

PREFACE

In recognition of the continuing importance of the U.S. Marine Transportation System (MTS), the U.S. Congress, on November 13, 1998, directed in Section 308 of the Coast Guard Authorization Act of 1998, that:

“The Secretary of Transportation, through the Coast Guard and the Maritime Administration, shall, in consultation with the National Ocean Service of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Corps of Engineers, and other interested Federal agencies and departments, establish a task force to assess the adequacy of the Nation’s marine transportation system (including ports, waterways, harbor approach channels, and their intermodal connections) to operate in a safe, efficient, secure, and environmentally sound manner.”

The Task Force was to consider the capability of the MTS, the adequacy of the depth of channels and harbors, and the cost to the Federal government of accommodating projected increases in foreign and domestic traffic over the next 20 years. Evaluations of the Nation’s capability to dispose of dredged materials and the future of the navigational aid system were additional components of this effort.

Congress required the Secretary to report the results of the Task Force’s assessment. This report summarizes the results of the assessment and constitutes the response to Congress.

Development of the Report

This report reflects a highly collaborative effort among public sector agencies, private sector organizations, and other stakeholders in the MTS. The process began with seven *regional listening sessions* in spring 1998, hosted by the U.S. Coast Guard, the Maritime Administration, and 12 other Federal agencies. The purpose of these sessions was to learn what users, stakeholders, and the public perceived to be the current state of the MTS and its future needs.

The input received at the regional listening sessions became the agenda for *The National Conference on the Marine Transportation System* hosted by the Secretary of Transportation in November 1998. Executives from industry, labor, and government participated in this conference. Through breakout groups and plenary sessions, the participants addressed two overarching issues — the development of a shared national vision for the MTS and public and private coordination of MTS activities. Participants also addressed MTS issues affecting safety, competitiveness, infrastructure, security, and the environment.

After the National Conference, the Secretary established the Congressionally mandated MTS Task Force. The Task Force included MTS users and service providers, such as Federal agencies and departments, ports, commercial carriers, shippers, labor, recreational boaters, fishermen, environmental organizations, and other MTS stakeholders. A listing of Task Force members and organizations involved in the assessment of the MTS and the development of this Report is included at the end of this document.