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BUSINESS | LOGISTICS REPORT

# Port of Oakland Container Fees Face Delays

Oakland's plan to charge for loading and unloading containers during busy periods may be pushed back after federal regulators requested more information about the program



The Port of Oakland wants to assess fees on containers to reduce congestion. *PHOTO: BLOOMBERG NEWS*

By **ERICA E. PHILLIPS**

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A Port of Oakland proposal to charge fees on container cargo during peak times will likely be delayed after federal regulators said they needed more information to ensure the plan wouldn't unreasonably raise costs for importers and exporters or reduce the port's efficiency.

The Federal Maritime Commission voted unanimously Wednesday to issue the request to the five marine terminal operating companies at the Port of Oakland who proposed

the fees as a way to reduce congestion during peak hours. Under the plan, dubbed OakPass, the funds generated would pay for terminals to operate an additional shift on Saturdays.

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statement, the FMC said it had “concerns” about the OakPass program, “based on an initial review and comments received from various stakeholders who would be impacted by the program.” Importers, exporters and transportation industry groups expressed their frustration with the way the plan was introduced in letters filed to the FMC last month. Many complained that the proposal was put forth with minimal details and without first consulting the industries that would be directly affected.

John Cushing, who leads the OakPass program, said in a statement Wednesday that the FMC’s request could delay the start date, which was originally expected to be sometime in the fourth quarter. Once the terminal operators have provided the required information, the FMC will have an additional 45 days to decide whether to allow the agreement to go into effect.

Peter Friedmann, a spokesman for the Agriculture Transportation Coalition, said he was “pleased” that the FMC was further scrutinizing OakPass, and said he hoped the regulators would require public forums to hear everyone out.

Mr. Friedmann said he thinks the Oakland terminals can avoid the FMC-imposed delay if they work with agricultural exporters, trucking companies, retailers and other importers to come up with a new plan for reducing congestion.

“If the terminal operators would bring us all in, we could sit down for an afternoon, figure this out, and go to the FMC and say here’s the plan,” Mr. Friedmann said. “That could be done in an afternoon.”

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