

Today I caught up with Bruce Lambert, Executive director for The Institute for Trade and Transportation Studies (ITTS), for a quick Q&A regarding his thoughts on the potential for a robust Marine Highway Program in the U.S. and what some of the barriers might be. ITTS specializes in examining freight transportation systems, from a policy and planning perspective, for State Departments of Transportation in the Southeast. Bruce's experience includes an extensive background in freight transportation planning and policy, having worked at various Federal Agencies (FHWA and USACE), a consultant (Standard and Poor's DRI, now a part of Global Insight), a port (The Port of Long Beach) and a University (Louisiana State University).

**AMH:** Bruce, in your opinion, is there the potential for a Marine Highway Program in the United States?

**BL:** Yes, the potential for the Marine Highway Program to operate in the domestic U.S. trade exists. The challenge is can we find ways to incentivize firstly, the carriers to offer these services, and secondly, encourage shippers to utilize these services. There are inland water services and coastal services in other markets in the world and there already exist services in the U.S, such as Osprey Line. We need to consider if these services can be expanded or promoted. Ultimately, Marine Highway options must provide services that the market, and not necessarily government, can support in the long term. It should be stressed these services are not one size fits all, as the differences in traffic will vary greatly across different lanes.

**AMH:** I like that you emphasize that "not one size fits all." Obviously different markets will each have unique needs and solutions.

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

**BL:** Clearly, there is precedent in the U.S. history of transportation where funding of projects, etc., were done to encourage growth in a certain sector or corridor, but how do you do so in a mature transportation environment?

There are many different issues facing the development of a Marine Highway Program, ranging from costs associated with double handling cargo at the docks, vessel operation configuration and costs, and related government regulations and double taxation. While not all of these issues must be resolved, clearly working on a variety of fronts will be helpful. This represents one area where seeing the benefits of a long term option from a public sector perspective must match the short term operational constraints of the global supply chain. Waterways can be reliable, although slower, if the infrastructure (both locks and dams, but also technology) can be developed to provide for better transparency in the supply and shippers can accommodate these transit times for inland movements. From a public perspective, we also have to consider this as part of a broader service transportation system. Furthermore, we need to realistic that waterway option will have geographic barriers, as in some cases does rail and even highways in certain regions.

**AMH:** Is MH a part of a National Transportation System?

**BL:** Currently, some ferry services are designated as parts of the National Highway Network, but regarding policy, there is no clear integrated national transportation policy. Given the different agencies involved (including both project approvals and funding options) a truly integrated system remains in the distant future. The option for Marine Highways is to be designated as an alternative to a main highway, which is similar to the current Marad position. This provides a clear geographic component as well as supports the pieces that may move forward if integrated corridor management strategies are developed.

The interesting thing will be how we integrate waterways into our broader societal goals. Waterways offer a more environmentally friendly transportation option, but if we underfund waterway infrastructure (locks and dams, and dredging) while not making the investment in making the system operate more efficiently from a technology standpoint, these benefits will be lost to society in general.

**AMH:** Bruce, thanks again for taking the time to chime in with your thoughts on a subject matter that is getting a lot of attention presently in the U.S. and promises to heat up more as our public officials and stakeholders look for ways of utilizing and integrating our inland and coastal waterways into the surface transportation formula.

As an aside, I highly recommend visiting [www.ITTSresearch.org](http://www.ITTSresearch.org) and signing up for Bruce's monthly newsletter which is full of informative content and information relating to improving freight transportation.

**BL:** Wayne, thank you for asking for my input and for the great work you are doing on your new website promoting the positive benefits of MH, I wish you the best of luck.