

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

As I write this, a little past mid-May, two recent events are fresh in mind. Earlier this month the Maritime Administration convened its second symposium aimed in the direction of a National Maritime Strategy and just this week Congress gave final approval to its first water resources bill in seven years. Both have significance to the maritime sector but, for the time being, we are able to gauge the significance of one.

You don't have to be inside-the-beltway to know what is WRDA ("werda"). In recent decades it has been the path by which harbor deepening and inland waterway projects win Federal approval. It is the necessary step to qualify for the funding of dredging and the modernization of our system of locks. It is how the Harbor Maintenance Tax and Trust Fund came to be law in 1986. It is how the 50-foot deepening in the Port of New York/New Jersey was authorized in 2000. And it is how in the Corps of Engineers will be authorized to deepen and/or widen channels in the ports of Boston, Savannah, Jacksonville, Canaveral, Palm Beach, Freeport, and Corpus Christi before too long – for the Water Resources Reform and Development Act of 2014 is on its way to being signed by President Obama.

Passage of WRRDA 2014 was cheered in the halls of Congress and around the country. The House and Senate, with strong approving votes, showed those bodies capable of completing a major infrastructure bill despite the fractious partisanship and anti-spending sentiment of recent years. The bill, HR. 3080, lacks the earmarking that turned some in Congress sour on public works legislation. Instead it prescribes a more detailed process by which congressional committees will receive and act on project recommendations.

The added "R" in the bill is more than for show. Reforms to current law and practice are many. How well they will work in speeding the Corps of Engineers civil works process and the Federal agency reviews will have to be seen. More immediately gratifying is the flexibility offered to port authorities and States who sponsor navigation projects and often tire of waiting for Federal funding and construction to get started. The terms of the bill give them greater ability to move ahead with project studies and construction.

So there is a lot in WRRDA to cheer. And if congressional committees live up to their promise of taking up future water resources bills on a two-year cycle there will be even more to cheer in the years ahead.



Tanker Seatreasure LOA 600 feet outbound Long Island Sound after discharging gasoline Port of New Haven. Bound for Baltimore to load diesel fuel bound for Europe. Photo by Captain Charles P. Jonas, Senior Connecticut Pilot



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The second National Maritime Strategy Symposium took place on May 6th. The first of the symposia took place in January over three days and focused on the objective of boosting the U.S.-flag share of international commerce. The gathering this month was focused domestically. MARAD wanted stakeholders to “help us identify concerns, opportunities and issues facing our domestic maritime industry.” The agency asked for attention to U.S. domestic shipping, ports, shipyards and workforce. Closer to the event the agenda settled around three categories: domestic shipping, ports and shipyards. Three morning panels of industry representatives and three afternoon breakout sessions. It might be fair to conclude that most of the 200+ persons in the atrium of the USDOT building were there if not to make very specific recommendations then to say that, yes, we need a strategy—and a policy—to bring more work to American ports, shipyards and Jones Act shipping.

The long term benefit of the symposium speech-making, which included the Secretary of Transportation and the chairman of the Readiness Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee, and breakout sessions, will not be known anytime soon. Will policy proposals emerge? Will it spur new thinking in Congress or at the White House? However, we soon should see a document that attempts to jell the sentiment and some of the ideas into words. Acting Administrator Jaenichen offered up a summary of the day’s messages. He said MARAD would produce a draft “maritime strategy” ready for us to look at toward the end of summer.

Meanwhile, if you have your own thoughts as to what should be in a national maritime strategy Mr. Jaenichen no doubt would welcome them. Address your envelopes to him at the Maritime Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation, 1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE, Washington, DC 20590. The official docket remains open until May 28.

You can submit comments by going to the www.regulation.gov website here: <http://1.usa.gov/1i4WaMo>.

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.

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Our members include:

Briarpatch Enterprises, Inc.

Joseph Gilbert, 203.876.8923, hiddenemp@aol.com

Bridgeport Port Authority

Andrew J. Nunn, 203-576-3964, andrew.nunn@bridgeportct.gov

The Bridgeport & Port Jefferson Steamboat Company

Frederick Hall, 631-473-0286, FHall@McAllisterTowing.com

Blakeslee Arpaia Chapman, Inc.

John Fucci, 203-483-2954, jfucci@BAC-INC.com

Coast Line Service

Rob Pearce, 617-951-9957, rob@bostonlineservice.com

Cross Sound Ferry Services, Inc.

Adam Wronowski, 860-625-4824, adam@longislandferry.com

Connecticut Maritime Association, Inc.

Donald Frost, 203-406-0106, dbfrost@optonline.net

Connecticut State Pilots, Inc.

Capt. Charles Jonas, 516-319-5069, cpjonas@optonline.net

Empire Fisheries, LLC

Joseph Gilbert, 203-876-8923, hiddenemp@aol.com

Gateway Terminal

Tom Dubno, 203-467-1997, tdubno@gatewayt.com

Gwenmor Marina & Marine Contracting Inc.

Christian McGugan, 860-536-0281, Christian@gwenmor.com

GZA GeoEnvironmental, Inc.

Dan Kinard, 860-286-8900, dan.kinard@gza.com

Interport Pilots Agency, Inc.

Captain Louis Bettinelli, 732-787-5554, loubett@optonline.net

Moran Towing Corporation

Aislinn Pitchford, 203-442-2800, aislinn@morantug.com

New England Shipping Company, Inc.

David Pohorylo, 203-467-2423, dpohorylo@newenglandshipping.com

New Haven Port Authority

Judi Sheiffele, Ex.Dir., 203-946-6778, JSheiffe@newhavenct.net

New Haven Terminal

Michael Vasaturo, 203-468-0805, vpusec@aol.com

Port Security Services

Ralph Gogliettino, 800-762-9147, Ralph@portsecurity.us

Santa Energy Corporation

Thomas Santa, 203-362-3332, SantaT@santaenergy.com

Schooner, Inc.

Kristen Andrews, 203-865-1737, kristen.andrews@schoonerinc.org

Sea Support, Inc.

Ralph Gogliettino, 203-467-1590, Ralph@seasupport.biz

Thames Towboat Co.

Richard MacMurray, 860-443-7394, rich@longislandferry.com

Thames Shipyard & Repair Co.

Stan Mickus, 860-460-8437, stanmickus@longislandferry.com

Underwater Construction Corporation

Chris Tirrell, 860-857-8440, chris@uccdive.com

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William Gash, Executive Director

P.O. Box 188, Stonington, CT 06378 Phone: 860-941-0044
Fax (888) 436-5413 Email: ctmaritime@msn.com

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DEEP WATER PORT notes is published monthly electronically & printed quarterly by the Connecticut Maritime Coalition, Inc.
Designed by CG Creative, contact@cgcreative.us

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