Section 1: Background, Purpose, and Goals

The Georgia Ports Authority and the Port of Savannah

The Georgia Ports Authority (GPA) was established in 1945 with a mandate to develop, maintain, and operate ocean and inland ports for the benefit of Georgia's economy. Today, GPA operates the Port of Savannah's Garden City Terminal — North America's largest single-terminal container port — handling over 9.3% of all containerized cargo moving to and from the United States annually, including 10.5% of all U.S. containerized exports. The Port of Savannah is also one of only 15 U.S. military Strategic Ports designated by the Maritime Administration. GPA's commercial activities, combined with private port-related operations, support more than 439,000 jobs statewide, generating $106 billion in annual revenues and $5.9 billion per year in federal taxes.

GPA's strategic vision extends well beyond its coastal terminals. Under its Network Georgia initiative, GPA has pursued a systematic program of inland port development to extend the Port of Savannah's reach into high-growth manufacturing and logistics corridors across the state. GPA opened its first Network Georgia inland port inCordele in 2013, and its second — the Appalachian Regional Port in Chatsworth, northwest Georgia — in 2018. The Gainesville Inland Port, now open, completes the core of the Network Georgia vision by addressing the critical freight corridor of Northeast Georgia along I-85/I-985.

The Northeast Georgia Freight Challenge

The 15-county region of Northeast Georgia centered on Gainesville, Hall County, is one of the nation's fastest-growing manufacturing and logistics corridors. Home to approximately 1.5 million people, the region produces heavy equipment, food and forest products, and has attracted explosive growth in distribution centers. Since 2015, 118 companies have invested over $1.5 billion to open or expand operations in the Gainesville metropolitan area, creating over 5,700 jobs. The region is home to 80 logistics firms employing more than 4,800 people, and Northeast Georgia companies accounted for 5% of imports and 4% of export volumes handled at the Port of Savannah in 2016.

Despite this economic vitality, the region faced a fundamental freight infrastructure gap. Companies moving containers between Savannah and Northeast Georgia had only two options, both of which required negotiating the most congested freight bottlenecks in the United States:

- Direct truck: a 301-mile route via I-16, I-285, and I-85 through metropolitan Atlanta, requiring passage through the third-worst truck freight bottleneck on the U.S. National Highway System (the I-285/I-85 interchange in northeast Atlanta), where average speeds drop from 55 mph to as low as 25 mph during peak hours.

Approximately 54% of containers between Savannah and the Gainesville region moved via this route.

- Combined rail-truck via Austell: containers moved by NS intermodal train between Savannah and NS's Whitaker Yard in Austell, GA (14 miles west of Atlanta), still requiring a 70-mile first/last-mile truck trip that passed two of the twenty worst U.S. freight bottlenecks. Approximately 46% of containers used this route.

A 2017 market volume study commissioned by GPA confirmed the scale of the opportunity and quantified the potential for a direct inland port in the Gainesville region. GPA also tracked a record 8.4% container growth rate at Savannah, with compound annual growth rates of 4.4% projected for export and import volumes — creating an urgent need for new capacity options.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of the Gainesville Inland Port is to establish a direct intermodal rail connection between Northeast Georgia and the Port of Savannah, providing a cost-effective, reliable, and sustainable freight alternative that eliminates dependence on Atlanta's congested highway corridors. The broad goals of the project are to:

- Extend the Port of Savannah's reach into Northeast Georgia's dynamic manufacturing and logistics corridor
- Improve freight mobility, reduce highway congestion, and strengthen supply chain resilience for regional industries
- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions and transportation-related air quality impacts through modal shift from truck to rail
- Promote economic opportunities, job creation, and freight access in a rural region with underserved communities
- Establish a scalable, replicable model for inland port development in high-growth logistics corridors nationally

Specific measurable objectives include: removing 120,000 trucks annually from Atlanta-area highways; reducing container travel time from approximately 7 hours (truck) to less than 30 minutes (first/last-mile local delivery); delivering a facility capacity of 200,000 container lifts per year at buildout; and generating more than $687 million in total discounted public benefits over the project's lifecycle.

Section 2: Implementation & Resources

Project Structure and Partnership

The Gainesville Inland Port was implemented as a true public-private partnership. GPA served as project sponsor, primary funder, owner, and future operator. Norfolk Southern Corporation committed $7 million in private funding toward rail and signal infrastructure

and will provide intermodal rail service between Gainesville and the Port of Savannah. Hall County provided critical support through land access — making County-owned adjacent properties available for use as earthwork borrow and receiving areas — and through governmental coordination on permitting, road improvements, and emergency access. Moffatt & Nichol served as the lead engineering firm. Carroll Daniel Construction served as the general contractor.

The project's total cost was approximately $164.6 million, inclusive of previously incurred costs. Funding was structured as follows:

Benefit Category	Value (Discounted @ 7%)
Georgia Ports Authority	$102.4 million (65% of future eligible costs)
U.S. DOT INFRA Grant (FY 2021)	$46.9 million (30% of future eligible costs)
Norfolk Southern Corporation	$7.0 million (5% — restricted to rail/signal work)
Previously Incurred (GPA)	$8.4 million (design, permitting, land acquisition)
Total Project Cost	~$164.6 million

The $46.9 million INFRA grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation's Maritime Administration (MARAD) reflected federal recognition of the project's national significance for freight mobility, safety, and sustainability. Compliance with Build America, Buy America Act (BABAA) requirements was a condition of federal reimbursement and was integrated into all aspects of design, procurement, and construction management.

Development Process

Project development followed a structured process consistent with NEPA requirements and federal grant obligations. Key phases included:

- Feasibility and site selection: evaluation of five site alternatives; selection of the Gateway Industrial Centre
- Environmental review: preparation of a full Environmental Assessment (EA) in coordination with MARAD, covering air quality, noise and vibration, hazardous materials, groundwater, surface water, wetlands, floodplains, threatened and endangered species, cultural resources, environmental justice, traffic, public health and safety, visual impacts, and land use

- Engineering design: conceptual through final design, including iterative design workshops with Norfolk Southern to optimize yard configuration, track alignment, gate systems, and dual-ended mainline connections
- Permitting: federal, state, and local permits including Section 404/401 for wetlands and streams, stormwater, and transportation approvals
- Construction: site clearing, earthworks, drainage, paving (roller-compacted concrete), rail installation, gate systems, and facility equipment

Timeline

The project progressed from initial feasibility to opening over a multi-year period:

- 2018–2021: Feasibility analysis, site selection, design development, and previously incurred expenditures ($8.4 million)
- 2021: FY 2021 INFRA Grant application submitted and awarded ($46.9 million)
- 2022–2023: EA completed and approved; final design and permitting advanced; BABAA compliance framework established
- Early 2024: Construction mobilization; clearing commenced
- 2024–2025: Major earthwork operations across two phases; subgrade preparation; roller-compacted concrete pavement; rail track and signal installation
- 2025–2026 (Q1): Gate system and facility equipment installation; all-electric rubber-tired gantry (RTG) crane commissioning
- May 4, 2026: Grand opening; Norfolk Southern intermodal rail service commenced

Implementation Challenges

The project required creative engineering and sustained partnerships to overcome several significant challenges:

Topographic Complexity and Earthworks:

The selected site — while the best available option along the rail corridor — featured elevation differentials exceeding 200 feet, substantial rock, perennial streams, and groundwater influence from nearby Lake Lanier. To grade a suitable intermodal yard across this terrain required an extraordinary volume of earthwork. Rather than hauling material off-site (which would have generated significant truck traffic, cost, and environmental impact), GPA and Hall County engineered a multi-phase, multi-year earthworks strategy using Hall County-owned properties adjacent to the site as both borrow areas and fill receiving areas. Initial earthworks sourced material from one County-owned property to depths nearing 60 feet, placing it on site at depths exceeding 60 feet. These deep fill areas were then monitored for months to confirm settlement performance before final earthwork operations drew from a second County-owned

property. The result was zero off-site earthwork waste — a major engineering and environmental achievement.

Site Selection Constraints Along the Rail Corridor:

Finding a site large enough and appropriately positioned along NS's Crescent Corridor proved far more difficult than anticipated. The rail corridor through Gwinnett County was too densely developed to accommodate a full intermodal facility. The Hall County site required extensive land acquisition, NS mainline access negotiations, and coordination with adjacent industrial and residential land uses. Without Hall County's active partnership — including property access, transportation coordination, and political support — the project could not have been sited at its current location.

Rail Network Integration and Dual-End Access:

Connecting to NS's active Crescent Corridor required design of a dual-ended connection — an approach developed collaboratively in design workshops with NS and GPA — that allows trains to access the facility from either end of the yard, eliminating the need for complex switching operations and reducing train dwell time. Land ownership and easement negotiations with NS, Hall County, and adjacent property owners were necessary to secure the required footprint and access.

BABAA Compliance Integration:

The $46.9 million federal INFRA grant was conditioned on compliance with the Build America, Buy America Act, requiring that all iron, steel, manufactured products, and construction materials used in the project be produced in the United States. Embedding BABAA compliance into procurement and construction management from project inception — rather than layering it on after design — required discipline and coordination but ensured eligibility was maintained throughout.

Environmental Permitting for Wetlands and Streams:

The complex terrain of the project site included jurisdictional wetlands and streams. The preferred site plan was selected as the least environmentally damaging practicable alternative among the options evaluated, and mitigation measures were incorporated to minimize impacts. Coordination with the Army Corps of Engineers, Georgia EPD, and other regulatory agencies supported permitting approvals on a schedule consistent with project delivery.

Section 3: Innovation & Relevance

The Inland Port as an Extension of Port Functionality

Perhaps the most fundamental innovation of the Gainesville Inland Port is conceptual: the deliberate extension of deep-water port infrastructure and logistics capabilities into a landlocked inland manufacturing region, 324 rail miles from the coast. By co-locating

intermodal container handling capability directly within a high-growth industrial corridor — and connecting it to the Port of Savannah's Garden City Terminal via NS's dedicated rail service — the facility effectively moves the "port gate" to Northeast Georgia for tens of thousands of shippers annually. This reframing of the inland port not as a peripheral service, but as an integral component of the maritime gateway, is the innovation that makes all other benefits possible.

Dual-Ended Rail Configuration

The facility's dual-ended connection to NS's Crescent Corridor mainline — trains can enter and exit from either end of the yard — is the product of intensive design collaboration between GPA, Moffatt & Nichol, and Norfolk Southern. This configuration departs from conventional single-ended intermodal yard design and eliminates the need for complex and time-consuming locomotive switching to reposition trains prior to departure. The result is materially shorter train dwell times, higher throughput capacity relative to yard footprint, and improved operating flexibility as train frequencies and lengths evolve. This design decision reflects sophisticated operational thinking and has direct, quantifiable impact on the facility's long-term cost and capacity performance.

All-Electric Terminal Operations

The Gainesville Inland Port's all-electric rubber-tired gantry cranes represent a deliberate commitment to sustainability in terminal operations. Unlike the diesel-powered RTGs prevalent at most container terminals, all-electric equipment eliminates direct combustion emissions during container handling — a meaningful contribution in a region that has historically not met federal air quality standards. As the electrical grid continues to decarbonize, the facility's emissions profile will improve automatically over time without equipment replacement. The adoption of all-electric terminal equipment at an inland, greenfield facility also demonstrates the practical scalability of sustainable terminal technology beyond traditional deep-water port contexts.

Zero-Waste Earthworks: Engineering Around a Challenging Site

The decision to pursue the Gateway Industrial Centre site — the optimal site operationally and commercially, despite its challenging topography — required an engineering response equal to the challenge. The multi-phase, multi-year earthworks strategy developed by GPA, Hall County, and the project team converted what could have been an environmental and logistical liability into a showcase for sustainable construction management. By using adjacent Hall County-owned properties as both borrow sources and fill receivers, the project team avoided generating any off-site earthwork waste, eliminated thousands of construction truck trips from local roads, and reduced the embodied environmental cost of site preparation. This approach required detailed planning, geotechnical monitoring over an extended period, and a level of public-private coordination that went well beyond typical construction practice.

Replicable Public-Private Partnership Model

The project's financing and governance structure — a port authority, a Class I railroad, a county government, and the federal INFRA grant program operating as co-invested partners — provides a proven template for inland port development that other port authorities and regions can adapt. The critical elements are: identifying a railroad corridor with available freight capacity and a willing Class I operating partner; establishing a county-level partnership that can provide land, regulatory facilitation, and community engagement; structuring federal grant eligibility through BABAA-compliant procurement; and committing port authority capital and operational expertise to ensure long-term facility performance. GPA has now deployed variations of this model at three inland facilities, building institutional knowledge that accelerates each successive project.

Relevance to Industry Priorities

> "Georgia Ports Authority's inland port at Gainesville, combined with Norfolk Southern's rail service, will provide crucial links in the supply chains of local industries, consumers, and the rest of the world."
> — Jeff Heller, Vice President Intermodal and Automotive, Norfolk Southern
>
> "The proximity of the new inland port will be a real plus in many areas and was an influencing factor in the eventual location of our building. Quicker service, lower cost and ease of movement should all be realized."
> — Mark Headrick, President of Auto Metal Direct, a global auto parts distributor

The Gainesville Inland Port is directly aligned with the priorities most central to the port and maritime industry in 2026:

- Supply Chain Resilience: By providing a route between Northeast Georgia and Savannah that entirely bypasses Atlanta's highway network, the project eliminates the region's exposure to the nation's most severe freight bottleneck and materially improves supply chain reliability for hundreds of industrial users.
- Decarbonization: The modal shift of 120,000 trucks per year to rail, combined with all-electric terminal equipment, reduces greenhouse gas emissions by 26,677 tons in the first year of operations alone, growing to 87,631 tons per year by 2054. Over the 30-year project lifecycle, total CO2 emissions avoided will reach approximately 1.6 million tons, with additional reductions in NOx (549 tons), VOCs (33 tons), and particulate matter (23 tons).
- Infrastructure Modernization: The project demonstrates that inland port infrastructure investment, structured correctly with public-private partnership and federal grant

leverage, can deliver benefit-cost ratios of 5.8x — a compelling case for continued national investment in multimodal freight infrastructure.

- Economic Equity: The project expands freight infrastructure access in a rural region with historically underserved communities, serving a 15-county area in which nine of ten Appalachian Regional Commission counties qualify as "transitional" or "at risk" economically, with median family incomes approximately 67% of the U.S. average.

Section 4: Results, Evidence & Impact

Operational Outcomes

The Gainesville Inland Port opened on May 4, 2026, with Norfolk Southern operating five-days-per-week intermodal rail service between Gainesville and the Port of Savannah's Garden City Terminal, connecting directly to NS's on-dock Mason Mega Rail Terminal. The facility is fully operational. Initial container traffic commenced on opening day, with volumes projected to grow from approximately 62,000 TEUs in Year 1 toward the facility's 200,000-lift-per-year design capacity over the next ten years.

Quantitative Freight and Transportation Impacts

Benefit Category	Value (Discounted @ 7%)
Annual trucks removed (full operations)	~120,000 trucks per year
Truck trips removed (Year 1)	~26,000 roundtrips
Container travel time: Truck to rail	~7 hours reduced to <30 minutes (first/last-mile)
Truck-miles removed (Year 1)	~18 million over-the-road truck-miles
Truck-miles removed (2054 projection)	~59 million truck-miles per year
Truck-miles avoided over 30-year lifecycle	>1 billion truck-miles
Working rail tracks / total track footage	6 tracks / ~18,000 feet
Terminal design capacity	~200,000 container lifts per year
Rail service frequency	5 days per week

Quantitative Environmental Impacts

Benefit Category	Value (Discounted @ 7%)

CO_2 emissions avoided (Year 1)	>26,677 tons
CO_2 emissions avoided (2054)	~87,631 tons per year
Total CO_2 avoided (30-year lifecycle)	~1,605,752 tons
NOx emissions avoided (2025-2054)	~549 tons
VOC emissions avoided (2025-2054)	~33 tons
Particulate matter avoided (2025-2054)	~23 tons
Avoided emission costs (discounted)	$66.5 million

Economic Benefits: Benefit-Cost Analysis

GPA's federal INFRA grant application included a rigorous benefit-cost analysis demonstrating total discounted benefits of $687 million against a discounted cost of $118 million — a benefit-cost ratio of 5.8x, with a discounted payback period of just 4.0 years and an internal rate of return of 27%.

Benefit Category	Value (Discounted @ 7%)
Improved Supply Chain Efficiency	$485.5 million
Improved Safety / Avoided Accident Costs	$123.7 million (22.8 fatalities avoided; 582.5 injuries avoided)
Avoided Emission Costs	$66.5 million
Avoided Highway Congestion Costs	$27.5 million
Avoided Pavement Maintenance Costs	$15.9 million
Residual Value of Assets	$0.5 million
Incremental O&M Costs	–$32.2 million
Total Discounted Benefits	$687 million
Benefit-Cost Ratio	5.8x
Discounted Payback Period	4.0 years
Internal Rate of Return	27%

Economic Development and Employment

The facility's announcement and development have already catalyzed direct economic investment in the Hall County area:

- Auto Metal Direct (global auto parts distributor) cited proximity to the inland port as a deciding factor in opening a new 318,000-square-foot distribution and fulfillment center at Gateway Industrial Centre, bringing 40 jobs to Hall County
- Kubota Manufacturing of America opened a new plant inside Gateway Industrial Centre in 2017, creating 67 jobs
- Fox Factory Holding Corp. relocated its corporate headquarters from California to Gainesville in 2018 and built a new manufacturing plant, creating 800 jobs
- Agile Cold Storage built a 150,000-square-foot cold storage facility in Gainesville serving food and pharmaceutical manufacturers, creating approximately 100 jobs
- The facility provides direct employment for 20 terminal workers, primarily hired from rural Hall County

The project serves a 15-county area — home to 1.5 million people — that includes 10 counties within the Appalachian Regional Commission, of which only one has been designated economic "attainment." The nine remaining counties have median family incomes approximately 67% of the U.S. average, and poverty rates 150% or more of the U.S. average. Improved freight access for businesses in these communities expands their competitiveness in global markets and supports sustained economic development.

Safety Benefits

The reduction of 120,000 truck trips per year on Atlanta-area interstates generates significant traffic safety benefits. The INFRA grant benefit-cost analysis projects 22.8 fatalities avoided and 582.5 injuries avoided over the project lifecycle, with a discounted safety value of $123.7 million. The project also delivers direct local safety improvements:

- Closure of an existing at-grade rail crossing on White Sulphur Road, eliminating a longstanding vehicle-train conflict
- Rerouting of White Sulphur Road to maintain emergency vehicle access while removing a conflict point with rail operations
- Upgrades to nearby Cagle Road to improve local connectivity and traffic safety

Lessons Learned

- Site selection for inland ports along active rail corridors is more constrained than surface analysis suggests — early, intensive engagement with the railroad partner to identify viable connection points is essential before committing to a site
- Complex terrain that initially appears to be a project liability can be managed through innovative construction strategies, but only with extraordinary public-private coordination — Hall County's willingness to provide adjacent land as earthwork sources was indispensable

- BABAA compliance is far more manageable when embedded into design and procurement from the start; retrofitting compliance analysis into completed designs creates cost and schedule risk
- Community concerns about at-grade crossings, emergency access, and noise require proactive, specific engineering responses — commitments that address root concerns, build trust, and accelerate permitting and community acceptance

Section 5: Integration, Adaptability & Scalability

System Integration

The Gainesville Inland Port was designed for full integration into both GPA's inland port network and NS's national intermodal rail system. NS rail service connects Gainesville directly to NS's on-dock Mason Mega Rail Terminal at the Port of Savannah's Garden City Terminal — the nation's busiest single-terminal container port — via NS's Crescent Corridor, a 2,500-mile national freight corridor linking the Atlanta region to the Gulf Coast, the Northeast U.S., Southern California, and Mexico.

Within GPA's Network Georgia system, the Gainesville facility complements the Appalachian Regional Port (northwest Georgia, served by CSX) and the Cordele Inland Port (south-central Georgia), creating three distinct inland gateways that collectively extend the Port of Savannah's market reach across the state and into adjacent regions of the Southeast. Together, these facilities enable shippers across a vast multi-state service territory to access Savannah's container gateway via rail intermodal, reducing reliance on over-the-road trucking throughout the Southeast freight network.

The facility's operational processes integrate with GPA's existing container management systems, vessel booking platforms, and customer relationships, minimizing adoption friction for existing Port of Savannah customers seeking to shift to the Gainesville rail option.

Adaptability

The facility's 104-acre footprint and infrastructure were designed with long-term adaptability in mind. The initial configuration supports current demand and near-term growth, while the 140-acre overall project area accommodates future capacity expansion toward the 200,000-lift-per-year design maximum. Projected lift volumes grow from approximately 62,000 TEUs in Year 1 to more than 180,000 TEUs by 2050, meaning the facility is designed to absorb 30 years of volume growth without fundamental reconstruction.

The dual-ended rail connection provides flexibility to accommodate changing train lengths, frequencies, and operating patterns as NS's service evolves. The all-electric terminal equipment platform can incorporate future advances in automation and digital

logistics systems without requiring wholesale equipment replacement. And the facility's gate and yard configuration can be reconfigured over time to adapt to changing cargo mix, container sizes, and operational demands.

The project is also positioned to benefit from continued decarbonization of the electrical grid. As grid electricity becomes cleaner, the facility's electric RTG cranes will produce lower lifecycle emissions without any operational changes — an inherent adaptability advantage over diesel equipment.

Scalability and Replication

GPA has now successfully developed and opened three inland port facilities under its Network Georgia initiative: Cordele (2013), the Appalachian Regional Port (2018), and the Gainesville Inland Port (2026). Each facility has refined the model, and the Gainesville project — as the most complex in terms of site conditions, funding structure, and environmental process — provides the most complete and transferable playbook for future inland port development.

Key elements of the Gainesville model with strong replication potential for other port authorities include:

- Leveraging existing Class I railroad corridors as the backbone for inland port connectivity — avoiding the cost and complexity of new rail construction
- Structuring federal grant eligibility (INFRA, BABAA) into project design from the start to access meaningful federal cost-sharing
- Building county-level partnership as both a political and resource foundation — Hall County's property access contributed material value that no grant program could have substituted
- Using iterative design workshops with railroad operating partners to optimize configuration decisions that will maximize operating efficiency for decades
- Adopting all-electric terminal equipment to future-proof the facility's environmental performance

The NS Crescent Corridor alone spans 2,500 miles across 11 states, offering numerous other potential nodes where this model could be applied to extend port connectivity into underserved inland manufacturing regions.

Section 6: Stakeholder Engagement & Collaboration

A Partnership Built from the Ground Up

The Gainesville Inland Port could not have been developed without the active, committed participation of a broad coalition of stakeholders. GPA invested years of relationship-building and collaborative problem-solving with government agencies, the

railroad, local government, community organizations, and the private industrial sector, before a shovel touched the ground. The partnership structures developed through this process were not procedural checkboxes — they were substantive arrangements in which each partner contributed essential value that made the project possible.

Federal Partnership and Grant Administration

GPA worked closely with the U.S. Department of Transportation's Maritime Administration (MARAD) throughout the INFRA grant process and the NEPA environmental review. The Environmental Assessment — prepared jointly to meet both NEPA and grant requirements — covered a comprehensive range of resource areas including air quality, noise and vibration, hazardous materials, groundwater, surface water, wetlands, floodplains, threatened and endangered species, cultural resources, environmental justice, and traffic. The thoroughness of this process reflected GPA's commitment to transparency and federal compliance, and supported MARAD's confidence in the project. The resulting EA Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) cleared the way for construction.

The project also involved consultation with five Native American tribal nations — the Alabama-Quassarte Tribal Town, the Coushatta Tribe of Louisiana, the Muscogee (Creek) Nation, the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Nation, and the Cherokee Nation — consistent with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. This consultation was conducted respectfully and with genuine attention to tribal concerns about cultural resources in the project area.

Norfolk Southern: A Deep Railroad Partnership

NS is not merely a service provider at the Gainesville Inland Port — it is a co-investor and co-designer. NS committed $7 million in private capital toward rail and signal infrastructure, worked through years of design workshops to optimize the facility's track configuration and mainline connections, negotiated land and easement arrangements to enable the dual-ended connection, and provided dedicated intermodal service from the facility's opening day.

The collaboration between GPA, Moffatt & Nichol, and NS's engineering and operating teams produced the dual-ended yard configuration — one of the facility's defining design innovations — and resolved the complex challenge of integrating a new active yard into an existing mainline operation without disrupting ongoing train movements. This depth of railroad partnership is rare and reflects sustained relationship investment over many years.

Hall County: Essential Government Partner

Hall County's role far surpassed typical local government participation in infrastructure projects. The County:

- Made adjacent County-owned properties available as earthwork borrow sources and fill receiving areas — a contribution that enabled the project's zero-waste earthworks strategy and avoided significant cost and environmental impact
- Included land acquisition facilitation for the project in its FY 2019-2022 Transportation Improvement Program
- Coordinated road improvements — White Sulphur Road (facility entrance) rerouting and nearby Cagle Road upgrades — to maintain community access and safety during and after construction
- Worked with GPA to address emergency vehicle access concerns raised by neighboring communities
- Provided local political support that facilitated permitting and community acceptance throughout the construction period

This level of county partnership was achieved through years of relationship-building and a shared commitment to the region's economic future. Hall County recognized that the inland port would be a transformative economic asset for its residents and businesses, and invested accordingly.

Community and Public Engagement

The Gainesville Inland Port sits within a mixed-use area that includes rural residences, industrial facilities, and community institutions, including Air Line Church. The NEPA process required, and GPA embraced, transparent public engagement through public meetings and accessible documentation. Community concerns focused primarily on traffic safety at existing at-grade crossings, noise from rail operations, emergency vehicle access, and visual impacts.

GPA responded to these concerns not with reassurances but with practical engineering solutions:

- Closure of an existing at-grade crossing on White Sulphur Road — eliminating the safety risk entirely rather than mitigating it
- Rerouting of White Sulphur Road to avoid crossing the rail line while maintaining continuous road access
- Emergency access planning coordinated directly with Hall County fire and EMS agencies

These responses — treating community concerns as legitimate engineering inputs rather than obstacles to be managed — built trust with the surrounding community and support for the project's long-term success.

Industrial and Commercial Stakeholder Engagement

GPA engaged existing and prospective industrial customers in the Gainesville corridor throughout project planning, drawing on a 2017 GPA-commissioned market study and direct engagement with logistics firms, manufacturers, and distributors. Early industry feedback confirmed strong demand for a rail intermodal option in the region, with companies like Auto Metal Direct, Kubota, Fox Factory, and others citing the anticipated inland port as a factor in their own investment decisions. This demand-side validation informed the project's design capacity and service parameters and has supported a confident initial launch of five-days-per-week rail service.

Conclusion

Non-Scoring Section

The Gainesville Inland Port is the product of a decade of vision, analysis, partnership-building, and determined implementation — a project that required GPA and its partners to solve problems that did not have off-the-shelf solutions and to build new relationships.

What opened on May 4, 2026, is more than a terminal. It is a new node in the national freight network that eliminates one of the Southeast's most persistent supply chain vulnerabilities; a platform for sustainable freight operations that will reduce millions of tons of greenhouse gas emissions over its lifetime; a catalyst for economic development in communities that have historically had limited access to global trade infrastructure; and a proven model that other port authorities can adapt to extend their own reach into landlocked growth corridors.

The project's 5.8x benefit-cost ratio — validated through rigorous federal INFRA grant analysis — reflects not just the power of the modal shift it enables, but the extraordinary efficiency achieved through years of value engineering, creative partnership, and disciplined project management. Every dollar of federal grant funding leveraged $2.33 in non-federal investment. Every dollar invested in the project will return $5.80 in public benefits.

GPA looks forward to growing the Gainesville Inland Port — in volume, in service frequency, and in the depth of its impact on the communities and industries it serves — for decades to come.

Submitted by the Georgia Ports Authority — Gainesville, Hall County, Georgia — 2026

Engineering: Moffatt & Nichol • Railroad Partner: Norfolk Southern • Construction: Carroll Daniel Construction
County Partner: Hall County