

# Deep Water Port *notes*

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

## Maritime Matters in Washington

By Mr. Paul Bea



*Tanker "SWARNA MALA" inbound New Haven Harbor with cargo for Magellan Terminal.  
LOA 600 ft Beam 105 ft Draft 33 ft Photo – Captain Charles Jonas, Connecticut Marine Pilot*

THE ISSUE OF CHANNEL MAINTENANCE APPEARS TO BE STICKING IN WASHINGTON. The question is whether it is a Miracle Glue kind of sticking or just a Post-It kind.

On one day—April 18th—two noteworthy developments occurred in the House of Representatives on the humble subject of Federal channel maintenance. First, the House of Representatives voted, by voice, in support of full funding of Federal channel maintenance.

Admittedly, the vote was an easy one. The amendment to the surface transportation bill (HR 4348) didn't threaten the jurisdiction of committees that object to proposals for mandatory spending from the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund. And the vote actually doesn't appropriate an eye-catching \$1.47 billion, the user fee collections in the last year.

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However in supporting the amendment to the surface transportation bill offered by Rep. Charles Boustany (R-LA) the Members of the full House are associated with the view that the total amount available for spending from the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund (HMTF) each fiscal year be equal to the Trust Fund receipts.

Nitpickers, me included, will rightly note that the amendment lacks an enforcement provision to back up the “guarantee” in the text. There is nothing to ensure full funding as the outcome of future appropriations decisions. However, as these things go, it is incrementally stronger language than the provisions in the House and Senate “highway” bills that opine that the Administration should budget the full measure of Harbor Maintenance Tax revenues and Congress should appropriate the same.

The second, more substantial action that took place has to do with real funding. The Energy & Water Development Appropriations Subcommittee met on the bill to provide Corps of Engineers funding in FY 2013. The subcommittee approved a record level of spending for port channel maintenance and a tapping of the HMTF in the amount of \$1 billion.

Most of that would go toward channel maintenance, which is the principal allowed use of HMTF monies. It represents roughly \$150 million more than was appropriated for the current year and a significant improvement over recent levels in the range of \$750+ million for channel maintenance.

In both of the above instances, more legislative action is required before those decisions are put in a form that

goes to the President for signature. Both present some reason for optimism that the ongoing effort will result in real improvements as it does offer more reason for stakeholder ports to actively lobby for improvements in channel maintenance policy and funding.

Before closing I should note that the surface transportation bill I referred to at top is yet another extension of the highway and transit programs, through to the end of September. The bill stands in for a more comprehensive measure, HR 104, which Republican leaders were unable to get through the House. So Speaker John Boehner went with Plan B, which is to pass a comparatively simple extension bill and send it to the Senate with the knowledge that the Senate would attach its own passed version, S. 1813. Those are the first steps leading to a House-Senate negotiation and raising hopes that Congress will finish action on the important highway and transit measure that states are desperately seeking.

Raising hopes, of course, is not the same as giving reason for confidence that a bill will make it to the White House for signature. The continuing political jousting has every potential to derail the successor to the 2005 SAFETEA-LU transportation law. For example, the House voted to include the Keystone XL pipeline project in the bill, knowing President Obama has vowed to veto any measure that would approve that project.

*Paul Bea is a government relations and policy advisor in Washington, DC. He chairs the marine highway advocacy group, The Coastwise Coalition, and discusses marine transportation system matters at [www.MTSMatters.com](http://www.MTSMatters.com).*

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<http://www.ctdol.state.ct.us/veterans/vetreprs.htm>

### The Office of Military Affairs

Mr. Robert Ross, Executive Director  
 (860) 270-8074,  
 bob.ross@ct.gov  
<http://www.ct.gov/oma/site/default.asp>

### Federal Resources

VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011 Creates New Benefit for Unemployed Veterans. This legislation offers a tax credit up to \$5,600 for companies that hire veterans who have been unemployed six months or longer.

Hiring a veteran with a service-connected disability bumps the credit up to \$9,600. [http://courtney.house.gov/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=6533&Itemid](http://courtney.house.gov/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=6533&Itemid)



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