

For Immediate Release



Caribbean Ports Urged to Become Hubs for Trade, Energy and Investment

Miami, Florida, 17 September 2026 – Caribbean ports have an opportunity to capture significantly more economic value from the trade, tourism, and shipping activity already moving through the region. However, doing so will require greater investment in modern infrastructure, energy systems, and regional connectivity.

That was among the key messages emerging from “The Port Opportunity: Trade, Tourism and Energy Hubs”, a panel discussion at the 10th Caribbean Infrastructure Forum (CARIF), sponsored by CIBC alongside KPMG, in Miami this week.

The discussion brought together port and infrastructure leaders from across the region and internationally to examine how Caribbean ports can evolve beyond their traditional roles into strategic hubs supporting trade, tourism, energy security, and economic resilience.

Moderated by Jeffrey Newton, CIBC Caribbean Senior Director of Credit Underwriting and Portfolio Management, the panel featured Mehmet Ali Deniz, Global Investment Holdings Group Chief Strategy Officer; Donna Marie Howe, Jamaica Bauxite Mining Limited Managing Director; Derek Newbold, Grand Bahama Port Authority Limited Chief Investment Officer, Business Development Department; and Darwin Telemaque, Antigua and Barbuda Port Authority Chief Executive Officer and Port Management Association of the Caribbean Chairman.

Newbold said the region should look beyond simply increasing the amount of cargo passing through its ports and focus instead on capturing more of the economic activity surrounding that movement.

“We shouldn't so much be focusing on how much more cargo we can get into our ports. The focus is how can we now capture some of that economic value when the cargo and the commerce is actually moving through our region,” he said.

That opportunity, he explained, includes investment in cold-chain storage, warehousing, distribution and assembly facilities, maritime services and resilient energy infrastructure. Newbold said attractive infrastructure projects should strengthen at least one of three areas: connectivity, resilience or competitiveness.

Telemaque highlighted that modernization has become particularly urgent as much of the Caribbean's port infrastructure dates back decades, while the demands being placed on those facilities continue to evolve.

“Time to pay attention to the most critical assets you have on your islands. Put in the right investments and empower your industries,” he said.

He also pointed to the global maritime industry's energy transition as a major economic opportunity for the Caribbean. With the region hosting a substantial share of the global cruise business, he said Caribbean ports should begin positioning themselves to provide the

infrastructure and services vessels will increasingly require, including shore power, alternative-fuel bunkering and improved waste-management systems.

“We have sun, we have wind, we have geothermal. We ought to start finding the investments to create fuels, to create bunkering hubs, to create the shore power we need,” Telemaque said.

Rather than every Caribbean destination attempting to provide every service, he suggested greater regional coordination could allow ports to develop specialized capabilities and complementary energy hubs.

Howe similarly stressed that modernization cannot take place in isolation. With port upgrades requiring significant capital and long-term planning, she said governments, port operators, technical specialists, financiers, and other stakeholders will need to work together on infrastructure that can respond to future trade and energy requirements.

“We need to think about what that trading hub in the Caribbean is going to look like in 20 to 30 years, and it has to be done progressively,” Howe said.

She also emphasized the wider role ports play in Caribbean societies, pointing to their importance not only for commerce but also for disaster response and recovery.

Deniz, meanwhile, highlighted the relationship between infrastructure investment and tourism growth, arguing that successful cruise-port development requires attention to both physical capacity and the experience passengers have once they arrive.

“You cannot create a great destination just by making great infrastructure. You also need to bring in activities to people,” he said.

The discussion also highlighted opportunities to extract greater value from the cruise industry beyond passenger arrivals. These include locally supplying ships with food and other provisions, expanding waste-management services, developing energy and bunkering capabilities, and creating pathways for more Caribbean people to work aboard cruise vessels in technical, engineering and leadership positions.

For investors, Newbold said the distinction between infrastructure that is desirable and infrastructure that is genuinely bankable remains critical. Revenue certainty, predictable cash flows, regulatory certainty and effective public-private sector engagement can all help move projects from ambition to execution.

“Governments don't necessarily need to fund all of these investment projects, but the public sector plays a very important role in creating the right environment,” he said, pointing to policy clarity, transparent processes and functional regulatory systems as important components.

Across the discussion, panelists agreed that the Caribbean's ports are more than gateways for ships and goods. With strategic investment and stronger regional coordination, they can increasingly become platforms for energy, logistics, tourism, trade, and wider economic development.

Ends



From left are Mehmet Ali Deniz, Global Investment Holdings Group Chief Strategy Officer; Donna Marie Howe, Jamaica Bauxite Mining Limited (JBM) Managing Director; Derek Newbold, Grand Bahama Port Authority Limited Chief Investment Officer, Business Development Department; Darwin Telemague, Antigua and Barbuda Port Authority Chief Executive Officer and Port Management Association of the Caribbean Chairman; and Jeffrey Newton, CIBC Caribbean Senior Director of Credit Underwriting and Portfolio Management.

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