

*Not a Seminar but a Submission to **Business South**, made by the Southampton Master Mariners' Club in 2009 in its role as a 'City Champion'.*

## **A Transport Vision for the Southampton Region.**

Circa 1963, the Southampton Master Mariners' Club was asked by the Ministry of Transport to submit a paper entitled "The future of the Port of Southampton" and the report compiled by Club members was well received enjoying widespread publicity locally and nationally. The plan was considered ingenious, geographically economical and logistically advantageous nationally.

The scheme envisaged the building of jetty-type berths at right angles to the shoreline on the western side of Southampton Water and projecting into deep-dredged water where very large bulk and general cargo carriers could be accommodated. Inshore of these would be berths for shallower-draught vessels which could load the cargoes discharged from the bigger ones - and then *transport their cargoes coastwise - or to European destinations - as required.*

Shortly after the report was submitted, the concept of CONTAINERISATION

began to germinate and the Ministry "filed" the report. The proposed venue was DIBDEN BAY and it is well appreciated that further mention of the development of DIBDEN BAY for maritime commercial purposes will not be welcomed by the residents of "The Waterside" but if the disadvantages identified initially can be mitigated and the advantages identified more clearly it is probable that much of the resistance to the development will be overcome.

### The Conditions Today

The Port of Southampton is a major UK container port, second only to Felixstowe, and the distribution nationally of the containers discharged therein places a considerable strain on the road and rail system. Indeed, the major objection to the development of DIBDEN BAY as an extension of the Container Port was based on the massive increase in road traffic and, without hugely expensive development, the inability of the local roads to absorb this.

*The concept of the 1963 report, in today's conditions, is to obviate any such increase in road traffic in the New Forest area and, indeed, to reduce it locally and nationally. In its simplest form the scheme envisages a container ship berthing at a jetty and discharging containers on to transporters which would then carry them a short distance and reload them on small(er) container feeder ships berthed there. Instead of, as is the current practice, many containers being loaded on to road vehicles for distribution throughout the United Kingdom, the containers would then be carried by the feeder ships for discharge in ports such as Boston, Grimsby, Teesport, Blyth, Dundee, Montrose or Aberdeen - to mention but a few. Other feeder ships would, when the need arose, serve nearby Continental ports.*

This, indeed, would appear to be the thinking behind the development by PD Teesport of their "Northern Gateway Deep Sea Container Terminal" and, perhaps, this underlines the need for a "Southern Gateway" - a role for which Southampton is ideally placed geographically when one considers its advantageous proximity to the trade routes of the World.

This "short sea" trade has numerous advantages not the least of which is the re-vitalising of the small destination ports served by it. The cost of road maintenance throughout the United Kingdom is astronomical and much of this is occasioned by the "wear and tear" of heavy road transport. Throughout the South East traffic congestion on arterial roads is endemic but this is not the case in the centre and north. It is estimated that approximately half of the cargoes destined for central or northern United Kingdom are discharged in ports located in the south of the country and transported onward by road/rail and it is said that it is currently cheaper to discharge in a Continental port and deliver by feeder ship to one of the smaller ports in the north.

According to the Road Transport Association, road congestion currently costs British business 17 billion pounds annually and, in addition there is the huge burden of road repair and maintenance. Undoubtedly, road transport has a huge adverse impact on the environment - something that the deployment of today's environmentally friendly shipping would reduce significantly.

Initially, the United Kingdom - unlike our friends on the Continent - was slow to adopt the "Maritime Motorway" concept but Southampton currently has regular "feeder services" to Greenock and, when demand dictates, services to Manchester, N.Ireland, Dublin and the Channel Islands. Elsewhere, the recent introduction,

by PD Ports, of its "Logical Link" between the largest container port of Felixstowe and Teesport with two sailings per week, is a promising development. The current service runs one way only - from Felixstowe to Teesport-but the operators say there will be a "longer term opportunity" to export containerised goods from the north of the country through Teesport to Felixstowe - and onward to global destinations. It is no coincidence that two of the largest supermarket companies in the world - ASDA (a subsidiary of Wal-Mart) and Tesco are building massive "import centres" in Teesport thus affording welcome gainful employment opportunities locally.

Recently, the secretary-general of the European Sea Ports Organisation ( ESPO) was asked "Which ports come out on top in the competition to attract and build short-sea business" - and his response was " Generally speaking, the winning ports are those which recognise the business potential of short-sea, and then take the initiative without waiting for government action (such as Motorways of the Sea funding), by engaging in direct partnership with shipping lines and ports at the other end of a short-sea connection". A more sombre warning came from PNO Consultants when they opined that they expected the larger ports to lose out on short-sea shipping, *except for handling feeder services which still have to transfer from deep-sea vessels..*

Expansion of the short sea trade in the context of Southampton will only come about if the Port and its infrastructure can develop. Undoubtedly, this in turn will raise the matter of Dibden Bay and the idea will again meet fierce opposition. If however it can be demonstrated that the advantages to the local and national economy will be substantial and can be achieved without a significant increase of traffic on local roads. Provided that the supporting infrastructure can be built sympathetically to local demands, it is possible that the development of the Port of Southampton can proceed in order to meet the challenges of the future.

**The Cachalots**

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