

## ***Shipping Boon for New Bedford***

YOUR VIEW: Freight would complement city's fishing port

By Kristin Decas, Port Director and CEO, Harbor Development Commission

Published in New Bedford Standard Times (April 10, 2008) and Providence Journal (May 2008)

Congestion is on the verge of collapsing the truck network.

With East Coast interstate trade projected to triple in the next 10-15 years, the nation's highway systems simply cannot handle the expected exponential increase in truck traffic. The goals of clean air, open space, and quality of life are incompatible with further extensions and expansions of the highway system. Short sea shipping, through the reuse of a reinvigorated and robust coastal shipping network, the "ocean highways," promises a sound alternative for the future and a real opportunity for economic growth for the port of New Bedford.

In order to supplement the editorial of April 1, I feel it is important to submit additional facts about short sea shipping and explain how it will compliment, not compete with, the existing industries that are the bloodline of the New Bedford economy.

Short sea shipping will not use New Bedford's commercial fishing infrastructure. In fact, plans are in play to expand the public piers and wharves that support the city's No. 1-ranked fishing fleet. Likely hubs for short sea shipping include State Pier and Maritime Terminal, with backland staging areas for truck traffic.

Short sea shipping equals jobs, and new jobs. Less than 20 years ago, three stevedore companies provided over 50,000 man-hours of labor for oceangoing import/export activity. Since that time, the port has seen a decline of 75 percent in labor man-hours, identifying it as a vastly undertapped resource for economic growth and job creation. Short sea shipping offers a viable opportunity to rebuild this labor market by bringing freight activity to the port.

Further, as a short sea shipping hub, New Bedford moves to the front line of the supply chain, lowering the cost of transporting cargo and thereby attracting new business to the area and stimulating economic growth of existing backland industries. This means more jobs. A study funded by the governor's Seaport Council indicated short sea shipping could bring as many as 800 jobs to the region.

As for truckers, short sea shipping is a win, and national trucking associations and unions are on board. The current turnover rate for truckers is over 100 percent due to rising fuel costs, regulations on long-haul trips, and the unwillingness of drivers to be away from home for long periods. Many truckers are paid by the number of trips made, not by miles traveled. Short-haul moves would allow them to run multiple trips and increase their income. Other benefits include lower fuel consumption and improved lifestyle. No jobs are lost; rather, there will be a shift to short-haul trips from long-haul trips. Traffic issues can be addressed by scheduling vessels and truck transport for night hours and staging trucks in industrial areas.

Short sea shipping will only be a piece of the vibrant working waterfront. The commercial fishing industry is the soul of our economy and will only gain by the revitalization of the port. There are opportunities on many fronts, including global import/export trade, industrial water-borne industries, recreational boating, and cruise and ferry services. It is not one use versus another, but how all these industries can work as a whole to complement one another and best sustain the great city of New Bedford.