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U.S. Ranks Second in World Maritime Container Traffic, According to New BTS Report

The United States ranks second in world maritime container traffic with one in nine maritime containers in the world either bound for or coming from the United States, according to "America's Container Ports: Delivering the Goods," a new report from the Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS).

BTS, a part of the U.S. Department of Transportation's Research and Innovative Technology Administration, reported that U.S.-container trade in 2005 and 2006 was more than double the trade of a decade earlier. An estimated 46.3 million 20-foot equivalent units (TEU's – the standard measure for counting containers of various sizes) passed through U.S. ports in 2006, up from 22.6 million in 1996. Two-thirds of the containers are imported into the United States.

During that time, world container trade more than tripled, resulting in a decline in the U.S. share of world container trade from 16 per cent to 11 per cent. China has exceeded the U.S. share of world container trade since 1998.

Other findings of the BTS report:

- Container traffic in the United States is becoming more concentrated as larger, faster and more specialized vessels call at the limited number of ports capable of handling them. The top 10 U.S. container ports accounted for 85 percent of U.S. containerized traffic in 2005, measured in TEUs, up from 78 percent in 1995.
- Over half, nearly 55 percent, of U.S. containerized merchandise trade in terms of TEUs passed through west coast ports in 2005, up from 42 percent in 1980.
- U.S. maritime ports are handling larger container vessels, measured by the average vessel size per call. The average size per call of container vessels calling at U.S. ports was nearly 45,000 deadweight tons (dwt) in 2005, up from 38,000 dwt in 2000.
- Overall, nearly 26 million containers of various sizes entered the United States by all modes of transportation in 2005, up 37 percent from 19 million in 2000. Of those containers, more than 15 million entered the nation by truck and rail from Canada and Mexico in 2005 while the remaining 11 million were oceanborne.

"America's Container Ports: Delivering the Goods," is BTS' first stand-alone container report. The report is available at http://www.bts.gov/publications/americas_container_ports/

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