



Statement of

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Chairperson
Committee on Strategic Planning
Pacific Marine Towing Industry Partners (PMTIP)
A Washington State Skill Panel**

**Before the
Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
United States House of Representatives**

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Good morning Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee. On behalf of the Washington State skill panel I want to thank you for inviting us to speak about how we are currently dealing with the mariner shortage crisis in our industry with regards to training, recruitment and retention. We are proud of our achievements and attribute our success to a highly organized and coordinated nonpartisan multifaceted collaboration of industry and non-industry members. This was made possible through funding received from the Washington State Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board.

My name is Captain Jeff Slesinger. As the Chairperson for the Committee on Strategic Planning, I have been elected by our skill panel, Pacific Marine Towing Industry Partners (PMTIP), to speak with you today. In addition to my responsibilities with the skill panel, I am also employed as a working Captain and full time Director of Safety and Training for Western Towboat Company, a family owned tug and barge company that has served the Pacific Northwest for over 50 years.

In September of 2005, our skill panel was formed to serve the marine towing industry by harnessing the expertise of leaders from business (50%), education (18%), labor (11%), and the local workforce and economic development (21%). Over thirty (30) participants make up our membership today.

Over the last two (2) years, our skill panel has developed two highly effective and efficient partnership model approaches designed to address training, recruitment and retention issues that face our industry. These best practice models have a record of demonstrated success. We are here to expand our partnership by requesting that federal resources be devoted to both continue and enhance this promising approach pioneered by our regional skill panel.

The first successful partnership model is the skill panel itself. The mission of our skill panel is to work together to ensure competent and qualified mariners in the pacific marine towing industry by:

- Forming a sustainable partnership;
- Working together; and,
- Sharing strategies to attract, train and retain personnel needed to fill the high-skill, high wage jobs immediately available within our industry.

Our objectives as a skill panel are aligned with the Washington State Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board to provide:

- Workers with better skills, jobs, and career opportunities;
- Employers with more efficiency, less turnover, and higher profits;
- Common skill standards that meet employer needs;

“Working Together to Ensure Competent & Qualified Mariners in the Pacific Marine Towing Industry”

- Educational programs that address key economic clusters and offer on-the-job learning strategies;
- Local and state information about employers' skill needs;
- Policy recommendations based on real-time information; and
- Ongoing links between employers and the public infrastructure that prepares their workforce, to ensure the quality and adequacy of a skilled pipeline.¹

Together, we have identified major factors that create a demand for qualified mariners within our industry:

1. Growth within the industry. Shipyards are full throughout the world constructing Offshore Supply Vessels (OSVs), Crewboats, Anchor Handling Boats, Tugboats and Barges to keep up with business expansion and replace older vessels.
2. Aging Workforce. The average age of officers working in the workboat industry is approaching sixty (60) years old. More and more of the baby boomers within the industry are retiring and leaving the industry.
3. New Regulatory Training Requirements. New regulations set in place by the International Community and the United States Coast Guard have placed a tremendous amount of new training requirements on the industry. These new training requirements have severely restricted the ability of the incumbent worker to progress within their company². This “hawsepipe” career path, a person entering the industry on deck and working his or her way up to the wheelhouse, was the predominant career path in the towing industry.
4. Generational Factors. We are experiencing a shortage of young people interested in the marine towing industry and have yet to find a reliable means of connecting to the next generation of tugboat personnel.
5. Confusing or Incomplete Career Path. Those individuals that are interested in joining the industry do not have a clear coordinated career path to follow that lead to seagoing positions. Presently, we don’t have a very good answer to the man or woman who is on the dock or riverbank and asks “How can I get a job on one of those tugs? What kind of training do I need and where can I get it?”

Some of the solutions we came up with as a skill panel include:

- Funding research through the University of Washington to collect and establish quantifiable data identifying current workforce trends and issues.

¹ <http://www.wtb.wa.gov>

² *Impact Study of STCW 1995 Amendments and 2001 USCG Towing Licensing Regulations on the US Pacific Northwest Marine Towing Industry Workforce*, Catherine Claiborne Research Assistant UW ADVANCE Center for Workforce Development University of Washington, 2006.

- Coordinating efforts with our national trade association, American Waterways Operators (AWO), to assist us, along with Admiral Salerno from the USCG to give some relief to the industry, by allowing “200 ton license” to “towing license” as an efficient and reasonable way to fill some entry level licensed positions.
- Continuing the development of objective simulation assessments for AB-Mate and Mate to Master positions.
- Continuing outreach efforts to partner with other organizations and companies to help create a clearer and more efficient pathway for potential employees to join the marine industry workforce³.
- Researching the feasibility of recruitment options, by directing our efforts towards USCG military personnel, who do not have the TWIC issue⁴.
- Developing business solutions by coordinating with partner company members, for example: cost reduction technologies to address physical fitness standards.⁵
- Developing a recruitment and retention portal resource website: www.workontugs.com to inform the public, especially our youth about the marine towing industry.
- Creating a regional Crew Endurance Plan and Crew Endurance Management System (CEMS)⁶ with training materials (now being reviewed by the USCG) that will provide industry regulatory oversight relief and enhance the health and safety of the crew.
- Garnering legislative champions for the marine towing industry by demonstrating that it is a safe, environmentally responsible and gainful employment industry.
- Continuing with outreach and marketing programs to overcome the difficulty of hiring individuals from the maritime academies.⁷
- Supporting and assisting innovative solutions such as the Pacific Maritime Institute’s (PMI) Apprenticeship 2-Year Mate 500-1600 Tons Program to fast track new recruits from unlicensed to licensed positions.^{8 9}

³ Plenty of people who want to become mariners but there are barriers to career pathways. Source: PMI’s feedback on interested potential candidates for their Apprenticeship 2-Year Mate Program.

⁴ Increased federal regulations (USCG) hindering recruitment efforts, for example: TWIC (Transportation Worker Identification Card), which is tied into homeland security, is a 60 day application process, similar to the passport.

⁵ Other obstacles furthering the delay process for potential employees in the maritime industry will be one licensing center, located in West Virginia, versus regional licensing centers around the country to process requests and new proposed physical standards. Source: Industry skill panel members voicing concerns over the proposed one licensing center.

⁶ <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/gm/cems>

⁷ *Impact Study of STCW 1995 Amendments and 2001 USCG Towing Licensing Regulations on the US Pacific Northwest Marine Towing Industry Workforce.*

⁸ Large demographics of qualified licensed mariners are retiring in combination with a decline of 500 and 1600 Gross Registered Ton (GRT) licensed officers for towing vessels (operating on Near Coastal / Ocean Waterways) by approximately 95% over the last five years. Source: United States Coast Guard (USCG) Licensing Database.

- Developing a business vision and plan to ensure stability and long term sustainability of our skill panel that effectively and efficiently address regional and national marine towing industry related issues.

When searching for solutions, we identified many ongoing regional training programs that have skill panel representation. Some of these programs include:

- The Youth Maritime Training Association (YMTA) – Career and technical education programs in Washington State high schools <http://www.ymta.net>
- The Workboat Academy – “Finding, Training and delivering Qualified and Competent Mariners to the Workboat Industry” <http://www.workboatacademy.com>
- The Seattle Maritime Academy – A division of Seattle Central Community College offering on-board training and education (SCCC) <http://seattlecentral.edu/maritime/institution.php>
- Alaskan Native Employment Initiative - Award-winning training and employment project in Alaska to hire youth for careers aboard U.S.-flag commercial vessels
- Transportation Institute, Pacific Coast Operations – “Transitioning Foster Youth into Maritime Careers” <http://www.trans-inst.org>

The second successful partnership model is a vocational apprenticeship program approach. The biggest issue we face as an industry is supporting our existing and future workforce needs based on our current work, regulatory and socioeconomic environment.

Prior to the adoption of the International Maritime Organizations (IMO) Standards of Training, Certification and Watchstanding (STCW), there were approximately three weeks of required training from Ordinary Seaman to Captain. Under the new regulatory environment, that same individual is faced with approximately twenty three (23) weeks of classroom instruction to achieve the same USCG Certification.

The typical mariner works six (6) to seven (7) months per year away from their family. For many new and incumbent mariners it is a hardship and financial burden to take the necessary time off to meet these new training requirements and support their family.

⁹ Currently a typical AB in the United States has to: pay out-of-pocket a total cost of \$16,000 for training to become an Officer-In-Charge; attend one of three approved schools spread throughout the country in Florida, Ohio, and Washington states; and, has only sixteen weeks of time off per year to complete twenty weeks of training. Source: *Impact Study of STCW 1995 Amendments and 2001 USCG Towing Licensing Regulations on the US Pacific Northwest Marine Towing Industry Workforce*, Catherine Claiborne Research Assistant UW ADVANCE Center for Workforce Development University of Washington, 2006.

In order to provide opportunities and facilitate entry and advancement at all levels within the maritime industry, we need to work together to establish clear career pathways for individuals that are new to the industry as well as incumbents looking for a method of advancement.

Currently, the Maritime Academies provide a pathway to Third Mate Unlimited and Third Assistant Engineer that has been proven to be very popular. The academies offer an excellent career path to individuals seeking a four (4) year college degree along with their maritime training. However, many mariners seek opportunities in the towing industry, in part, because a college degree is not required for career advancement. An Academy approach may not be appropriate for these individuals. Another, complementary career path is needed for these prospective mariners.

As an alternative, a new vocational program was developed for the marine towing industry by the Maritime Institute of Technology and Graduate Studies / Pacific Maritime Institute (MITAGS/PMI) with support from our skill panel. This apprenticeship style approach has been adopted by fourteen (14) towboat and OSV companies, attracting hundreds of individuals to the maritime industry. This program provides a defined career pathway to the level of Mate 1600 Tons Near Coastal / Ocean.

The Seafarers International Union's (SIU) Paul Hall Center for Maritime Training and Education also offers successful apprenticeship Deck, Steward and Engine Department programs.

We have identified several key components of a successful apprenticeship model:

1. First, there is an equal balance between learning on-the-job and in the classroom.
2. Second, there is a partnership between industry and maritime training institutions.
3. Third, and this is key, there is a recognized, common performance standard that is accepted by all the key parties:
 - a. the USCG is the certifying organization that establishes the standard; and,
 - b. the industry in partnership with the marine training institute establishes acceptable performance measures required to meet that standard.
4. Fourth, there are effective retention tools built in, including financial incentives for 3- 5 years of good, competent, post program employment.
5. Finally, there is a 3:1 reduction of sea time. At the end of the process, we have an individual who is confident in their skill set because they have already been put to work in an on-the-job environment; this "apprentice" truly knows the requirements of their job.

The common denominator for success in all of the vocational apprenticeship training models, we found is company participation. In the successful models, companies agree to take cadets (student observers) aboard and by doing so have provided a very effective and efficient pathway for individuals seeking a position onboard boats.

At the end of the apprenticeship program: the individual is confident in their skill set because they have already been put to work in an on-the-job environment; the USCG (certifying body) is confident that the mariner has met not just the certifying standard but the intent of that standard; the companies are confident that their employee has been trained to meet the skills set for the job they are hired to perform; and, the local communities have gained a productive citizen who is contributing to the economy with their family wage job and providing a critical link to our transportation infrastructure.

The strong participation within our Washington State skill panel places us in a unique position to help build a national model between existing training organizations that will allow current and future mariners the ability to matriculate academic competencies and credentials seamlessly between billeted positions.

With your help, we can realize our future goal to build a nonpartisan *Marine Towing Technology & Career Center* to meet the needs of these individuals wanting to embark on careers in the towing industry, both Ocean/Near Coastal and Inland, and for the companies that hire these individuals by:

1. Using and expanding the Apprenticeship Model based on current successes and feedback loops.
2. Working with established Department of Labor Apprenticeship Models within the industry.¹⁰
3. Working with established maritime schools, vocational training centers, industry and subject matter experts to develop standards of apprenticeship for all deck, engine and steward positions aboard a vessel.
4. Identifying and coordinating resources to streamline processes.
5. Providing a passport-able and seamless process for individuals wanting a career in the maritime industry.
6. Providing organized outreach efforts and resources to assist companies in recruitment efforts.
7. Promoting the use of distance learning, enabling students to take courses through the use of media technology such as videos, teleconferencing computers, and the Internet.
8. Developing training programs conducted jointly with the Department of Defense to meet the needs of Maritime defense contractors and the Military Sealift Command.
9. Providing services to address Maritime recruitment and training of youth residing in targeted high poverty areas within empowerment zones and enterprise communities.

¹⁰ Currently the occupations which are apprenticeable are Able Seaman and Officer in Charge of a Navigational Watch.

10. Providing retention tools to maritime companies.
11. Developing and modularizing curriculum, learning guides, assessments and on-board training record books to meet established Apprenticeship Standards at all billeted levels.
12. Developing a secured web-based server for employees, companies and agencies to access training and competency records for an individual.
13. Building a “brick and mortar” infrastructure and framework to house this concept approach.
14. Providing curriculum, guidance and articulation agreements to any and all qualified educational centers that are willing to meet the standards.
15. Providing a sustainable funding source through grant mechanisms, scholarships, private and public contributions and loan programs to provide a career path.

By working together toward common objectives, we can continue to identify current and future workforce needs, and design creative and innovative solutions through education and training opportunities to ensure a “rising tide floats all boats”. We will provide the highest number of good jobs that pay wages that can support a family, offer benefits, such as healthcare, and provide opportunities for advancement.

Our partnership will continue to:

- Provide regional innovative solutions with national application to close skill gaps.
- Ensure competent and qualified mariners in the marine towing industry.
- Continue outreach efforts to collaborate with other skill panels in the same industry.
- Bring together partners to support entire career pathways.
- Focus on apprenticeship programs, financial assistance for incumbent workers, and high wage earnings for minorities and/or individuals who do not have postsecondary educations.
- Address workforce challenges by strategically aligning ourselves with local, state and federal workforce and economic development organizations to reach all individuals who wish to pursue a career in the marine towing industry and assist in educational efforts as well as creating a clear path for accomplishment.
- Develop special training projects that promote and enhance a safety culture within our industry and to efficiently and effectively satisfy regulatory requirements.
- Promote the benefits of our industry to garner public support to ensure a strong labor force of competent and qualified mariners.¹¹

¹¹ The marine towing industry is gainful employment, providing good paying jobs to people without a college education. The average starting pay for an unlicensed individual is \$15.00 an hour; \$27.50 an hour for licensed. Source: *Impact Study of STCW 1995 Amendments and 2001 USCG Towing Licensing Regulations on the US Pacific Northwest Marine Towing Industry Workforce*.

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- Create, support and expand innovative programs like the PMI Apprenticeship Mate program to all marine towing positions, which will increase our labor pool, therefore increasing revenue generated locally.
 - Coordinate regional training resources and funding to address the current workforce's immediate and high priority training needs.
 - Coordinate to develop matriculation through a regional curriculum approach offered in the High Schools, Apprenticeships, Internships and Job Corps in our region.
 - Provide feedback loops for continual improvement.
 - Provide an infrastructure to operate and sustain our efforts.
 - Seek funding sources.

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, we very much appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today. Our skill panel stands ready to work with this committee to:

- Ensure clear pathways are created for qualified individuals seeking a career in the maritime industry;
- Man our boats competently and safely;
- Provide a critical segment of our transportation network;
- Insure the viability of essential commerce; and,
- Provide high-skill, high wage jobs that will support families and the economy of our local communities.

Thank you.