

EFFECTS OF INCREASED SHORT SEA SHIPPING

For the second Evening Seminar from **London Branch** last year, an audience of about 50 people, among them many branch members, assembled in HQS Wellington on 2nd November. Commodore David Squire, editor of Alert, chaired a panel of industry speakers, to study both progress towards and the likely effects of, increased short sea shipping.

The panel comprised Mike Elsom, director of Sea & Water, an organisation dedicated to promoting water transport as an alternative to road, David Cross, of CMA-CGM, the French container line that has recently entered the short sea arena, Chris McQueen, Deputy VTS Manager at the Port of London and Captain David Cornelius, a serving Master with F. T. Everards.

Mike Elsom set the scene with many an interesting statistic. The overwhelming majority (over 80%) of freight moved within the UK, travels by road, this includes oil and aggregates. This is hardly news, but what may be, is that at while 4% is moved by rail, 7% is already moved by water, making our industry of great interest to those concerned about the environment, congestion or both. Mike highlighted the real cost of the competing methods, in terms of pollution, climate change, noise and accidents; the scores came in at road €24 per 1000tonne km, rail €12 and water €5.

Sometimes a short sea journey is an obvious solution that stares up from the map; for instance the 35-mile voyage from Campbeltown on the Mull of Kintyre, to Ayr, replacing a tortuous 350-mile lorry trip. Another example is the hardware chain, B&Q. They found imports adversely affected by congestion in the south east of England. So they moved their hub from UK southeast ports to Rotterdam, and then used feeder services into Immingham - much nearer their national distribution centre. These routes form part of what has been called our 'coastal ring road', offering a clean, reliable and often, with the right policy direction, cheaper alternative to Europe's congested roads. Clearly part of the solution to Europe's transport problems could be maritime.

So how will the industry rise to this challenge, especially dealing with extra coastal traffic? Chris McQueen stepped up to provide a snapshot of the modern world of VTS. Not surprising perhaps, was the extent to which AIS and ECDIS now play a major role, allowing real time situational awareness and providing comprehensive vessel data to VTS operators - provided of course, that vessels update their AIS correctly and indeed have operational equipment. Tracking is greatly improved, but radar is still a crucial tool of VTS in the estuary.

Coverage up river is being greatly enhanced by the 'Thames Transponder'. This is an AIS transponder aimed at smaller craft, including tugs, Class IV, V & VI passenger vessels and others not normally fitted with AIS. In addition to the transponder, a visual presentation is displayed, often by a laptop in the wheelhouse, allowing all vessels a clear picture of the river and traffic around the next bend or past the next bridge. There is a requirement to input 'persons on board' details and all the data is read by VTS, as well as other craft. The Thames Transponder has been successfully trialled and following public consultation, a government decision and the passing of a

new by-law, is planned to extend the VTS picture from Greenwich, all the way up to the limit of the tidal river at Teddington.

Looking to the future, London can expect an increase of 5000 movements a year by 2018, if the London Gateway project goes ahead as planned. Additional tonnage will be a mixture, with a significant increase in short sea feeder traffic generated by the new terminal, jostling with larger tonnage, including tankers heading to Coryton and more LNG vessels, for the Medway, as well as London. Clearly the new VTS infrastructure will have its work cut out, with perhaps closer control, or 'liaison' between pilots, Masters and VTS, to make the best use of available slots.

David Cross, as a container operator, shared Mike Elsom's view that the short sea sector is expanding, alongside an even more rapid increase in deep-sea activity. There are still inefficiencies however, or untapped potential to take a more optimistic approach! For instance, for every five laden containers shipped into UK, almost two depart empty. Productivity of UK ports still lags behind some of our continental neighbours by up to eight or nine containers an hour. Port capacity in the UK is also lacking, although this is under review with potential projects in hand on the Thames, lower Clyde and Liverpool. Beyond ports, infrastructure shortfalls include parts of our 19th Century rail network, such as the tunnel just outside Southampton that does not allow the passage of 9'6" containers – forcing them onto the south's over crowded roads. There is also a lingering unitisation discrepancy between the short and deep sea sectors, with 20 and 40 ft units being replaced by 30 and 45 ft boxes on the coast.

David encouraged operators to listen to their customers, particularly those with congestion problems in southern England. Here short sea shipping has been able to come up with solutions using regional ports, as seen in Mike's example of B & Q and Immingham. For their part, CMA-CGM operate liner feeder services in the North Sea and Irish Sea, connecting British, Irish and continental ports.

Finally David Cornelius, fresh from the 'coastal ring road', shifted the focus not only to that of a Mariner, but away from boxes and towards liquids as cargo. David observed how things have changed over Everards' history, now with fewer ships than years past, but those they have, are rather more sophisticated. Some of the problems faced by the modern Master, may be familiar to his forebears however, such as delays waiting for tide, boatmen or pilots and arriving to find another vessel still on the berth. Although modern vessels discharge significant cargoes in just a few hours, vessels stack-up at the first sign of a delay that once would have been routine. It would seem that both terminals and ship operators plan schedules with ever-tighter margins, both of time and navigational safety (Under keel clearance down to 10% of ships draught in many places). David said that at present he loses a couple of cargoes a month due to delays - the outlook is unlikely to be an improvement. Another development at a few ports has been expanding port limits, taking in surrounding sheltered anchorages. Vessels seeking shelter are then forced further out to sea, their Masters facing a choice between stretching watch-keepers hours and incurring pilotage fees for a once free coastal anchorage.

AIS was a hot topic for David's fellow Master at our ISPS Seminar in the summer and so it proved again. For David, the problem was less the security implications of having to broadcast all this information, than the duplication of effort involved in

passing data to departure port, VTS, coastal state or states, the ship operator, the next port and the one after that. All this on just slightly differing forms, to be faxed here or e-mailed there, 12 hours in advance here, 48 over there and all the while a lot of it is being broadcast on AIS and appearing on the internet! While David was aware that AIS information was available to subscribers of certain web sites, it certainly didn't seem to him that many of the interested parties in the short sea trade were using it. He suggested easier access for all involved to AIS data would help smooth out the peaks and troughs at port facilities, allow better planning and ease the burden on Masters. Those re-calling our ISPS Seminar in June will ponder the security implications of this – obviously precautions would be required to protect this data, without impeding the access of those who legitimately require it.

Another familiar theme to come from David Cornelius was manning. Indeed this topic almost dominated the subsequent open-floor part of the debate. David mentioned Pilotage Exemption Certificates as one of his concerns; it seems that standards are far from uniform, with the emphasis tending to be on local knowledge, possibly at the expense of ship handling experience and ability.

The challenge of recruiting, training and retaining crews was certainly not lost on the audience with many questions and comments in this area, leading to a discussion on recruiting cadets in the current climate, training, manning levels and related fatigue. Apparently it is occurring to some operators, that present demands on crews actually warrant an increase in manning levels. More than one participant spoke of the requirement to keep enough UK crews to allow throughput into the industry ashore, for pilotage and VTS etc. Chris McQueen was able to describe the new training regime that has enabled VTS operators to be recruited from the street and trained to VTSO in about six months and on to Supervisor in a further three years. IALA V103 VTS course models are used and entrants qualify as VTSO, with a local area endorsement, followed in due course by the Supervisor's qualification and further local area endorsement; all recorded in an operator's MCA VTS Certification Log. Other shore disciplines that traditionally employ the skills of ex-mariners, may become tempted to look carefully at this scheme.

The political will behind European initiatives was also discussed, with speculation as to whether governments were willing to 'level the playing field' between road and sea transport, in order to reap the environmental and economic benefits. The potential impact on the Ro-Ro sector, of new rules covering driver's hours was pointed out, with longer sea voyages providing opportunity for drivers to rest.

The debate, which could have gone on into the night, ran out of time, so David Squire brought matters to a conclusion, with most feeling a useful exchange of views and experiences had been accomplished. Deliberations continued for a while longer however, in HQS Wellington's Wardroom Bar.