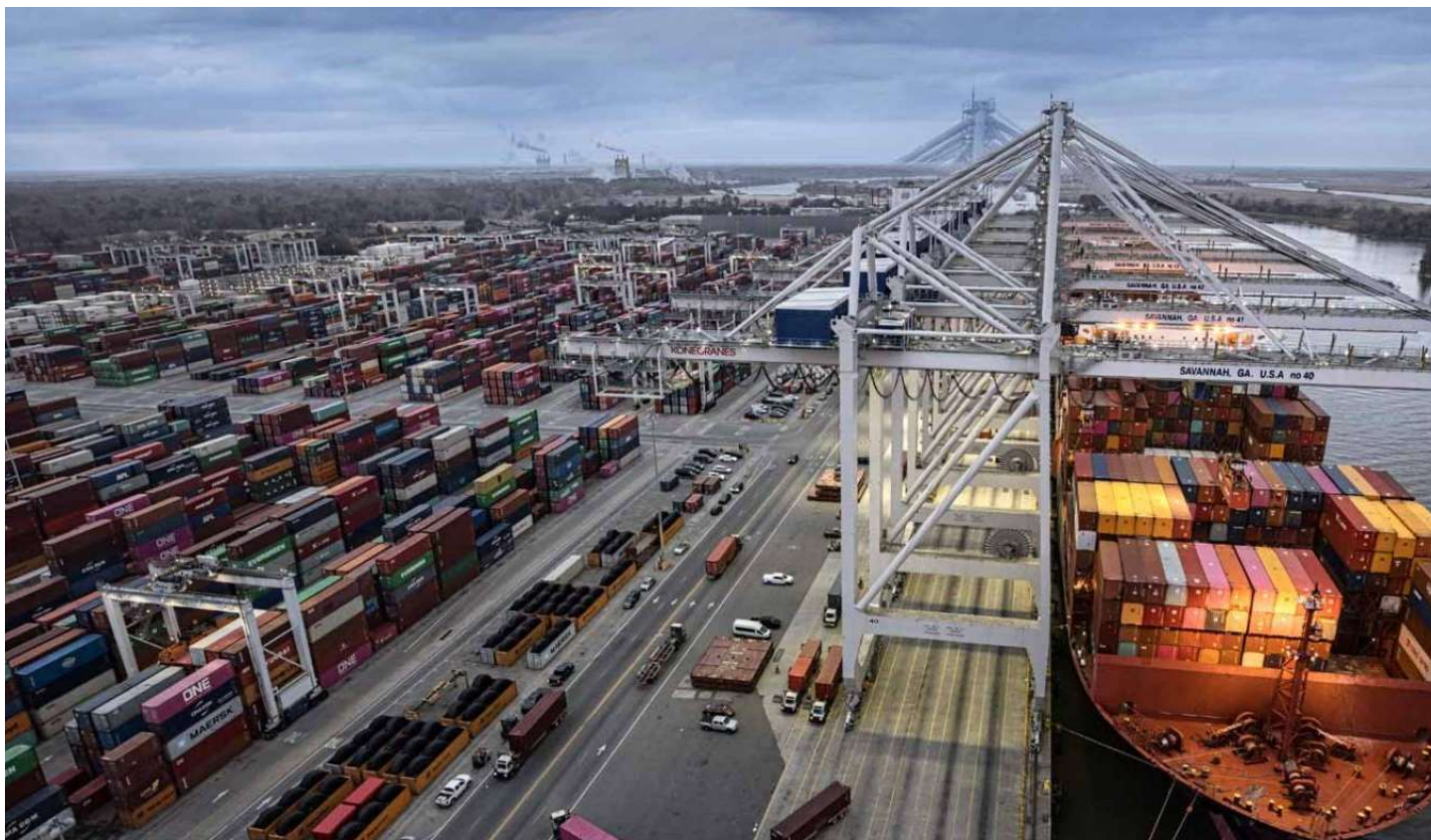


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## GPA cuts Savannah hours, discontinuing pop-up yards amid volume decline



*With the import surge of the last two years subsiding, the Georgia Ports Authority no longer needs pop-up yards or late-night truck hours. Photo: Stephen B. Morton / Georgia Ports Authority.*

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Ari Ashe, Senior Editor | Feb 16, 2023, 2:23 PM EST



The Georgia Ports Authority (GPA) will stop offering evening truck hours at the Port of Savannah and has discontinued the use of several inland pop-up storage yards as volumes moving through the gateway have slowed significantly in recent months.

Friday will be the last day truckers working the port will have until 9 pm to pick up or drop off containers during the week, the GPA announced Wednesday. Starting Monday, Savannah's gates will operate between 4 am to 6 pm during the week; it's also open from 8 am to 5 pm on Saturdays.

The GPA instituted evening truck gate hours in 2021 to combat the import surge that resulted in more than 30 vessels anchored outside the Garden City terminal, then tweaked the hours last year to open earlier in the morning.

The decision to eliminate evening hours comes as volumes at Savannah have cooled considerably after two robust years. Laden imports increased year over year in 25 out of 26 months between August 2020 and September 2022, according to PIERS, a sister product of the *Journal of Commerce* within S&P Global. Since October, however, laden imports have declined in four consecutive months on a year-over-year basis.

January laden imports were 193,684 TEU, down from 249,047 TEU in January 2022, according to PIERS.

While it's typical for volume to be lower in January compared with October, laden imports have fallen more than the recent historical average during that time. Laden imports last month were down 17 percent compared with October, according to PIERS, versus the 3 percent decline on average during those same months in 2019 through 2022.

The GPA noted that this January's import numbers were pushed even lower because weather delays caused six vessels due to berth late in the month to discharge instead in early February.

### **Ending use of pop-up yards**

The GPA has also stopped using several inland pop-up yards due to the volume slowdown, pulling out of the CSX Hulsey Yard in Atlanta in December and Statesboro Airport last month. The port is also no longer sending cargo into Norfolk Southern's Dillard Yard in Savannah and will formally leave at the end of February.

The port authority opened the pop-up yards when available space inside the Garden City terminal neared maximum capacity as importers let containers idle for weeks at a time in 2020 and 2021. The pop-up yards allowed GPA to shuttle long-dwelling containers to alternative locations to keep Garden City's cargo flow fluid.

Shippers had too much inventory sitting in their distribution centers in late 2022, forcing them to slash orders until inflation comes under control and buying by US consumers picks up.

The GPA said it's using the downturn in economic conditions as an opportunity to prepare for the next upswing. Joel Wooten, GPA board chairman, said in Wednesday's statement the board has a "commitment to constant infrastructure improvement, even during downtimes."

Four large ship-to-shore cranes that arrived Feb. 9 in Savannah will be used at the Garden City Terminal's Berth 1. The multi-year project to expand the small berth into one capable of handling ultra-large container vessels is 80 percent complete and should be fully done this summer.

Once complete, Savannah will be capable of simultaneously handling four vessels of 16,000-plus TEU capacity and three smaller container ships.

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