

Prepared Remarks
Secretary LaHood
Amer. Association of Port Authorities
March 24, 2009

Thank you, Geraldine Knatz.

Thank you, Kurt Nagle for your leadership on behalf of the port community.

And Mr. Rodney Slater: Thank you for your outstanding years of service at the Department of Transportation.

I'm sure you found, as I have, that the career staff at the DOT are some of the smartest, hardest working people in the federal government. It's a privilege to work with them.

On behalf of President Obama, I am delighted to be here today to discuss the vital importance of commercial seaports to our nation's transportation infrastructure – and our plans for strengthening these assets.

In spite of the economic downturn, we project that freight flowing through our port system will increase by more than 50 percent by 2020. And the volume of international container traffic will more than double.

Clearly, our seaports facilitate commerce and trade on a global scale. They enable us to compete effectively.

What's more, maritime transportation is good for the environment -- generating lower emissions than some surface modes, and offsetting rail and truck congestion.

It's in our national interest to keep all our ports – large and small – in good repair and fully modernized.

One of my key messages to you today, is to let you know that my Department is your partner in this effort.

I strongly believe that our port system needs to be included in our intermodal planning process. Ports, freight rail, and trucking are bound together logistically and economically. We need to view them holistically.

Now for some good news.

As you know, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act is intended, in part, to modernize our nation's transportation infrastructure.

The Recovery Act includes 100 million dollars for the Maritime Administration's Small Shipyard Grant Program -- a tenfold increase over last year's funding level.

These grants may be used to make capital improvements to foster efficiency, competitive operations, ship construction and repair, and technical training.

In addition, the port community has the opportunity to compete for an unprecedented 1.5 billion-dollar discretionary grant program.

I've heard directly from many of you about this, and I know there are many ready-to-go capital projects out there.

I'm confident you will ultimately receive a fair portion of these funds for port, intermodal, and freight efficiency projects. The RFP will be out soon.

The Recovery Act also offers port operators an opportunity to share in federal highway funds that have already been allocated to states and territories.

The Port of Portland, Oregon, for example, has begun using these funds to rehabilitate their port facilities.

Work with your state DOT, the Federal Highway Administration, and MARAD to explore this option for your port.

In addition to these opportunities, MARAD has innovative projects underway to modernize and expand the nation's port capacity.

In particular, we are currently a “one-stop shop” for 4 major port expansion projects in Anchorage, Hawaii, Philadelphia, and Guam.

Through public-private partnerships that combine federal, state, and local resources, we’re helping to expedite port development projects in these locations ahead of schedule and under budget.

These efforts not only put people to work. They also increase freight flow, meet just-in-time delivery requirements, and expand economic activity.

We are committed – with Congress’ help – to expanding this program, which has generated a great deal of interest in the port community.

We are also committed to doing more with America’s Marine Highway -- a 25,000-mile expanse of coastal, inland, and intra-coastal waterways that move freight.

This network is currently under-utilized.

Our new Marine Highway Program promises to help accelerate and expand the use of this valuable national network, so we can reduce the congestion outside your gates -- and transport even more freight and passengers in a greener, more efficient manner.

This is an important part of our effort to maximize the effectiveness and strategic value of all our transportation assets, viewed as a complete system.

President Obama has clearly indicated that he believes our nation needs a robust, multi-modal transportation infrastructure that can meet the demands of the 21st century.

We will provide seaports with the resources and support they need to connect efficiently with other modes – and help the United States succeed in a fiercely competitive global economy.

Thank you.