



SC Ports to buy WestRock site to expand port capacity at North Charleston Terminal

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With support from the state and unanimous approval from the SC Ports Board of Directors, SC Ports plans to purchase the former WestRock paper mill site in North Charleston to further expand port capacity at the Port of Charleston.

The SC Ports Board of Directors voted today to move forward with a purchase sales agreement with WestRock. The transaction is expected to close as soon as practical.

“The tremendous backing from our state and an excellent partnership with WestRock allows us to make investments today that will support our state’s economy and create opportunities for future generations of South Carolinians,” SC Ports President and CEO Barbara Melvin said. “We are adding significant port capacity to support growth in South Carolina and throughout the Southeast.”

The roughly 280-acre industrial waterfront property sits adjacent to North Charleston Terminal, offering a natural extension of the container terminal that will enable SC Ports to handle more cargo for port-dependent businesses.



SC Ports plans to purchase the former WestRock paper mill site in North Charleston. (Photo/SC Ports/Matthew Peacock)

The additional land will expand the terminal’s capacity to handle 5 million containers in the future, and create 5,000 feet of linear berth space for container ships and around 400 acres of terminal space for cargo.

“South Carolina’s economy is prospering, and we must continue to invest in our world-class port system to support the companies investing in our state,” Melvin said. “This is an incredible opportunity to enhance our high-performing North Charleston Terminal with renewed capacity to handle future growth.”

SC Ports plans to modernize the existing North Charleston Terminal with an optimized layout, upgraded cargo-handling equipment and significant new container capacity — yielding even more reliable, productive port service. Customers will also benefit from the on-terminal rail service offered by Palmetto Railways with dual connectivity to CSX and Norfolk Southern, and proximity to Interstate 526.

The South Carolina Department of Transportation is playing a pivotal role in the project. As part of its expansion of Interstate 526, SCDOT plans to replace the Don Holt Bridge, which will remove height constraints for larger vessels.

Plans are also underway to achieve a 52-foot depth up to North Charleston Terminal. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Charleston District, is undertaking a feasibility study — a critical first step toward deepening this stretch of the Cooper River an additional five feet.

This deepening effort, combined with the new bridge height, will allow the biggest container ships calling the Port of Charleston to seamlessly access North Charleston Terminal.

“Modernizing the terminal, raising the Don Holt Bridge, deepening the Cooper River and purchasing the former WestRock property are all critical components that will yield a state-of-the-art North Charleston Terminal,” Melvin said. “These achievements would not be possible without the support and foresight from Governor Henry McMaster, SC House Speaker Murrell Smith, SC Senate President Thomas Alexander and the entire SC Legislature.”

The site also provides key support functions for Ingevity Corporation’s North Charleston manufacturing facility. SC Ports has been working closely with Ingevity to align their future needs during the transition.

SC Ports will work with SCDOT, Palmetto Railways, Ingevity and the City of North Charleston to master plan the infrastructure to best support the region’s economy and residents.

“This land purchase represents a tremendous opportunity to position our port system and our state competitively for decades to come,” SC Ports Board Chairman Bill Stern said. “Our port infrastructure investments directly support thousands of South Carolina companies that depend on SC Ports to do business, and we are expanding to ensure we have the capacity to handle the growth in the Southeast.”

Notable quotes from elected leaders:

“South Carolina Ports is widely known as a top driver of our state’s booming economy, but that success doesn’t come by accident — it takes timely, strategic investments like this one. Every time we invest in port infrastructure, we see significant success at port-dependent businesses and new, good-paying jobs for our people. Our state’s investment in the expansion of North Charleston Terminal will yield dividends and create opportunities for future generations.” — Governor Henry McMaster

“An investment in our port system is an investment in South Carolina — unlocking more economic potential through new business and new jobs. This land purchase will enable SC Ports to expand the North Charleston Terminal, and the additional port capacity will make South Carolina even more competitive. This is a win for all South Carolinians.” — SC House Speaker Murrell Smith

“Many of our industries rely on SC Ports to move their products to global markets. The expansion of the North Charleston Terminal is critical to supporting the efficient flow of goods throughout our state and ensuring we have ample port capacity to handle companies’ growth. Our commitment to build vital port infrastructure will ensure South Carolina remains globally competitive for decades to come.” — Senator Larry Grooms, Chairman of the SC Senate Transportation Committee and the Review and Oversight Commission on the South Carolina State Ports Authority

“Investing in South Carolina’s ports ensures our state remains competitive on a global stage and it brings greater opportunities for our workforces. SC Ports supports 1 in 9 jobs in South Carolina, and the purchase of this property will benefit South Carolinians for decades to come.” — Representative Bruce Bannister, Chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee

“The paper mill site has been in the fabric of our community for decades, helping support many generations of North Charleston families, including my own. As it transitions into a port terminal, we are eager to collaborate closely with South Carolina Ports to guarantee this site continues to be a cornerstone of economic vitality, all the while seamlessly integrating into the community.” — North Charleston Mayor Reggie Burgess

Notable quotes from partners:

“WestRock and its predecessor companies had a long history operating the North Charleston mill, and we greatly appreciate the contributions made by our team members over the years. We are pleased that SC Ports intends to transform the site into a world-class container terminal and continue to support the state’s economy and create jobs for South Carolinians.” — WestRock President and CEO David Sewell

"We are excited to have SC Ports as the buyer of this site as we both strive to deploy innovative solutions to the marketplace and drive economic growth for South Carolina. We look forward to our continued partnership with SC Ports to master plan the site." — Ingevity President and CEO John Fortson

"We know how important it is to our thriving economy to ensure that goods can move efficiently across the state and region. We look forward to working closely with our state leaders, partners and SC Ports to further enhance our state's infrastructure to benefit our state's port system and the people of South Carolina." — SC Department of Transportation Secretary Christy A. Hall, P.E.

"SC Ports is an economic engine for our state, with an impact that touches nearly every industry. Thousands of South Carolina businesses depend on SC Ports to reach domestic and international markets every day. The expansion of the North Charleston Terminal and additional capacity at the Port of Charleston signals South Carolina's emphasis on strategic growth to benefit both our economy and citizens, alike. We're excited to see how SC Ports' expanded capacity allows existing businesses to continue to thrive and encourages new industry to consider our state." — Harry M. Lightsey III, Secretary of Commerce

"As the Southeast economy and the Port of Charleston continue to grow, the demand for transporting more goods in and out of the Charleston region is increasing. SC Ports' acquisition of the WestRock mill site and investment in the North Charleston Terminal and supporting infrastructure will add more fluidity and capacity to our regional supply chain as we handle more cargo by rail at the terminal and throughout the state." — Palmetto Railways President and CEO Patrick McCrory