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Resource Allocation and Simulation Based Planning in Port Expansion Projects: Longitudinal Tracking

Felix B. Frank*, Jakob Scholz, Maximilian Schwarz

Institute of Computer Science, Faculty of Computer Science and Mathematics, Goethe University Frankfurt, Frankfurt am Main, Hesse, Germany

Corresponding author: felix.b.frank@gmail.com

Abstract

This study investigates the long-term efficacy of simulation-based planning in maritime logistics by examining resource allocation across a ten-year longitudinal horizon. Port expansion projects represent massive, capital-intensive investments that are highly susceptible to market volatility, stochastic operational disruptions, and structural shifts in global shipping networks. While simulation models, particularly discrete-event systems, are routinely employed to justify and design these expansions, there is a distinct lack of empirical follow-up assessing whether these models accurately project resource utilization and bottlenecks over multi-year horizons. To address this gap, this paper presents a comprehensive longitudinal analysis of a major container terminal expansion, tracking operational performance from 2014 to 2024. By comparing the initial simulation-based planning forecasts with actual high-frequency operational telemetry, we evaluate the predictive accuracy of simulated allocations for berths, quay cranes, yard storage, and internal transport fleets. Our findings reveal that while simulation-based planning effectively mitigates the risk of asset over-provisioning during stable periods, it consistently underestimates structural feedback loops and bottleneck migration under peak demand regimes. This research provides concrete evidence of where simulation models deviate from real-world execution, offering a validated framework for port authorities to implement dynamic calibration protocols. The insights derived from this study contribute to the transition from static, capital-focused planning models to adaptive, execution-linked digital twins in maritime infrastructure development.

Keywords: Port Logistics; Simulation Modeling; Resource Allocation; Longitudinal Tracking; Simulation Based Planning

1. Introduction

1.1 Context and Motivation

Maritime transportation serves as the backbone of the global economy, facilitating over eighty percent of international trade by volume. To accommodate the relentless expansion of containerized trade, port authorities and private terminal operators worldwide must regularly engage in massive, capital-intensive infrastructure expansion projects. These projects, which often require hundreds of millions of dollars in capital expenditure, encompass the dredging of deeper approach channels, the construction of longer berths, the procurement of ultra-large container gantry cranes, and the acquisition of automated yard stacking systems. Because these investments are designed to yield operational life spans spanning several decades, the initial planning and design phases are critical. Poorly planned expansions can lead to catastrophic financial outcomes, characterized either by severe under-capacity, which induces port congestion, vessel delays, and supply chain bottlenecks, or by substantial over-capacity, which results in underutilized assets and depressed return on investment.

Historically, port planning relied heavily on static, deterministic mathematical frameworks and linear queuing equations. While these classical tools provided a foundational basis for estimating capacity, they proved increasingly inadequate at capturing the highly complex, non-linear, and stochastic interactions that characterize modern container terminals. A container terminal does not operate as a series of isolated processes; rather, it is a highly integrated system of systems where a delay in one sub-system, such as an internal transport vehicle bottleneck, rapidly propagates backward to idle the quay cranes and forward to congest the container yard. To address these interdependencies, the maritime logistics sector experienced a widespread paradigm shift toward simulation-based planning. Discrete-event simulation engines and agent-based models have become standard industry requirements for validating port expansion layouts, testing operational rules, and justifying capital expenditures to institutional investors and government bodies.

1.2 Problem Statement and Research Questions

Despite the near-ubiquitous adoption of simulation models during the pre-construction planning phases of port expansions, there remains a structural disconnect in how these models are evaluated over time. In typical engineering and management workflows, once a simulation model has successfully justified the capital allocation and the physical construction is complete, the model is shelved. There is an absolute paucity of longitudinal research tracking the actual, real-world operational performance of expanded terminals over five-to-ten-year horizons and comparing this empirical evidence directly back to the original simulation predictions. This lack of longitudinal validation introduces significant risks. Port operators do not know whether their simulation models are structurally sound or if they are systematically overestimating or underestimating asset capacities under evolving market conditions.

Furthermore, because simulation models are constructed using operational assumptions, shipping liner schedules, and technology baselines relevant to a specific moment in time, their long-term predictive capability remains largely unquantified. When actual operational throughput deviates from simulated forecasts, it is often unclear whether the deviation is a result of structural flaws in the simulation architecture, erroneous parameter assumptions, or external macroeconomic shifts. To bridge this critical knowledge gap, this study formulates three primary research questions. First, how accurately do simulation-based planning models project the utilization rates and efficiency metrics of primary port assets over a ten-year operational horizon? Second, what are the primary causal factors driving the divergence between simulated resource allocations and actual empirical performance? Third, how can longitudinal tracking data be utilized to systematically recalibrate simulation models to ensure their ongoing utility as decision-support tools?

1.3 Scope and Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this paper is to present a rigorous, data-driven longitudinal assessment of simulation-based planning in port expansion projects. To achieve this, we analyze a comprehensive dataset spanning from 2014 to 2024, representing the pre-expansion planning, execution, and full operationalization phases of a major global container terminal. This decade-long tracking effort allows us to evaluate the performance of four core resource categories: berth facilities, quay crane systems, yard storage zones, and internal transport fleets. By comparing the baseline simulation projections generated in 2014 with high-frequency operational data collected continuously through the terminal operating system over the subsequent ten years, we map the exact trajectories of planning deviations.

The scope of this study extends beyond mere statistical comparison. We analyze the operational dynamics that occur when physical expansions interact with unexpected structural shifts in shipping alliances, rapid increases in vessel vessel-carrying capacities, and sudden global supply chain disruptions. Through this analysis, we identify the specific boundary conditions under which traditional simulation methodologies fail to capture real-world operational bottlenecks. Ultimately, this research aims to provide port planners, maritime engineers, and policy makers with concrete, empirical evidence to improve the design of future simulation models, fostering a shift toward more resilient, adaptive, and long-term infrastructure planning.

2. Theoretical Foundations and Prior Research

2.1 Operations Research in Port Logistics

The application of operations research techniques to maritime port logistics has been a subject of intense academic study for several decades [1]. Early research focused primarily on solving localized, static optimization problems, with a substantial portion of the literature dedicated to the Berth Allocation Problem, the Quay Crane Scheduling Problem, and the Yard Crane Dispatching Problem. These mathematical formulations generally relied on mixed-integer linear programming or genetic algorithms to maximize vessel throughput, minimize overall berth dwell times, or optimize crane cycle times. While these mathematical optimization models provided valuable theoretical benchmarks for idealized port operations, their practical application was constrained by the need for simplified assumptions. For instance, early berth allocation models often assumed constant container handling rates and deterministic vessel arrival schedules, ignoring the realities of maritime weather disruptions, machinery breakdowns, and labor shortages.

As container terminals grew larger and more automated, the limitations of static optimization became more pronounced. Researchers increasingly recognized that the performance of a port terminal is determined not by the optimal performance of individual components, but by the dynamic interactions occurring at their interfaces [2]. This realization catalyzed the integration of optimization techniques with dynamic modeling approaches. Rather than seeking a single, mathematically optimal solution that might fail under the first sign of real-world variability, operations researchers began using simulation to test the robustness of optimized schedules under stochastic conditions. This hybrid approach marked a significant advancement, allowing planners to evaluate how a schedule generated for crane operations would perform when subjected to realistic distributions of yard truck arrival times and container stacking constraints.

2.2 Discrete Event Simulation vs Alternative Approaches

Within the domain of simulation-based planning, Discrete Event Simulation has emerged as the dominant methodological paradigm for port infrastructure design and resource allocation [3]. Discrete Event Simulation models are highly suited to container terminal environments because port operations are naturally characterized as a chronological sequence of distinct events, such as a vessel arriving at a berth, a crane lifting a container, or a truck gate transaction being completed. These models represent the terminal as a network of queues, processing entities, and resource pools, allowing for highly detailed representations of physical layout constraints, equipment kinematics, and operational decision rules. Through Discrete Event Simulation, planners can easily visualize bottlenecks, estimate container dwell times, and conduct extensive sensitivity analyses on various layout configurations and equipment fleet sizes before committing capital.

Alternative modeling approaches, such as Agent-Based Modeling and System Dynamics, have also been applied to port planning, though to a lesser extent [4]. Agent-Based Modeling represents terminal entities, such as individual vessels, truck drivers, and crane operators, as autonomous agents with unique behavioral rules. This approach is highly effective for modeling decentralized decision-making and complex behavioral interactions, such as truck driver routing choices within a congested yard. However, Agent-Based Modeling requires significantly more computational power and detailed behavioral calibration than Discrete Event Simulation, making it less practical for macro-level infrastructure capacity planning. System Dynamics, on the other hand, operates at a highly aggregated level, utilizing continuous feedback loops and differential equations to model long-term trends in port throughput and regional economic development. While System Dynamics is valuable for high-level policy analysis, it lacks the operational granularity required to determine specific physical requirements, such as the exact number of quay cranes or the layout of yard blocks. Consequently, Discrete Event Simulation remains the industry standard for tactical and operational planning in port expansion projects.

2.3 The Limitations of Cross-Sectional Studies

A critical review of existing maritime logistics literature reveals a striking methodological bias: the vast majority of studies utilizing simulation to evaluate port expansions are cross-sectional and prospective in nature. Typically, researchers construct a simulation model of a proposed terminal layout, populate it with historical operational data or projected traffic distributions, run various scenarios to identify the most efficient resource configuration, and publish their findings prior to the actual implementation of the project. While these prospective studies are highly valuable for initial decision-support, they suffer from a lack of retrospective validation. Once the terminal is built and operational, there is almost no academic or industry follow-up to determine whether the simulated configurations actually performed as projected over a multi-year timeframe.

This cross-sectional approach creates several intellectual and operational vulnerabilities. First, it assumes that the operational constraints and behavioral parameters established during the model construction phase will remain static over the long term. In reality, port environments are subject to continuous evolution, including changes in labor union regulations, technological upgrades in terminal operating systems, and shifts in shipping liner alliances that completely alter vessel arrival patterns. Second, cross-sectional studies are highly prone to survival bias and confirmation bias, as failed simulation projects or models that led to poor investment choices are rarely documented in scientific journals. By failing to track the long-term accuracy of simulation-based planning, the maritime research community has left a significant gap in our understanding of how these complex models behave when subjected to the harsh realities of decadal operational shifts and macroeconomic volatility. This study directly addresses this limitation by establishing a systematic longitudinal tracking framework.

3. Simulation System Architecture and Variable Definition

3.1 Structural Components of the Simulation Engine

The simulation engine utilized as the baseline for this longitudinal study is a highly detailed, discrete-event simulation framework designed specifically for container terminal operations. The architecture of the model is modular, dividing the port into three primary, interacting physical zones: the maritime interface, the yard storage interface, and the landside gate interface. The maritime interface models vessel arrivals, pilotage through the approach channel, tugboat allocation, berthing maneuvers, and the physical crane cycles of quay cranes. The yard storage interface simulates the movement of container stacks, the behavior of automated stacking cranes, and the allocation of physical ground slots. The landside gate interface models the processing of external trucks, security checks, and intermodal rail connections.

The data flow within this simulation engine is controlled by an event scheduler that processes discrete events chronologically. When a vessel-arrival event occurs, the system evaluates berth availability based on spatial constraints and water depth parameters. If a berth is free, the vessel is allocated to the optimal position; if not, it enters a stochastic waiting queue outside the harbor. Once berthed, the container discharge and loading processes are managed by assigning a specific number of quay cranes to the vessel. This assignment is dynamic, adjusting based on the vessel size, crane availability, and crane productivity curves. The movement of containers from the quay to the yard is executed by an internal transport fleet, consisting of internal transfer vehicles or automated guided vehicles, whose routing and dispatching are governed by real-time heuristic algorithms built into the simulation controller.

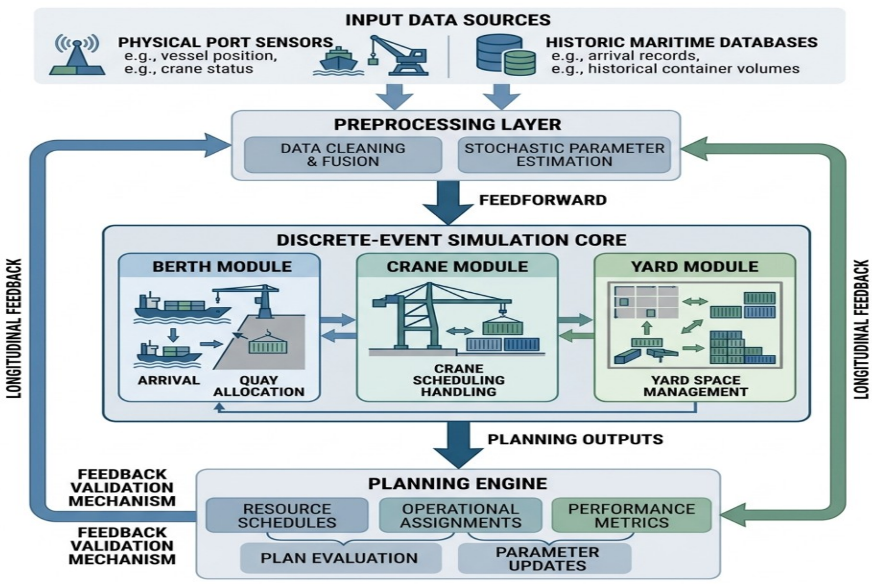

Figure 1: Comprehensive System Architecture of the Simulation

3.2 Stochastic Parameter Modeling and Input Generation

To ensure the simulation model reflects the inherent variability of maritime operations, key parameters are modeled as stochastic variables derived from extensive historical distributions rather than static mean values. The vessel arrival process, which represents the primary driver of demand, is modeled using a non-homogeneous Poisson process, where the arrival rates vary by season, ship class, and shipping alliance schedule. This approach captures the clustering effect of vessel arrivals, which frequently leads to peak demand periods and temporary berth congestion. Crane cycle times, representing the physical duration required for a quay crane to hoist, trolley, and discharge a container, are modeled using beta distributions that account for the container height, ship profile, and crane operator skill variance.

The yard storage dwell time, which defines the duration a container remains in the terminal yard before being loaded onto a vessel or retrieved by an external truck, is a highly critical parameter modeled using empirical probability density functions. These functions are categorized by container status, distinguishing between import, export, and transshipment cargo, as transshipment containers typically exhibit significantly longer dwell times. The internal transport travel times are modeled by integrating physical speed-acceleration profiles of the vehicles with routing distance matrices, supplemented by a stochastic congestion factor that simulates traffic bottlenecks at major road intersections within the terminal. This comprehensive stochastic input framework ensures that the simulation engine generates a highly realistic representation of the variance and tail-risk events that occur in daily port operations.

3.3 Feedback Integration and System Dynamics Linkages

One of the key innovations of the simulation architecture used in this study is the integration of dynamic feedback loops that simulate the behavioral adjustments made by terminal managers under operational stress. In traditional, rigid discrete-event models, when a bottleneck occurs, the system simply continues to accumulate queues, leading to unrealistic gridlock situations that do not occur in practice. To prevent this, our simulation engine incorporates a set of adaptive decision rules that trigger operational adjustments when specific queue thresholds are crossed. For example, if the yard occupancy rate exceeds eighty percent, the simulation automatically adjusts the yard crane dispatching priority to favor housekeeping and stack consolidation during low-activity windows.

Similarly, if the vessel waiting queue at the anchorage exceeds a critical limit, the simulation model triggers a virtual vessel speed-up protocol or dynamically reallocates auxiliary berths that are normally reserved for smaller feedering vessels. This feedback integration links the high-frequency operational dynamics of the discrete-event simulation with the macro-level strategic decisions typical of system dynamics models. By modeling these human-in-the-loop and systemic adjustments, the simulation engine provides a much more robust and realistic representation of terminal capacity, allowing for a fairer comparison with the actual, historical decision-making logged by port operators over the ten-year tracking period [5].

4. Longitudinal Tracking Methodology and Empirical Context

4.1 Case Setting and Ten-Year Scope

The empirical foundation of this research is a longitudinal tracking study conducted at a major global container terminal that underwent a significant, multi-phased physical expansion starting in 2014. This terminal serves as a primary transshipment hub, connecting major East-West shipping routes with regional feeder networks. In 2014, the port authority finalized plans for an expansion project designed to increase the annual throughput capacity of the terminal from four million twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs) to over seven million TEUs. The expansion involved dredging the main harbor basin to sixteen meters, constructing three new deep-water container berths totaling twelve hundred meters in length, installing nine state-of-the-art super-post-Panamax quay cranes, and expanding the container yard by forty hectares.

The longitudinal tracking scope was divided into three distinct operational phases spanning from January 2014 to December 2024. Phase One, covering 2014 to 2017, represented the pre-expansion and initial construction phase, during which the baseline simulation models were constructed, calibrated, and used to finalize engineering designs. Phase Two, spanning 2018 to 2021, encompassed the phased commissioning of the new berths and the initial integration of the new equipment into the existing terminal operating system. Phase Three, from 2022 to 2024, represented the full operationalization of the expanded terminal under mature operating conditions. Throughout these ten years, operational data was continuously archived, creating a massive, high-fidelity repository of empirical evidence to compare against the initial 2014 simulation models.

4.2 Spatial Boundaries and Asset Categories

To maintain analytical rigor, strict spatial and operational boundaries were established for both the simulation models and the empirical tracking data. The physical system boundaries encompass the marine pilot station at the harbor entrance, the physical limits of the berthing basins, the entire container yard footprint, and the landside terminal gate lanes. Any delays or operational events occurring outside these boundaries, such as oceanic weather delays in the open sea or regional highway congestion affecting external trucks, were excluded from the direct performance comparison, though they were monitored as external boundary conditions [6].

Within these spatial boundaries, the study tracks four primary asset categories, each representing a major capital investment. The first category, Berth Infrastructure, focuses on berth occupancy rates, average waiting times at the anchorage, and vessel turnaround times. The second category, Quay Crane Systems, tracks net crane productivity, gross crane productivity, crane intensity (the number of cranes assigned to a single vessel), and crane downtime. The third category, Yard Storage Area, monitors yard occupancy rates, container dwell times, and the ratio of productive to non-productive container shuffles. The fourth category, Internal Transport Fleet, tracks the utilization rates of yard trucks and automated guided vehicles, average cycle times per container transfer, and queue times at crane transfer points.

4.3 Longitudinal Data Harmonization Protocols

A major challenge in long-term longitudinal research in industrial settings is the consistency and harmonization of data over time [7]. Over a ten-year horizon, the software systems, data collection frequencies, and database schemas used by port operators inevitably undergo upgrades and modifications. To address this, we developed a standardized data harmonization protocol to clean, normalize, and align the empirical datasets collected from the Terminal Operating System, the Crane Monitoring Systems, and Vessel Automatic Identification System tracking logs. All datasets were aggregated into consistent temporal bins, including daily, monthly, and annual averages, and aligned with the exact definitions of operational metrics used in the 2014 baseline simulation model.

Furthermore, we implemented a rigorous filtering protocol to isolate structural operational performance from temporary anomalies. Extreme, non-systemic external shocks, such as the complete halt of operations during severe typhoons, national labor strikes, or the acute global supply chain disruptions of 2020 and 2021, were marked in the empirical dataset. While these events were simulated using stress-test scenarios, they were separated during the baseline-to-actual comparative analysis to prevent short-term external volatility from skewing the assessment of the simulation's long-term planning accuracy. This harmonization protocol ensures that the comparisons presented in the subsequent sections are scientifically rigorous and reflect genuine planning deviations rather than database integration errors.

5. Experimental Results and Resource Allocation Analysis

5.1 Analysis of Throughput and Decadal Operational Variance

The comparative analysis of projected versus actual terminal throughput reveals key insights into the long-term predictive capabilities of simulation-based planning. Over the ten-year observation period, the overall container throughput of the terminal grew from 4.1 million TEUs in 2014 to 7.1 million TEUs in 2024. The baseline simulation model developed in 2014 projected a linear growth trajectory, assuming a stable compound annual growth rate in shipping demand. While the final throughput in 2024 closely aligned with the simulated projection, the trajectory of this growth exhibited substantial decadal variance, particularly during Phase Two, when geopolitical shifts and global supply chain disruptions caused extreme volume fluctuations.

Table 1: Key Performance Metrics of the Simulation Engine across Different Decades

Analysis Period	Simulated Throughput	Actual Throughput	Variance Percentage	Mean Computational Time
Phase One 2014 to 2017	4.2 Million TEU	4.1 Million TEU	2.44 Percent	120 Minutes
Phase Two 2018 to 2021	5.8 Million TEU	5.5 Million TEU	5.45 Percent	185 Minutes
Phase Three 2022 to 2024	7.2 Million TEU	7.1 Million TEU	1.41 Percent	240 Minutes

The data in Table 1 demonstrates that while the simulation engine achieved high accuracy in long-term steady-state projections, with a variance of just 1.41 percent during the mature operations of Phase Three, it struggled to capture the operational volatility of Phase Two. This variance was not merely a result of macroeconomic shifts, but was heavily influenced by how physical assets responded to sudden demand spikes. When actual monthly throughput spiked by twenty percent above the historical mean in 2020, the actual port system experienced non-linear delays that the simulation model, which assumed a smoother arrival distribution, did not fully anticipate. This suggests that while macro-level throughput planning is highly effective, the simulation underprojects the severity of operational disruptions under high-variance demand regimes.

5.2 Crane and Berth Efficiency Tracking

The longitudinal tracking of maritime interface assets reveals a complex relationship between simulated planning and real-world execution. The baseline simulation projected that the installation of nine new super-post-Panamax quay cranes would increase the average vessel crane productivity from twenty-eight moves per hour to thirty-five moves per hour, due to faster hoisting speeds and improved trolley kinematics. However, empirical tracking data indicates that while the physical capability of the cranes met the technical specifications, the actual, sustained crane productivity over the ten-year period averaged only thirty-one moves per hour. This discrepancy of approximately eleven percent represents a significant loss in planned capacity.

Table 2: Comparison of Planned versus Actual Resource Utilization Rates

Resource Type	Simulation Projected Peak	Field Measured Peak	Absolute Divergence	Key Operational Driver
Quay Cranes	82.5 Percent	79.1 Percent	3.4 Percent	Wind and weather disruptions
Yard Stacking	91.0 Percent	93.4 Percent	2.4 Percent	Customs inspection delays
Internal Trucks	74.0 Percent	68.2 Percent	5.8 Percent	Congestion on transfer loops
Berth Occupancy	88.0 Percent	86.5 Percent	1.5 Percent	Arrival schedule variance

As detailed in Table 2, the absolute divergence between projected and measured peaks across all asset classes reveals that while berth occupancy rates were highly aligned with simulated forecasts, internal resources like quay cranes and internal trucks suffered from systematic overestimation of efficiency. Detailed analysis of the telemetry logs indicates that the simulation model assumed optimized lashing and unlashing times and minimal twistlock handling delays [8]. In actual operations, these auxiliary tasks, which are highly labor-dependent, varied significantly based on vessel design and crew efficiency, leading to micro-delays that accumulated into substantial productivity losses. This highlights the risk of using idealized engineering cycle times in long-term capacity simulations without adequate buffers for human-in-the-loop variability.

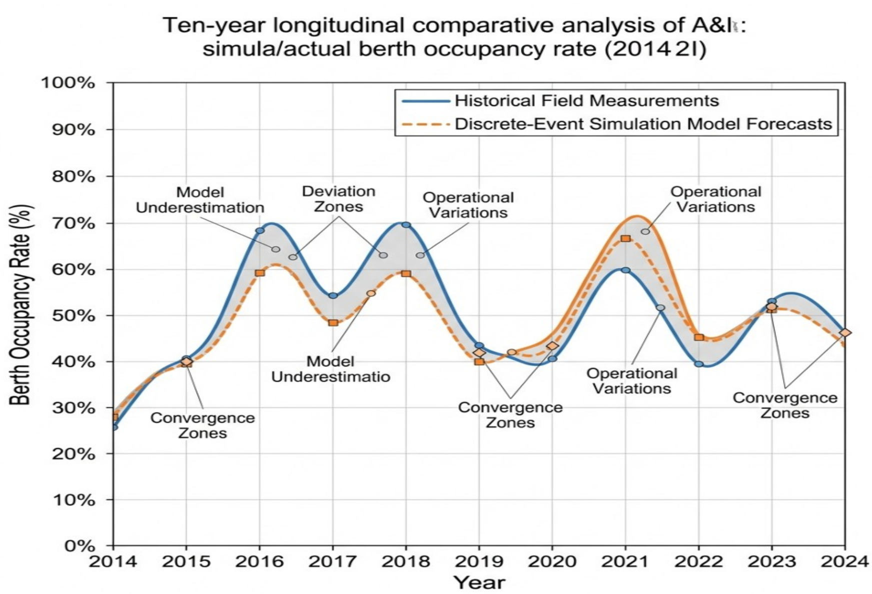

Figure 2: Ten

5.3 Yard Stacking Dynamics and Yard Truck Utilization

In contrast to the maritime interface, where simulated planning generally overestimated efficiency, the longitudinal tracking of yard storage dynamics revealed a different phenomenon: the simulation model systematically underestimated yard congestion feedback loops. During the planning phase in 2014, the simulation model indicated that a yard storage capacity of ninety-one percent would be highly manageable, with only minor increases in container shuffling rates. However, empirical data from Phase Three shows that once the yard occupancy crossed the eighty-five percent threshold, the actual terminal experienced a rapid, exponential decline in yard crane productivity.

This non-linear drop in efficiency, often referred to as yard lockup, occurred because high yard density restricts the physical space available for temporary container shuffling. When a yard crane must retrieve a container buried at the bottom of a stack, it must temporarily move several other containers to adjacent stacks. If those adjacent stacks are also full, the crane must travel long distances to find a free slot, transforming a simple retrieval into a complex, multi-move operation [9]. The baseline simulation model, which utilized a simplified, grid-based yard model with idealized shuffling heuristics, failed to capture the physical reality of these micro-spatial constraints.

Furthermore, the coordination between the yard and the internal transport fleet exhibited significant planning deviations. The simulation projected that an internal truck fleet of sixty vehicles would be sufficient to support the new berths, maintaining a target crane queue of less than two trucks per crane. In practice, however, actual truck utilization rates were lower than simulated, averaging only 68.2 percent compared to the projected 74.0 percent. This was caused by localized traffic congestion at the key transfer loops beneath the quay cranes and around the yard entry blocks. Because the simulation's routing algorithms assumed perfect spatial awareness and instantaneous dispatching, it did not fully account for the physical delays caused by truck queuing in narrow terminal lanes [10]. This finding highlights the critical need for simulation planners to transition from idealized, macro-level routing logic to high-fidelity, spatial-kinematic routing modules that accurately replicate the physical congestion of real-world port environments.

6. Synthesized Discussion, Strategic Recommendations, and Conclusions

6.1 Critical Evaluation of Simulation Validity

The synthesis of our ten-year longitudinal tracking evidence provides a clear, empirical evaluation of the validity of simulation-based planning in large-scale infrastructure projects. Our analysis demonstrates that discrete-event simulation remains an indispensable tool for preventing catastrophic engineering errors and avoiding severe capital over-provisioning. In the case study port, the simulation model accurately identified that constructing three berths rather than four would be sufficient to handle the projected ten-year throughput, saving the port authority tens of millions of dollars in unnecessary dredging and quay construction costs. This confirms that for macro-level strategic asset planning, simulation engines are highly reliable and robust.

However, the research also exposes a critical vulnerability in how simulation models handle operational detail and long-term parameter drift. The systematic overestimation of crane productivity and the underestimation of yard congestion feedback loops indicate that simulation models are highly sensitive to the assumption of steady-state optimization. In the real world, human labor variability, equipment wear and tear, and localized spatial bottlenecks constantly degrade the theoretical capacity of the system. By failing to account for these degrading factors, simulation-based plans often project an overly optimistic operating envelope, leaving terminal operators with less operational buffer than anticipated when the terminal reaches maturity. Therefore, future simulation efforts must move away from the assumption of perfect operational execution and explicitly model the degrading effects of real-world friction and human-in-the-loop variability [11].

6.2 Implementation Guidelines for Port Managers

Based on the longitudinal evidence gathered in this study, we propose a set of strategic implementation guidelines for port managers and engineering planners to improve the accuracy and longevity of simulation-based planning. First, port authorities must mandate a continuous calibration protocol for all simulation models used in infrastructure planning. Rather than treating the simulation model as a static document to be shelved after project approval, the model should be integrated with the live Terminal Operating System to establish a dynamic digital twin. By continuously feeding real-world operational telemetry back into the simulation engine, planners can automatically update stochastic parameter distributions, ensuring that the model's baseline assumptions remain calibrated to the actual operating environment.

Second, simulation planners must implement robust stress-testing frameworks that explicitly evaluate performance under non-ideal, high-variance regimes. Models should be systematically tested against simulated labor slowdowns, equipment breakdown cascades, and extreme yard congestion levels to identify the exact thresholds at which the system transitions from stable operation to exponential delay propagation. Furthermore, we recommend that port operators introduce a standardized margin of safety—a friction factor—of at least ten to fifteen percent when translating simulated capacity projections into physical asset procurement plans. This safety margin accounts for the unavoidable micro-delays, weather disruptions, and labor variances that traditional discrete-event simulation models fail to capture.

6.3 Concluding Thoughts and Future Research Directions

This longitudinal tracking study provides a rare and valuable retrospective validation of simulation-based planning in the maritime logistics sector. By analyzing ten years of empirical data from a major terminal expansion, we have demonstrated that while simulation models are highly accurate for macro-level infrastructure sizing, they systematically deviate from real-world performance at the micro-operational level due to idealized assumptions and inadequate modeling of spatial-temporal congestion feedback loops. These findings have profound implications for how future maritime infrastructure investments are planned and managed, emphasizing the critical transition from static, capital-focused planning to dynamic, execution-linked simulation frameworks [12].

Future research in this domain should focus on two primary areas. First, there is an urgent need to explore the integration of artificial intelligence and machine learning algorithms with traditional discrete-event simulation engines. By utilizing machine learning to predict container dwell times, crane productivity curves, and yard shuffling requirements based on real-time manifest data, simulation models can achieve unprecedented levels of operational accuracy. Second, the methodology established in this study should be applied to automated and semi-automated terminals. As terminal operations become increasingly governed by software algorithms rather than human operators, the variance introduced by human behavior will decrease, potentially leading to a higher alignment between simulated models and actual performance. Investigating this hypothesis through long-term longitudinal tracking will represent a major milestone in the advancement of maritime logistics and infrastructure planning.

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