

Deep Water Port *notes*

The News Portfolio of The Connecticut Deep Water Port Community
New London . New Haven . Bridgeport

Is a Feeder Barge System Viable in Connecticut?

By Donald Frost, Deputy Editor



*US Flag ATB Freeport, 604 FT LOA & Draft 22 FT, docked at Dow Chemical, New London with tug "Thames Ship" holding vessel to dock while securing mooring lines. The ATB Freeport discharged Styrene first loaded in the Mississippi River at Dow's facility 20 miles north of New Orleans.
 Photo by Connecticut Marine Pilot Captain Charles P. Jonas*

On November first the U.S. Dept of Transportation marked the opening of the so-called California Green Trade Corridor that will help take freight traffic off California's congested I-580 between Oakland and the Sacramento River ports of Stockton and Sacramento using a tug-barge feeder to move containers between San Francisco Bay and California's Central Valley.

A similar plan in Connecticut was proposed in 2001 that would connect the container terminals of the Port of New York-New Jersey and various deep water ports in Connecticut. The CT port selected as a test case for the idea was Bridgeport. Other than the distances (about 71 miles for both projects) and the use of tugs and barges to move the boxes, the similarity to the California project ends.

The California model is based on loading at one terminal (Oakland). The CT plan also assumed one terminal but the Port of NY-NJ has five container terminals (Port Newark, Port Elizabeth, Bayonne all in New Jersey, NY Container Terminal in Staten Island, and Red Hook in Brooklyn). The project identified the most economical size barge as one that would lift 300 containers. No single NY harbor container terminal could be assured of having 300 containers to be shipped at one time. To fill that barge would require stops at one, and probably two more terminals. Shifting time and expenses between terminals made the freight between NY and Bridgeport uncompetitive with trucks. Furthermore, the shifting



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time alone would have delayed deliveries so much that trucking is a better alternative.

Stephen M. Carmel, Senior Vice President of Maersk Lines, Limited in the August 2013 issue of the U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings) wrote: "More than half of all container CARGO is now component-level goods – that is, materials destined for factories for use in a production process operating on a just-in-time type inventory-management system. This requires deliveries that are consistent, reliable and have schedule integrity. The key goal is 99% on-time delivery."

The International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) contract with the NY Shipping Association did not (in 2001) and still does not have a tariff rate for handling containers directly from a ship to a waiting barge. Even if one existed the Maritime Security Act of December 2002 would make that nearly impossible. Once again time delays the shipment and the double handling raises the freight via barge. Also, container carriers have long term trucking contracts so that diverting any traffic away from trucks is not usually in the ocean carrier's interest.

Another problem, barely discussed in 2001, was the fact that Bridgeport did not have a crane to discharge containers nor space to receive 300 containers while also marshalling another 300 boxes for the return trip to NY. To discourage shippers from using Bridgeport as a virtual warehouse, the plan of the time shifted to a roll-on/roll-off system which would not require a crane and expedite unloading/loading. BUT the ILA in NY refused to even contemplate rating this option.

Lastly, the 2001 study mentions the fact that between 8 and 13% (varies by day of the week) of the trailer truck traffic on I-95 carry sea-containers, and assumed that a tug-barge operation could capture all that traffic. This is extremely unlikely given the proximity

of Bridgeport to NY via road and the nature of the goods that travel in those boxes. This again is a reference to assured on-time delivery.

There are solutions to many of the above problems and they are not necessarily expensive if the focus is on satisfying shippers versus possibly reducing highway congestion.

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