



Contact:
NOAA – Teri Frady, (774) 263-8711
NOAA – Anne Smrcina, (781) 545-8026
NOAA-USCG – Ben Benson (617) 223-8515

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Department of
Homeland Security*



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**NOAA & COAST GUARD HELP SHIFT BOSTON SHIP TRAFFIC LANE
TO REDUCE RISK OF COLLISIONS WITH WHALES**

Years of effort by NOAA and the U.S. Coast Guard will pay off this weekend when, for the first time in the United States, ship traffic lanes will be shifted to reduce the risk of collisions between large ships and whales.

Beginning July 1, ships transiting in and out of Boston Harbor in shipping lanes will travel a different path. The lanes have been rotated slightly to the northeast and narrowed to avoid waters where there are high concentrations of whales.

The lane shift adds 3.75 nautical miles to the overall distance and 10 to 22 minutes to each one-way trip. It also improves safety by moving large ship traffic further away from areas frequently transited by smaller fishing boats, and by reducing chances of damage to large ships owing to collisions with whales or with other ships while attempting to avoid whales.

“This is a large part of NOAA’s effort to work with its partners and industry to improve the prospects for endangered North Atlantic right whales. The population is vulnerable since they are particularly susceptible to collisions with ships,” said retired Navy Vice Adm. Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Ph.D, NOAA administrator and undersecretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere. “We have extensively studied the problem and whale behavior and have devised this measure as a much safer environment for ships and the whales while at the same time being the least disruptive to the economy.”

“This change highlights how the Coast Guard protects ‘people from the sea and the sea from people.’ Whale collisions with ships pose a significant hazard that we needed to better control,” said Coast Guard Capt. Liam Slein, First Coast Guard District Chief of Prevention. “We expect this small change will protect numerous whales while also reducing the damage and hazards such collisions cause.”

"I am pleased to see the cooperative efforts of NOAA and the United States Coast Guard result in a plan that will reduce the risk of collisions between large ships and whales in the shipping lanes in and out of Boston harbor," said Senator Kerry. "This is a great example of protecting the environment while maintaining an economically vital industry."

U.S. Senator Judd Gregg (R-NH) stated, “The relocation of the shipping lanes is the culmination of years of research and negotiation. I commend the USCG and NOAA for their hard work. I am hopeful that this action, in concert with our other efforts, will result in a more stable and healthy whale population, and will help prevent the unnecessary ship strike deaths of the very endangered right whales.”

Congressman Stephen F. Lynch, who represents the Port of Boston, said, "It is an extraordinary challenge to balance the commercial needs of the Port of Boston with the importance of protecting marine life and the environment, and the Coast Guard and NOAA are doing a remarkable job. It is critical that we maintain a viable working port, while also preserving the natural habitats and sea lanes used by whales--notably, the Northern right whale. We will continue to monitor the situation going forward to ensure that our policies move us closer to both of those goals."

NOAA researchers calculated the spatial density of whales in the NOAA Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary to determine if collision risks in the area could be reduced by moving the shipping lanes. The Coast Guard assessed safety and navigational effects of the shift on commercial ship traffic. Data on whale presence used in the analysis was collected over a 25-year period, and provided by the Provincetown Center for Coastal Studies, the Whale Center of New England, as well as sightings data collected by a host of other New England researchers and curated by the University of Rhode Island in the North Atlantic Right Whale Sighting Database.

The International Maritime Organization approved the U.S. proposed lane revision last December. Since that time, NOAA navigational charts have been updated with the revision. The IMO is a specialized agency of the United Nations that addresses issues pertaining to international shipping traffic, and it originally established the Boston Harbor shipping lanes in 1973.

Approximately 3,500 ship transits occur within the Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary every year, with the vast majority using the lanes. The shift rotated the east-west leg of the lanes by 12 degrees to the north, and lengthened the north-south lane to account for this adjustment. The lanes themselves were narrowed by one-half mile, to a width of 1.5 miles each. The width of the buffer between outgoing and incoming traffic was not affected.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, is celebrating 200 years of science and service to the nation. From the establishment of the Survey of the Coast in 1807 by Thomas Jefferson to the formation of the Weather Bureau and the Commission of Fish and Fisheries in the 1870s, much of America's scientific heritage is rooted in NOAA.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and information service delivery for transportation, and by providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners, more than 60 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

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EDITORS: NOAA and Coast Guard personnel are available for on-camera interviews. To schedule, contact Lt. Cmdr. Ben Benson, USCG, at (617)223-8515.