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FIRST EVER FRAMEWORK TO MEASURE MTS PERFORMANCE AND NEEDS

A first ever framework to measure the performance, needs, and value of the marine transportation system (MTS) is underway. Proposed as a product of a recently held MTS research and development conference, the framework provides a means for collaboration among government, industry, and academia to identify the condition and needs of the MTS.

The MTS consists of thousands of miles of navigable waterways and channels, hundreds of ports and harbors, intermodal connectors, and various vessels – including tankers, ferries, cruise ships, military transports, and barges – that are a waterborne network to help move people and commerce.

System improvement and the importance of marine transportation performance measurement were priority topics at the Second Biennial Research and Development Conference held at the National Academies of Sciences in Washington, DC, June 26-28, 2012. The conference was sponsored by the Committee on the Marine Transportation System and the Transportation Research Board of the National Academies.

Over 130 participants from government, ports, industry, and academia committed to create a conceptual framework to facilitate decisions on marine transportation infrastructure investments and to create new metrics, as well as synthesizing existing performance metrics, to assess the need, value, and status of the MTS.

This initiative is important because, as Major General Michael Walsh, Deputy Commanding General, Civil and Emergency Operations of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers stated in his opening remarks, “The U.S. is a maritime nation. For the U.S. to sustain economic growth and security, the marine transportation system must be a recognized and measured link of a national and global freight transportation system.”

The conference also highlighted the necessity of a national strategic vision to foster a freight transportation system that is modern, efficient, reliable, and fully integrated with all other modes of transportation, including road and rail. The U.S. MTS exists as a “system of systems” and must be fully cognizant of the economic, social, political, and environmental systems in which it exists.

Among the other conference themes was the recognition that the MTS is data rich and information poor. A call for improved sharing of data among federal agencies and with partners in industry and academia was another conference action.

“The President recognizes the need for a national transportation infrastructure investment program that focuses investments on national transportation priorities. The performance measures that will be developed as a result of this conference will allow us to see how well freight transportation investments are helping us to achieve our strategic goals, like the doubling of our exports by 2015,” stated Polly Trottenberg, Assistant Secretary for Transportation Policy at the U.S. Department of Transportation, an opening plenary keynote speaker.

Margaret Spring, Principal Deputy Undersecretary for Oceans and Atmosphere at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, also referenced the President's export goals in her plenary remarks, saying, "In an age of tightening budgets and aging infrastructure, these goals cannot be achieved without working together to identify critical needs of the marine transportation system and develop ways to address them." The results from this conference intend to help meet these challenges.

On the web:

The Committee on the Marine Transportation System: <http://www.cmts.gov>

The Transportation Research Board of the National Academies: <http://www.trb.org/Main/Home.aspx>

Research and Development Conference Information: <http://www.trb.org/Conferences/Metrics2012.aspx>