



## *Washington DC Meeting*

### ***Standing Committee on Water Transportation Sets Sights on National Freight Network***

Approximately 40 transportation professionals from the state, federal and private sectors attended AASHTO's Standing Committee on Water Transportation (SCOWT) meeting last week, as all interested stakeholders look to further integrate navigable waterways into the national transportation network.

Leading last week's meeting were SCOWT Chairman Larry "Butch" Brown, executive director of the Mississippi Department of Transportation and committee Vice Chairman Richard Nordahl, chief of the California Department of Transportation's Office of Goods Movement.

This year's SCOWT Washington, D.C., meeting had three objectives: *identify priority objectives for federal action; develop advocacy strategy to achieve objectives; and, initiate partnerships with organizations having similar objectives.* Helping to foster a cohesive water and freight approach the meeting included Administrator Sean Connaughton of the U.S. Maritime Administration; American Association of Port Authorities Executive Vice President and General Counsel Jean Godwin; Geoff Bowman, professional staff member of the House Subcommittee on Water Resources and the Environment; and, Let Mon Lee, a fellow in the office of Sen. Christopher Bond (R-MO), who is the Chairman of the Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee.

Other speakers included Tony Furst of the U.S. Department of Transportation's National Freight Policy office; Mark Pointon of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Operations and Navigation office; National Waterways Conference President Worth Hager; Arno Hart, whose RNO Group authored the "Smart Rivers Report"; and, Alan Myers of Cambridge Systematics, which is working on the next edition of AASHTO's Bottom Line Report.

Pointon outlined the U.S. Army Corps' waterways and navigational responsibilities, saying that one of the challenges in making a case for water transportation is increasing public awareness of this mode. He pointed out that the barges carrying fuel using U.S. waterways average 575 miles, topping rail and truck; 90 percent of grain shipments are carried on water; and, 20 percent of utility coal travels by water to ports as far inland as Armstrong County, Pennsylvania, on the Allegheny River.

Even though waterways provide a vital transportation mode, Pointon said challenges to the system include reliability; lock and dam repairs; and, the overall navigation. The Corps has launched an asset management initiative that includes a short list of goals, as well as a long-term management approach.

Connaughton spoke of the Maritime Administration's cooperation between the states regarding intermodal water initiatives and a number of representatives of transportation departments, port facilities and governors' office highlighted their efforts; among them were: California, Maryland, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania and Virginia.

Nordahl said California's ports are bracing for the increase in cargo—especially at the state's San Pedro Bay ports, Los Angeles and Long Beach. Plans are in the works for the replacement of the Gerald Desmond Bridge to increase its vertical clearance and add two more lanes to bring it up to six. Studies are also underway to upgrade Interstate 710 to handle the increase in freight traffic.

Shipments are also on the rise at Virginia's two ports—the Hampton Roads seaports and the Virginia Inland Port at the intersections of I-81 and I-66 near Winchester. Through fiscal year 2032, the Virginia Port Authority plans to invest more than \$3.1 billion at its seaports and assist with the creation of the Heartland Corridor, which is intended to expand rail capacity through Virginia, West Virginia and Ohio, connecting the Hampton Roads ports to Chicago.

The Port of New York and New Jersey is within 700 miles of major cities and population centers in the Northeast and it, too, is girding for increased cargo shipments. Tom Wakeman of the Port of NY/NJ told meeting delegates to move away from stovepipe investments in port facilities and think of freight transport as a system in the national and regional mobility network. Under this premise, waterways and terminals are linked to land access and distribution centers.

Wakeman also suggested transportation departments and port authorities reclaim abandoned industrial areas and brownfields for conversion into multi-modal transportation facilities.

The SCOWT next meets April 16-18<sup>th</sup>, 2007, in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Visit [http://freight.transportation.org/water\\_meetings.html](http://freight.transportation.org/water_meetings.html) for presentations and future meetings.