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Itajai berth project will allow larger ships

Rob Ward, Special Correspondent | Dec 21, 2017 9:26AM EST

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The expansion project also marks the end of a long journey of recovery from the area's devastating 2008 flood. Photo credit: Cristiano Andujar.

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An improvement project at Brazil's third-largest container port, the Itajai Port Complex (IPC), will enable the key APM Terminals Itajai to handle both larger ships and more calls.

When completed in April, the project will triple APM Terminals Itajai's berth length to 1,000 meters (3,280 feet), improve its draft to 14 meters, and enable vessels up to 335 meters in length to call at the port, as well as extend its turning basin. Equally significant, the expansion will enable vessels with more than 9,000 TEU capacity to call at the port. Those larger ships are arriving in greater numbers along the east coast of South America (ECSA).

The IPC wants the 138.8 million reais (\$42.2 million) expansion to catapult APM Terminals Itajai back to the No. 2 container port spot, ahead of rival Paranaguá, about 145 miles to the north. The IPC accounts for more than 60 percent of the state of Santa Catarina's economic activity and about 4 percent of Brazil's.

The project also marks the end of a long journey of recovery from the area's devastating 2008 flood, which killed more than 120 people, mostly upriver of Itajai, but also several people in the port area. Landslides and flooding in three of the four berths managed by the Itajai Port Authority (IPA), which does not include the private Portonave terminal, were severely damaged in the flood.

The flood closed the IPC for three weeks and subsequently had to operate with just 7.1 meters of draft for another three weeks, before emergency dredging took the draft back to 10 meters. Slowly, despite several setbacks and other years of less-severe flooding (in 2011 and 2015), the IPC stabilized and recovered. In 2016, the IPC handled 1.1 million TEU while Paranaguá hosted 1.2 million TEU.

Further, there is strong speculation that the Asia service of [Hamburg Süd](https://www.joc.com/maritime-news/container-lines/hamburg-sud), (<https://www.joc.com/maritime-news/container-lines/hamburg-sud>) [Hapag-Lloyd](https://www.joc.com/maritime-news/container-lines/hapag-loyd), (<https://www.joc.com/maritime-news/container-lines/hapag-loyd>) [Zim Integrated Shipping Services](https://www.joc.com/maritime-news/container-lines/zim-integrated-shipping-services) (<https://www.joc.com/maritime-news/container-lines/zim-integrated-shipping-services>), [Hyundai Merchant Marine](https://www.joc.com/maritime-news/container-lines/hyundai-merchant-marine), (<https://www.joc.com/maritime-news/container-lines/hyundai-merchant-marine>) and [NYK Line](https://www.joc.com/maritime-) (<https://www.joc.com/maritime->

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[news/container-lines/nyk-line](#)) of Japan will soon switch their joint service calls to APM Terminals Itajai after it features its extra berth and improved draft. However, one source told JOC.com the carriers involved will wait until the improved turning basin is open for business, scheduled for April 2018. The Asia-ECSA service calling at Itajai has [had to call the port less frequently](#) (<https://www.joc.com/maritime-news/ships-shipbuilding/asia-ecs-a-service-shows-cost-shippers-larger-ships-20170707.html>) than others on the string because the port is unable to accommodate the largest ships deployed on the service.

In addition, the IPC's two box terminals will also benefit, in January, when the Brazilian Navy officially approves the new depth as 14 meters, up from 13.5 meters, once dredging is completed. Also, owing to strong lobbying from shipping and cargo interests in the state of Santa Catarina — especially the powerful chicken and pork exporters such as BRF Foods, Seara, and Doux Frangosul — Brasilia eventually allocated the reconstruction and dredging funds it promised after the flooding of 2008, 2011, and 2015.

Robert Grantham, a veteran consultant for Solve Shipping, which is based in Navegantes, hometown of the Portonave box facility on the left bank of the IPC, has been predicting that the Asia flirtation with Imbituba would not last long.

"I have been saying for some time that the call in Imbituba by the Asia service was only going to be temporary, until APM Terminals Itajai could call upon a longer quay and a wider turning basin, allowing for much bigger vessels to call there," Grantham told JOC.com. "Now that they can call in Itajai with these bigger vessels the Asia service will return there, although Imbituba can compete with cargoes from the Porto Alegre area. Imbituba dropped their rates tremendously to win that business because Santos Brasil wants to sell the terminal and needs to attract more clients before it can find a buyer."

Marcelo Werner Salles, CEO of the IPA, said that it has been a long and painful process for the port of Itajai to complete its recovery, but they are now almost there.

"This week has been truly historic as it marks the end of a long period of suffering for the port of Itajai," he told JOC.com. "These improvements come almost 10 years after the catastrophic flooding of 2008 and now we look forward to a much brighter future. From one berth to three berths plus increased depth and the turning basin enhancement to come, Itajai will change course again in its history, with a great cycle of growth now on the horizon."

Monday saw the inauguration of Berth 3, which underwent more than 120 million reais worth of work, with the completion of reinforcement and realignment work. Meanwhile, the adjacent Berth 4's 18.8 million reais restoration will be finished by April. Both berths were damaged in the devastating 2008 floods.

"It is a win-win situation for all concerned," Itajai Mayor Volnei Morastoni said, "for our city, our businesses, and for our port workers too as more services will come here and more jobs will be created."

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