

Commercial Sealift

ISSUE: The Maritime Administration administers two linked commercial sealift programs that help the Department ensure that sufficient sealift capacity is available to meet the Nation's national security requirements in the most efficient and effective manner possible. These two programs are the Maritime Security Program (MSP) and Voluntary Intermodal Sealift Agreement (VISA) program.

ACTION REQUIRED: None – For Information Only

BACKGROUND:

- The Maritime Security Program (MSP) is authorized from FY2006 through FY 2015. The MSP ensures that the United States will have U.S.-flag commercial vessels along with their intermodal assets available to support Department of Defense (DOD) operations.
- The MSP fleet was established by the Secretary of Transportation in consultation with the Secretary of Defense and requires DOD approval for activation in an emergency under DOD-DOT Emergency Preparedness Agreements.
- MSP vessels are required to operate in the foreign commerce of the United States.
- MSP Funding supports up to 60 U.S.-flag vessels; \$174 million annually for FYs 2009, 2010, and 2011; and \$186 million annually for FYs 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015.
- The MSP fleet is currently fully subscribed with 38 containerships, 17 roll-on/roll-off vessels, 2 heavy lift breakbulk ships, and 3 tankers. The VISA fleet currently commits capacity of over 154,000 twenty foot equivalent units (TEUs) and 2.8 million square feet to meet DOD requirements. The MSP fleet accounts for approximately 115,000 TEUs and 2.6 million square feet of the VISA capacity commitment.
- During 2008, seven more modern and efficient MSP replacement vessels were enrolled in the program.
- MSP ship crews constitute over 2,400 mariner positions, and are a major crewing source for the government-owned 'surge' sealift fleet.
- There are currently 127 ships (including the 60 MSP ships) in the VISA fleet. VISA vessels receive priority consideration in the award of DOD's peacetime contracts.

Due to the importance of these programs, the Department has two measures that are used to demonstrate the ability of DOT to provide strategic mobility for the DOD in times of emergency. The first measure deals with the percentage of DOD-required shipping capacity complete with crews available within mobilization timelines. The second measure includes the U.S. commercial ports that are designated as strategic ports.

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