

From:

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

Clearly, there is potential for a comprehensive Marine Highway program in our country. However, the viability of a proposed Marine Highway option in the larger scope of the existing transportation network may prove to be a difficult sell to the current stakeholders within that network. The railroad and trucking industries, as well as organized labor, would be very interested in discussing the potential impact of any competing transportation mode. Conversely, the entities that purchase transportation services, especially those within the retail sector, may be very supportive of a Marine Highway network solution if it were able to fit into an appropriate cost benefit analysis. Furthermore, the current economic condition masks the shortage of qualified CDL drivers. Where will the CDL people be found when “the recession ends”?

The next predictable event impacting the transportation network in our country is the completion of the Panama Canal project in 2014. Likely, the economics of the “Post-Panamax” ships moving cargo from Asia through the Canal directly to ports on the East Coast (especially the Port of Hampton Roads, VA) will have an impact on both the existing rail and highway transportation modes. Special interests will not be able to prevent that change of tonnage from West Coast ports.

Does an opportunity to craft a Marine Highway solution as part of the National Transportation Policy exist? The Panama Canal project may prove to be the catalyst to that discussion. Could a comprehensive transportation plan be developed to include a Marine Highway between East Coast ports? That plan probably can be developed. However, the window of opportunity won't be open forever.

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

A Marine Highway network is not a highly visible component of the current transportation infrastructure. As well, both railroad and motor carrier segments (including organized labor) of the transportation industry will be very interested in any threat to available freight tonnage (both short and long term). Additionally, highway construction interests would likely have a problem with any infrastructure plan that diverted Federal transportation capital expenditures from their constituents.

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

It certainly is, but, it can be a more valuable component of national transportation. Clearly, there is an opportunity to move freight tonnage to a more efficient transportation network especially within the East Coast (defined as Florida to Maine). A more viable Marine Highway could also have a positive impact on the reduction of our carbon footprint.

Richard's Bio:

- Veteran of 35 years in the motor carrier segment of the Transportation Industry, principally with Yellow Transportation.

- Since 2006, president of Clepper Consulting Group, providing services to both 3PL and motor carrier clients: www.clepperconsultinggroup.com

- Recently quoted in *Fleet Owner* magazine in both the August 21 and August 28 edition.

- Graduate of the University of Maryland, College Park