

# 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

ONE IS TEMPTED TO GIVE TODAY'S PORT/MARITIME ACTION IN WASHINGTON SOME HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Not all that long ago routine American port activity in Washington was primarily focused on Federal regulatory matters and little with respect to transportation programs and policy. Rail and trucking rates and service were key concerns. If a port needed a channel project done it went to Congress for legislation and then to the Corps of Engineers to get the work done. Maritime policy was about vessels. The Federal government didn't have port improvement programs.

When the Department of Transportation opened for business in 1967 its maritime agent was the U.S. Coast Guard and its modal attention was directed to building the interstate system and tending to railroads, aviation and mass transit. The Maritime Administration didn't arrive from the Department of Commerce until 1981 and even then ports weren't in its portfolio.

Following the deregulation era of the 70s and 80s, there are a few important Federal policy dates for U.S. ports:

1986 - The Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) brought major policy changes to the Corps of Engineers Civil Works program, especially for its navigation mission. It require cost-sharing on channel improvement projects and instituted the Harbor Maintenance Tax on cargo to pay for the cost of channel maintenance. Ports sought but never won improvements to the laborious Corps process.

1991-The Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) was the first step in having U.S. transportation public works policy reflect the intermodal nature of the freight and passenger sector. Each succeeding authorization bill has made incremental responses to intermodal freight needs, the most recent being MAP-21.

2002 - The Maritime Transportation Security Act (MTSA) was signed into law in November 2002. No longer was port security just a matter of preventing cargo theft. The security of waterways, vessels and ports meant new responsibility for port authorities and marine terminals as well as enhanced roles for the U.S. Coast Guard, TSA, and the now Customs and Border Protection agency, all integrated into the Department of Homeland Security created that same month.

2009 - The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) was an \$831 billion response to the financial collapse of the previous year. The ARRA stimulus package included public works grants for "shovel ready" projects. For the first time port related projects, including rail elements, were made eligible for Federal dollars in what became known as the TIGER grants program. Over \$147 million was allocated to port and maritime related infrastructure projects in that first year.



*Tanker British Ensign preparing to leave the Deep Water Port of New Haven with one of Gateway's tug The Connecticut assisting. The tanker brought gasoline cargo from Canada. Picture by Connecticut Senior Marine Pilot Captain Charles P. Jonas*

Today ports and terminals can benefit by Federal aid whether for their own facilities or for "last mile" access projects. Terminal gates and cranes, on-dock rail, TWIC readers, and diesel engine replacements now qualify for direct grants or financing. Those come with strings but large ports and small have welcomed the aid.

In June a large number of ports will submit proposals to USDOT in the hope of being among the small percentage of projects selected for TIGER grants this fall. The program will be in its seventh round with around \$500 million to distribute in grants of \$10 million and more.

In late April the House Appropriations Committee produced its



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first FY 2016 bill of the year and it is the one that funds the Corps of Engineers Civil Works program. The bill includes \$5.6 billion for the water program, which is \$142 million more than the current year and \$860 million over the President's budget. So, for a time when Federal budget caps and sequestration remain in place navigation, flood control and related projects are faring comparatively better than other parts of the budget. The bill includes \$1.18 billion for channel maintenance. That is \$73 million more than the previous record but not up to the hoped-for "target" of \$1.25 billion set in the Water Resources Reform and Development Act of 2014. While the port sector can be disappointed, the good news is that O&M appropriations have gone up in recent years and the House bill continues in that direction.

I will end this letter by placing a large question mark as to the prospects for the overdue surface transportation authorization bill and National Maritime Strategy. The former is waiting on congressional tax panels to figure out how to restore solvency to the Highway Trust

Fund and, for that matter, pay for a new freight improvement program. Come May the Congress have to at least extend current law (MAP-21). As for the Maritime Administration's project to outline steps that might bolster the U.S.-flag industry's share of business, the agency continues to look for good ideas even as it nears completing a finished draft. The document will be released for comment. Ideas, anyone?

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

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