

## AT A GLANCE

## Q&amp;A

**Sean Connaughton,**  
**administrator, U.S.**  
**Maritime Administration**

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**WorkBoat:** *The administration says it is looking to you to work with U.S. ports to address congestion issues. What is your plan?*

**Sean Connaughton:** The overall question is how we get cargo out of a metro area and into the transportation system so it is delivered in a timely fashion. U.S. trade will double in the next 15 years, and we need a national strategy for port development and infrastructure improvement. A lot is already happening, with money being spent by ports and the federal and state governments to deal with bottlenecks. The idea is to identify projects underway to deal with bottlenecks and use this in a systematic way. We must coordinate better the federal spending that is going on — Marad funding, federal transit money for passenger ferries and federal rail money with the rail system for example — with what state and local governments are doing. If we don't coordinate, we'll end up with a situation where we have solved a problem at a port but created a traffic bottleneck at another point.

**WB:** *Why has short-sea shipping been so slow to develop both in the private sector and with the government?*

**Connaughton:** The days of conferences are over. We will be changing the thrust of our program to focus on the actual deliverables. We're looking at changing the name, as short-sea shipping really doesn't express the potential of the program, and besides, it's too hard to say real fast! We haven't decided yet what to call it. We're also looking at what's happening with this kind of shipping across the country to understand where it is working well and why it has been successful, such as service between New York and Boston, service on the Mississippi River and in Bridgeport, Conn. In Bridgeport, we've



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seen a dramatic interest in trucks using that ferry service to avoid New York City. We need to now prove that this can work, to

show that there's a correlation between the number of trucks taken off the road and the marine operation. If we can show these success stories, we'll be able to gain some legislation and this will lead to greater support within the transportation industry among shippers.

**WB:** *What can the federal government do to help ease the labor shortage in the industry?*

**Connaughton:** We've got lots of challenges, especially with the new security requirements. The other issue is making the industry more visible. The maritime industry isn't on the forefront of most high schoolers when they are looking at careers. This is not necessarily a government solution, as it is an industry solution. Industry must be aggressive in going out and getting people into the industry. We can help bring attention, but bringing in the next generation of workers has to do with wages, benefits, working conditions and opportunities for advancement. We must rethink how we recruit the younger generation, looking at what motivates them.

**WB:** *What are your plans for addressing challenges facing inland operators?*

**Connaughton:** A lot of it is raising awareness of the issues facing the inland industry. It traditionally has had a low profile and not many outsiders understand the critical importance of these marine highways to the country. We have many programs targeted to inland waterways and have offices in St. Louis, New Orleans and Chicago for the Great Lakes. But they are small offices with limited resources. Nonetheless, we will be more aggressive in assuring implementation of the work done by these programs and offices.

**WB:** *Is Marad better prepared for*

*another natural disaster in the wake of Hurricane Katrina?*

**Connaughton:** One of the interesting things that came out of the hurricane was learning that this agency has a tremendous range of capabilities available to assist the federal, state and local governments and private entities during an emergency. It's all about getting those capabilities into the response plans and making their availability known. After Katrina, we provided crane ships, housed responders and workers at the port on our vessels and opened our shoreside facilities for storage. We learned that our [emergency] plans did work, as we had planned for the possibility of a major storm hitting New Orleans and the Gulf area. Our facilities had little damage there, and our vessels were able to respond immediately, so for the most part our plans worked as anticipated. What we didn't anticipate was the demand that resulted for vessels and personnel, as they ended up playing a big role in the recovery effort.

**WB:** *Security regulations have been costly to comply with, and some say are excessive for the type of threat facing the marine sector. How do you respond to this?*

**Connaughton:** Security of the maritime sector is of paramount concern to the United States and the new security requirements do carry certain costs. The federal government has provided a large number of grants to ports to help them, and in many cases, many of these improvements are very basic and should have been done already. These include improving fencing, adding security cameras and screening people. We work with the Department of Homeland Security on port security issues, and when there are legitimate concerns, we raise them with DHS. This is the case now with some ports in the Gulf whose security improvements were wiped out by the hurricane last year. We are asking DHS to give them priority in the next round of port security grants to replace what was lost. Yes, they cost money, but at the end of the day, the goal is clear — to make sure the U.S. ports achieve the highest level of security possible while keeping the flow of trade moving.