

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION**Coast Guard****[USCG-98-3553] - /****Marine Transportation System:
Waterways, Ports, and their Intermodal
Connections**

AGENCY: Coast Guard, DOT.

ACTION: Notice of meeting; request for comments.

SUMMARY: The Coast Guard and the Maritime Administration, together with several other federal agencies, are holding seven two-day regional listening sessions to receive information concerning the current state and future needs of the U.S. marine transportation system—the waterways, ports, and their intermodal connections. These listening sessions are a first step in developing a customer-based strategy to work together to ensure waterways, ports, and their intermodal connections meet user and public expectations for the 21st century. The information provided at the regional listening sessions will be presented at a national conference in the fall of 1998.

DATES: The meeting in New Orleans, LA will be on March 31, 1998, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

ADDRESSES: The meeting in New Orleans, LA will be held at the Port of New Orleans, 1320 Port of New Orleans Place, New Orleans, LA 70130.

You may mail comments to the Docket Management Facility, (USCG-1998-3553), U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), 400 Seventh Street SW., Washington, DC 20590-0001, or deliver them to room PL-401, located on the Plaza Level of the Nassif Building at the same address between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, except holidays.

The Docket Management Facility maintains the public docket for this notice. Comments will become part of this docket and will be available for inspection or copying at room PL-401, located on the Plaza Level of the Nassif Building at the above address between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, except Federal holidays. You may also electronically access the public docket for this notice on the Internet at <http://dms.dot.gov>.

l. **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** For information on the public docket, contact Carol Kelley, Coast Guard Dockets Team Leader or Paulette Twine, Chief, Documentary Services Division, U.S. Department of Transportation, telephone 202-366-9329; for information concerning the notice of meeting contact Joyce Short, U.S. Coast Guard (G-M-2), 2100 Second St., SW, Washington, DC 20593-0001, telephone 202-267-6164.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**Other Regional Listening Sessions**

This notice announces the first of seven two-day regional listening sessions. Other sessions are being planned for Portland, OR; Oakland, CA; St. Louis, MO; Cleveland, OH; New York, NY; and Charleston, SC. The dates and locations of these sessions will be published in a separate **Federal Register** notice.

Request for Comments

We encourage interested persons to participate in this information-gathering initiative by submitting written data, views, or other relevant documents. Persons submitting comments should include their names and addresses, identify this notice (USCG-1998-3553), and the reasons for each comment. Please submit all comments and attachments in an unbound format, no larger than 8½ x 11 inches, suitable for copying and electronic filing to the DOT Docket Management Facility at the address under **ADDRESSES**. If you want acknowledgment of receipt of your comments, enclose a stamped, self-addressed post card or envelope.

Comments received, whether submitted in writing to the docket, or presented during the regional listening sessions, will be considered in preparing the agenda of a national conference in the fall 1998.

Background

The marine transportation system includes waterways, ports, and their intermodal connections with highways, railways, and pipelines. The marine transportation system links the United States to overseas markets and is important to national security interests. Excluding Mexico and Canada, over 95% of U.S. foreign trade by tonnage is shipped by sea, and 14% of U.S. inter-city freight is transported by water.

Forecasts show that U.S. foreign ocean borne trade is expected to more than double by the year 2020; and commuter ferries, recreational boating and other recreational uses of the waterway are expected to increase,

placing even greater demands on the marine transportation system.

Many federal agencies, state and local governments, port authorities, and the private sector share responsibility for the marine transportation system. The economic, safety, and environmental implications of aging infrastructure, inadequate channels, and congested intermodal connections will become more critical as marine traffic volume increases.

To meet these challenges, the Department of Transportation is pursuing the development of a customer-based strategy, in partnership with others responsible for waterways, ports, and their intermodal connections. The strategy will be aligned with the principles of the National Performance Review, will provide better delivery of Federal services, and provide a means to improve the nation's waterways, ports, and their intermodal connections to meet user needs and public expectations for the 21st century.

The regional listening sessions will build upon information from other Department of Transportation-led outreach activities that identified issues of significance to the marine transportation system. For example, in 1997 workshops addressed the impact of larger container ships; in 1994 outreach sessions led to an action plan to improve the dredging process in the United States; and in 1993 port visits identified land-side intermodal access impediments.

The Secretary of the Department of Transportation will host a national conference in the fall of 1998. That conference will address key issues raised by the regional listening sessions and written comments. The purpose of the national conference will be to address these issues, develop solutions, and explore potential strategies to implement these solutions. The conference will also develop a vision for an improved and more cooperative approach to the delivery of Federal services.

Objective and Issues

The objective of these regional listening sessions and the request for comments is to receive information from the general public and user perspective to identify concerns about the current state and future needs of our waterways, ports, and their intermodal connections. We need to identify the most critical issues that should be addressed to meet the challenges likely to be faced by our marine transportation system. We particularly need to identify those areas where the Federal government should improve existing services or provide

future assistance in addressing these issues.

We specifically are interested in information on the following questions for each component of the marine transportation system: waterways, the ports, and their intermodal connections:

- Currently, what elements work best in your region and why?
- Currently, what are the most significant problems in your region?
- What are the obstacles to resolving these problems?
- What is your vision of a marine transportation system that will accommodate the growing and competing demands of the future?
- What changes, additions, and types of assistance are needed to achieve your vision?

Format of Regional Listening Sessions

The first day of each regional listening session will be an open forum to receive views and opinions from the public concerning the current state and future needs of our waterways, ports and their intermodal connections. Persons wishing to make oral presentations should notify the person listed under **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT** no later than the day before the meeting. Written material may be submitted before, during, or after the meeting. Speakers are encouraged to provide a written copy of their comments since time limits may be needed to accommodate all speakers, and summary notes will be made of oral comments.

The second day of each regional listening session will be a structured focus group format. A representative cross section from the region's ports, terminals, stevedores, pilots, vessel operators, railroads, truckers, environmental community, and others will be selected to provide expert views on the current state and future needs of our marine transportation system.

A summary of each regional listening will be placed in the public docket and will be available for public review and comment.

Information on Services for Individuals With Disabilities

For information on facilities or services for individuals with disabilities or to request special assistance at the meetings, contact the person under **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT** as soon as possible.

Dated: February 25, 1998.

R.C. North,

Rear Admiral, U.S. Coast Guard, Assistant Commandant for Marine Safety and Environmental Protection.

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