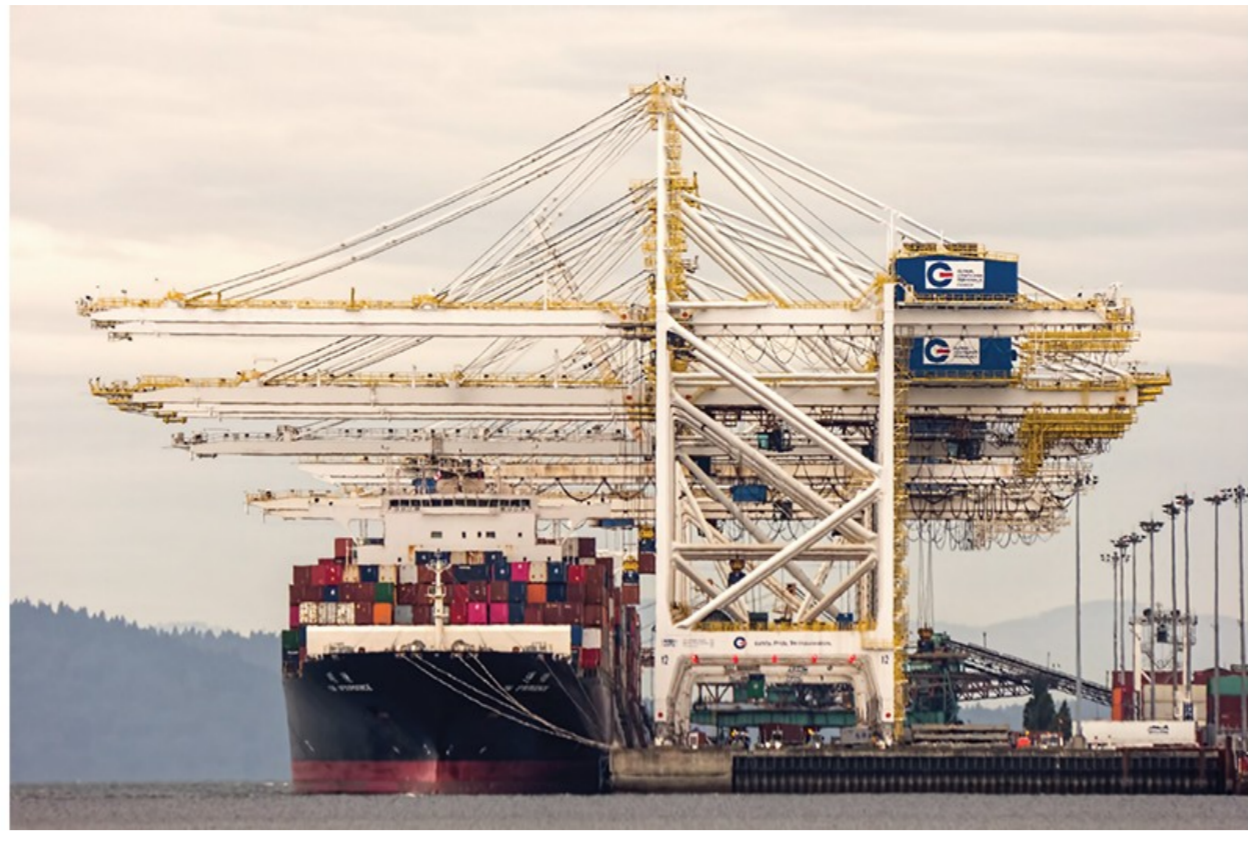




Transportation

Delayed decision hasn't cooled container terminal fight

Ottawa postpones decision on \$3.5 billion Roberts Bank Terminal 2 project until next year
By Chuck Chiang | September 25, 2020, 2:04pm



GCT Global Container Terminals Inc., operator of the Deltaport terminal, opposes the Vancouver Fraser Port Authority's plan for another container cargo facility nearby | Chung Chow

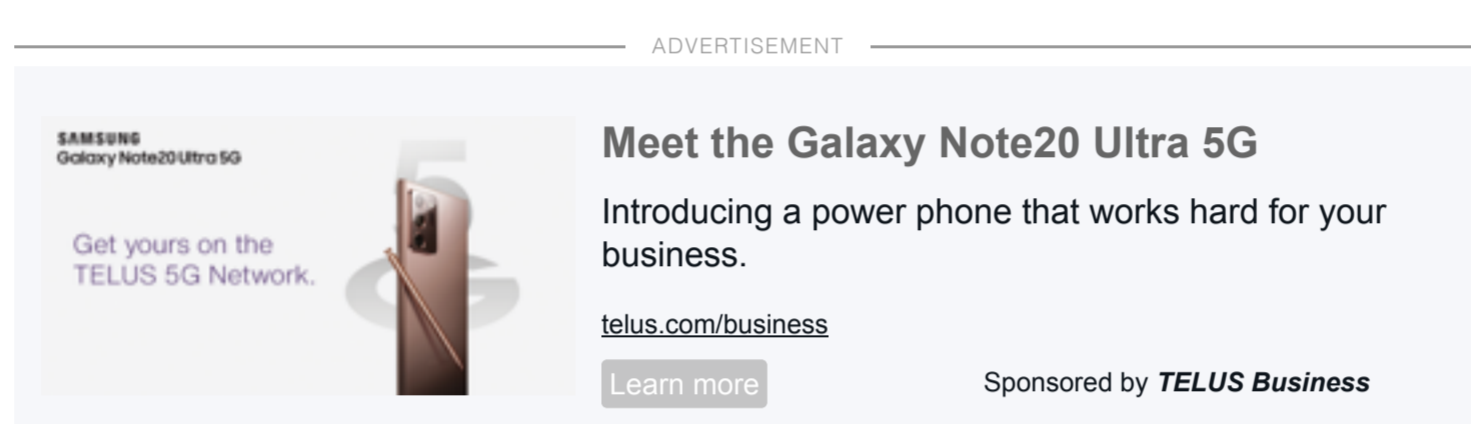
Ottawa's decision on a controversial plan to build a new, multibillion-dollar container terminal at Delta's Roberts Bank has been pushed to next year, but neither the project's proponents nor its critics appear ready to give ground in the dispute over the proposed facility.

Terminal 2, a project led by the Vancouver Fraser Port Authority (VFPA), would create via landfill an additional 2.4 million 20-foot equivalent units of annual container capacity for the port at a cost of potentially more than \$3.5 billion.



While the port authority is adamant that the new terminal is crucial to meet increased container capacity demand on the West Coast through the mid-2030s, opponents are equally adamant that there are more cost-effective and environmentally sustainable ways to meet that demand.

In August, federal Environment and Climate Change Minister Jonathan Wilkinson said that Ottawa would wait for the port authority to provide additional information – such as how officials will address a list of environmental mitigation measures recommended by an independent review panel earlier this year – before making a final decision on Terminal 2.



Duncan Wilson, the VFPA's vice-president of environment, community and government affairs, said in a statement that port officials are "aiming to provide this information to government by early 2021 and are hopeful that a decision can be made prior to next summer."

Wilson added that the federal information request and pause came after the VFPA requested Ottawa extend the decision-making timeline so the port authority can provide the type of information being sought by government.

"In no way does this extension change the need for the project," he said. "We know, based on forecasts conducted by independent experts and the positive outlook for container trade recovery post COVID-19, that this generational project is needed to facilitate Canada's growing trade with Asian markets beyond the mid-to-late 2030s."

However, Terminal 2 has come under heavy fire from the City of Delta, community environmental organizations such as Against Port Expansion and even GCT Global Container Terminals Inc., the operator of the GCT Deltaport container terminal at Roberts Bank.

Roger Emsley, executive director of Against Port Expansion (APE), said an e-petition started on September 2 and sponsored by Nanaimo-Ladysmith BC Green Party MP Paul Manly has garnered 1,100 signatures, demonstrating a wide level of community opposition to what he called an unnecessary project – especially with DP World's Fairview container terminal expansion in Prince Rupert receiving regulatory approval in June.

"With the very poor [container traffic] growth that Vancouver is seeing and with what Prince Rupert has to offer, it is obvious. We don't need it. And it's public money. Terminal 2 is taxpayer money to build the most expensive container terminal anywhere."

Emsley added that much of what Ottawa is requesting the VFPA to submit by 2021 is a repeat or extension of the scientific model the port authority used to measure environmental impact on the sandpiper habitat at Roberts Bank. That model, he said, is fundamentally flawed.

"It's not just us saying that," Emsley said. "It's independent scientists. It's Environment Canada.... So asking the port to repeat the wrong science doesn't do anything.... You have a situation where the minister is not asking the right questions, and this will get us nowhere."

APE also released new access-to-information findings on September 16 showing that Environment Canada scientists submitted a summary of their opposition to the Terminal 2 review panel in 2019 – but the findings were held back by a committee consisting of federal assistant deputy ministers, and never made it to the review panel.

Despite this, Emsley said he remains optimistic the federal government will reject Terminal 2, because of public pressure over its environment impact.

In the meantime, GCT Global Terminals said its Deltaport rival DP4 expansion project has entered the required regulatory process. The project is smaller than Terminal 2, and its proponents say it is more environmentally friendly, cheaper and would be funded through private investment.

GCT and the VFPA have been embroiled in a rancorous fight in which the terminal operator accused the port authority of a conflict of interest in delaying consideration of DP4 in favour of its Terminal 2 project. The VFPA has said the port would benefit from a different terminal operator at Roberts Bank to prevent one company from dominating container-port operations.

In its own e-petition launched in late August, GCT called on Ottawa to ensure a fair process of assessing DP4's merits when compared with Terminal 2.

The petition argued that "fair process should ensure additional container port capacity is added in the most cost-effective way, ensuring continued competitiveness of the Asia-Pacific Gateway and leveraging private sector investment instead of putting public funds at risk."

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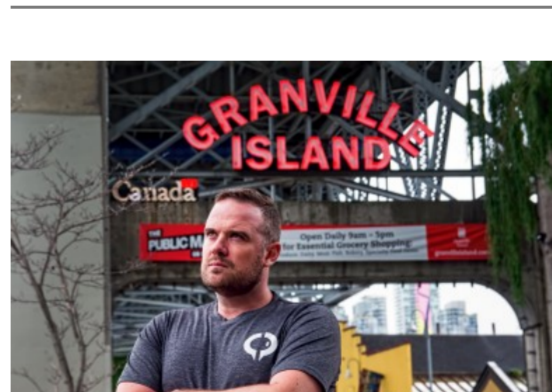
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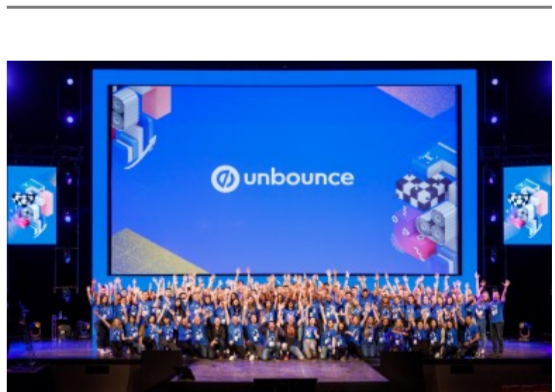
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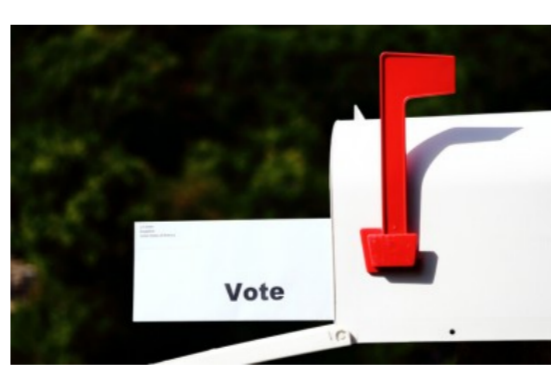
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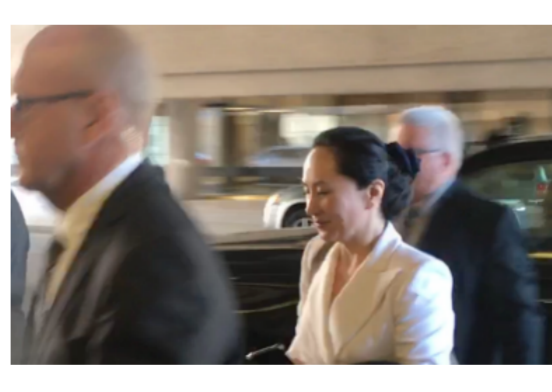
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