

From:

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1) Is there the potential for a Marine Highway Program in the United States?

Yes, the Marine Highway Program in the United States has potential. Perhaps because of our geography and transportation culture, calls within ports of the United States will not soon be as abundant as in Europe and other areas where distances to market are less and there is a greater public understanding and support for the benefits. However, through increased awareness and commitment, the 'marine highways' alternative offers multiple benefits regarding congestion mitigation, cost, job development and environmental protection, to name a few.

2) What are some of the barriers to making MH a reality on a larger scale?

There are several obstacles in marine highway start ups and sustainability such as the Harbor Maintenance Tax and Jones Act compliance costs that require attention. Some of the heavy costs are building new vessels, insurance and crewing. Currently in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico, Seabridge Freight has a marine highways service with a published schedule for three sailings per month. One of the challenges is changing the mind set from trucking to water. Another adjustment is scheduling shipments for a specific departure date, rather than go any time once the truck is loaded and ready to move. Also, the equipment logistics of returning empty containers and securing back haul revenue loads requires focus and marketing effort. It is necessary to lift enough cargo in both directions to surpass operations costs. Some cargoes are seasonal where a scheduled service cannot be detained until a plant in Mexico has been refurbished or retrofitted for a new product, as an example.

3) Is MH a part of a National Transportation System?

Yes, 'marine highways' are, and should be, an integral part of the National Transportation System. An example of recent developments; Horizon Lines announced a marine highways start up in October, 2009, by including Tampa, Florida in its U.S. Gulf of Mexico service rotation starting in Houston. This service is unique since in reality it is simply an additional port of call with an existing service. The prior vessel rotation had enough time in its schedule to call an additional port, connecting Houston with Tampa Bay, Tampa Bay to San Juan, Puerto Rico and San Juan to Tampa Bay. The vessel is over 1,000 teus in size and has capacity to increase lift from Houston, from Tampa and from San Juan. Therefore, if it succeeds in covering the additional port costs in Tampa, it could soon be profitable while at the same time decongesting the I-10 corridor alleviating the transportation system from the long haul less transit sensitive cargoes. Not to mention future savings in I-10 maintenance and expansion in proportion to unwelcome tonnage growth.

Bernard's bio:

A seasoned bilingual maritime professional with over 30 years of experience from different specialties of the industry namely: cruise passenger, cruise ferry/fast ferry, ocean, air and surface transportation.

In 2005 he was selected as Port Director & CEO to head up the Port of Brownsville, TX, a 5 million metric ton Mexico border facility with over 45,000 acres of property, including a short line rail road.

He served as President/CEO of Maya Lines, a short sea cargo and passenger project, from Florida to the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico after holding senior port management positions for 8 years receiving the Professional Port Management Certification, PPM®, from the American Association of Port Authorities in 2003.

In 1999 he became Assistant Port Director for the Port of Miami, Cruise Capital of the World and Florida's largest container port. Before that, he served as Trade Development Manager for the Tampa Port Authority, the largest tonnage port in the State of Florida. His seasoned ocean liner industry experience stems from stateside and offshore Latin American, Caribbean and European executive-managerial assignments with recognized ocean lines such as Sealand, Crowley American Transport, Del Monte Fresh Fruit and NANACO of Costa Rica facilitated by his bicultural and bilingual upbringing (English-Spanish).

He received a Bachelor's degree from Oklahoma State University, a post graduate Latin American Area Studies Certification and embarked on a Master's program at the University of Costa Rica.

Serving as member or board member in maritime, trade and community organizations he was or is associated with Miami Dade County Mayor's Marketing Council, Trade Mission Center of the Americas, Beacon Council, Propeller club, American Association of Port Authorities, Florida Brokers and Forwarders Association, Florida Foreign Trade Association, World Trade Center, Enterprise Florida, Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce, the bi-national chambers of commerce, Tampa Committee of 100 and President of the Tampa Bay Cargo Association, President of the Brownsville Propeller Club.