



Editorial - Even if local support and political will had been in place, port faced tough odds

Published: Friday, July 23, 2010 at 3:30 a.m.

It's no surprise that the N.C. State Ports Authority has put on hold its effort to build an international port in Brunswick County.

Even if the \$2.5 billion facility had the full support of the region, today's challenging economic conditions would likely have sunk the plan anyway.

With well-organized opposition from nearby residents and a hefty price tag, the proposal never gained much traction. And when Rep. Mike McIntyre, D-N.C., announced he would not support the proposal, its fate was sealed.

Carl Stewart Jr., chairman of the Ports Authority Board of Directors, put it best: "You cannot build a \$2 billion to \$2.5 billion port in a congressional district where the resident member of Congress is opposed to it."

The SPA said in a statement that it remained interested in pursuing a new international port in the state. Unfortunately, Stewart said, the Port of Wilmington can't accommodate the type of expansion the SPA envisioned in the Brunswick port plan. Also, the Port of Wilmington is 23 miles up the Cape Fear River, which makes it more difficult to access.

Ports along the East Coast are anticipating more ship traffic with an expansion of the Panama Canal aiming to be completed by 2014. The expansion would double the canal's capacity.

North Carolina is not alone, however, in postponing expansion. Plans by South Carolina and Georgia to build a new port on the Savannah River are having trouble getting off the ground, too.

The goal now for the SPA should be exploring all feasible expansion opportunities at the ports in Wilmington and Morehead City to ensure the state remains competitive. If the Southport plan would have been a home run for the SPA, the focus now should turn to hitting a single or

a double – looking for creative ways to increase traffic not only through infrastructure but also in the service and amenities ships that call here receive.

The SPA is wise to keep its options open on pursuing a larger port somewhere on our coast. But it's clear that now was not the time. And – for now, at least – Southport was not going to be the place.