Infrastructural Difficulties at the Port of New Orleans

The Port of New Orleans is a premier port in the southern United States. New Orleans dominates the chemical market and handles much of the product being imported and exported from chemical hubs in the region. Right now, shippers, forwarders, and carriers that rely on the port are battling both developing market difficulties and unique built-in infrastructural issues.

Infrastructurally, the Port of New Orleans has run into more and more problems as volume has increased. One issue that has become very serious is bridge height near port terminals and wharfs. The Huey P. Long Bridge and the Pontchartrain Expressway Bridge are in close proximity to active areas of the port. Whether or not containerships can navigate these bridges has nothing to do with backlogs, terminal productivity, piloting skill, or anything else that can be controlled. Instead, everything depends on water levels and how they vary based on tide patterns and additional flooding due to rain. Vessels are sometimes forced to wait for the Mississippi River to reach an optimal height for ship departure.

Adding infrastructural delays on top of the globally congested market can make a port unusable. That is particularly true with chemical logistics because much of the industry operates on a "just-in-time" order strategy. Processing plants organize shipments so that delivery windows align perfectly with manufacturing schedules, and any disruption to that timetable can severely disrupt operations. Shipping and inventory issues can potentially shut down entire factories.

> "At times, the situation at New Orleans can be uniquely challenging," explains Lynn Stacy, Managing Director at OEC Group's Liquid Logistics Division. "When the Mississippi floods, we're very proactive in finding alternate routes for our customers. Depending on a client's unique needs and individual orders, we can save them time and money by railing their cargo away from New Orleans and routing through other southern ports."