



**TESTIMONY OF
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DEPUTY COMMANDANT FOR OPERATIONS**

ON

**REVIEWING AND EXAMINING
THE FRANCIS SCOTT KEY BRIDGE FEDERAL RESPONSE**

**BEFORE THE
HOUSE TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE**

MAY 15, 2024

Good morning, Chairman Graves, Ranking Member Larsen, and distinguished members of the committee. I am grateful for the opportunity to testify before this committee regarding a unified response to the Motor Vessel (M/V) DALI's allision with the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore, Maryland. First and foremost, I offer my heartfelt condolences to the families and loved ones of the six individuals who lost their lives. The Coast Guard has strong ties throughout Maryland and the Baltimore community, and our sympathies are with all those impacted by this horrible incident.

The Coast Guard serves on the front lines for a nation whose economic prosperity and national security are inextricably linked to the Marine Transportation System (MTS) and its maritime interests. The Coast Guard assures the safety, security, and stewardship of the nation's MTS, an integrated network that consists of 95,000 miles of U.S. coastline, 25,000 miles of navigable channels, 50,000 aids to navigation, 1,400 intermodal connections, and 361 ports. This responsibility is paramount for the Service. The vast system of ports and waterways that make up the MTS support \$5.4 trillion of annual economic activity and account for employment of more than 30 million Americans. Your Coast Guard saves mariners in distress, enforces safety regulations, inspects vessels, maintains aids to navigation, and provides vessel traffic services to keep commerce flowing in a safe, secure, and efficient MTS.

To safeguard the nation's uninterrupted access to domestic and global supply chains from major MTS disruptions the Coast Guard organizes and leads unified responses under the National Response Framework (NRF). While the Coast Guard's broad authorities position the Service to coordinate activities aimed at restoring the flow of commerce, it is the strength of our partnerships that assures our mission success. Continuously training, exercising, and coordinating with federal, state, local, and industry partners are key Service priorities and set the stage for successful operations, like the complex and challenging response to the Francis Scott Key Bridge collapse.

INITIAL EVENTS AND COAST GUARD RESPONSE

On the morning of Tuesday, March 26, 2024, the M/V DALI, a Singapore-flagged container ship, was transiting the Patapsco River outbound from Seagirt Marine Terminal in Baltimore. At approximately 1:30 AM, the M/V DALI lost electrical power, propulsion, and steering, resulting in the vessel striking the Francis Scott Key Bridge, immediately collapsing three bridge span sections into the water. The central bridge span collapsed across the main navigation channel, blocking the channel to shipping and partially landing on the vessel's bow.

Due to the rapid notification of the ship's loss of power by the pilot onboard M/V DALI, the Maryland Transportation Authority (MDTA) quickly halted automobile traffic on the bridge immediately before the collision. Eight construction workers were on the bridge at the time; one was able to run off the bridge, one was rescued from the water, and the remainder were missing. Coast Guard Sector Maryland-National Capital Region (NCR) immediately responded with search and rescue (SAR) teams, which arrived on scene within minutes. Coast Guard SAR teams searched alongside our state and local partners for the remaining victims, using all available resources – including boats, cutters, and helicopters. The Coast Guard suspended SAR operations after more than 18 hours of searching when it was apparent that no missing workers survived the collapse, and operations transitioned to recovery of remains. The six deceased construction workers were eventually recovered from the wreckage during salvage operations.

While conducting SAR operations, the Coast Guard also closed the Port of Baltimore waterway, established a safety zone, and coordinated with the Federal Aviation Administration to implement area flight restrictions to ensure the safety of the general public around the wreck site. Responding agencies formed a UC and began a major operation to stabilize the site and evaluate risks to public health and the environment. The Coast Guard's proactive environmental response included deployment of 3,250 feet of containment boom around the M/V DALI.

As the initial response continued, Coast Guard surged deployable specialized teams – including a Salvage Engineering Response Team, Atlantic Strike Team, Incident Management Assistance Team, and a Public Information Assistance Team – to lead and support efforts to ensure vessel stability, incident site safety, and comprehensive damage evaluation. The Coast Guard continues to apply its range of capabilities, authorities, and resources to support the unified effort surging more than 200 personnel to the UC since the incident.

OVERVIEW OF UNIFIED COMMAND RESPONSIBILITIES

The UC leading the response leverages federal and state agencies' complementary jurisdictions, authorities and capabilities in a way that achieves unity of effort towards accomplishing common objectives. The UC is comprised of the Coast Guard, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Maryland State Police (MSP), MDTA, Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE), and Witt O'Brien's, which represents the owner and operating companies of the M/V DALI.

The UC was established in alignment with the NRF, National Incident Management System (NIMS) Incident Command System (ICS), as well as the National Oil and Hazardous Substances Pollution Contingency Plan (NCP). NIMS/ICS is utilized to provide a common method for developing and implementing tactical plans to efficiently and effectively manage the response to natural and man-made incidents.

The UC established a comprehensive response organization, and aligned objectives and actions around operational priorities, including:

- Ensuring safety of the public and first responders;
- Achieving accountability for missing persons;
- Protecting the environment;
- Safely restoring transportation infrastructure and commerce; and
- Supporting the investigations.

Additionally, the UC established a critical operational path to achieve five milestones:

- Milestone 1: Complete salvage assessment and engineering;
- Milestone 2: Restore navigation;
- Milestone 3: Remove the M/V DALI;
- Milestone 4: Clear remaining wreckage; and
- Milestone 5: Prevent and respond to pollution (continuous)

Consistent with the President's direction to re-open the Port of Baltimore as soon as possible, the UC worked aggressively towards safely and efficiently restoring maritime commerce to and from the Port of Baltimore to minimize economic and social impacts to the region and nation. Continuous coordination and communication amongst UC members, with elected leaders at the federal, state and local levels, and the general public was essential to meeting the UC's objectives safely and rapidly.

Leveraging its combination of authorities, assets, and response capabilities, the Coast Guard is leading operations to stabilize and refloat the M/V DALI while preventing threats to the environment under its Federal On-Scene Coordinator (FOSC) authority and impacts to the Port of Baltimore and MTS under its Captain of the Port (COTP) authority. USACE is leading operations to remove bridge wreckage from the federal channel by mobilizing resources, including the U.S. Navy Supervisor of Salvage (SUPSALV), through its responsibility to maintain federal channels for vessel navigation.

Partnership with State of Maryland leadership is vital to this response. MDTA has primary jurisdiction over the bridge and is overseeing bridge wreckage salvage and removal from the waterways outside of the federal channel. MSP is the lead authority for victim recovery and is working directly with victims' families. MDE continues to provide oversight to prevent environmental threats in coordination with the Coast Guard.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS TO DATE

The UC made significant progress toward meeting objectives through outstanding unity of effort, rapid mobilization of personnel and resources, and strong coordination and communication. The dedication, professionalism, and determination of responders resulted in major objectives being met ahead of schedule and with no injuries to personnel. Presently, more than 350 uniformed and civilian workers from 53 federal, state, and local agencies across the U.S. are deployed to Baltimore to support ongoing recovery and salvage efforts. In addition, 553 contract specialists are actively involved in various roles related to dive, crane, and vessel operations. More than 1,000 individuals contributed to the Francis Scott Key Bridge response mission thus far.

To address the estimated 50,000 tons of wreckage at the Francis Scott Key Bridge site, the UC assembled a substantial fleet of specialized vessels and equipment, including four Coast Guard cutters, more than 10 Coast Guard boats, 36 barges, 27 tugboats, 22 floating cranes, 10 excavators, one dredger, and one skimmer. Progress in the salvage effort is impressive, with thousands of tons of wreckage and debris removed from the site for disposal or recycling and 183 containers removed from the bow of the M/V DALI.

Within the broader unified effort, the Coast Guard facilitated significant progress in re-opening the Port of Baltimore and restoring the MTS. The UC established three alternate channels with controlling depths of 11-feet, 14-feet, and 20-feet. On April 25th, as a result of the extraordinary efforts of the USACE, Navy SUPSALV, and their contractors, a fourth limited access channel with a 48-foot controlling depth was established, with the full opening of the channel to its pre-incident specifications projected by the end of May. As of May 13th, 365 commercial vessels transited the four alternate channels, including all of the vessels that were in port during the incident.

COAST GUARD INVESTIGATION

Upon receiving notification of the major marine casualty on the morning of March 26th, Coast Guard investigating officers from Sector Maryland-NCR deployed to the incident and commenced a preliminary investigation to secure vital evidence, including perishable data from the M/V DALI's voyage data recorder (VDR). In accordance with existing agreements, Coast Guard and the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) agreed to proceed with the NTSB serving as the Lead Federal Agency for the concurrent safety investigations due to the multi-modal nature of the incident¹.

On March 26, 2024, I convened a Marine Board of Investigation (MBI), the Coast Guard's highest level of marine casualty investigation, to secure proper resources and assign our most experienced investigators, marine inspectors, and engineers to this critical task. MBI members deployed to the M/V DALI and assumed the lead for the Coast Guard marine casualty investigation on the morning of March 27th.

Under International Maritime Organization (IMO) protocols for marine casualty investigations, the Coast Guard also invited foreign flag administrations with interests in the incident to participate in the investigations. As a result, investigators from Singapore (the flag administration of the M/V DALI) and India (the flag administration for the majority of M/V DALI's crew) deployed on-scene and participated in fact-finding efforts. The MBI continues to evaluate evidence to determine the incident's causal factors and support development of immediate safety measures and preventative recommendations.

PORT RECOVERY

In addition to immediate response and investigation activities, the UC is leading efforts for port recovery and restoration of economic activity in the region. In collaboration with interagency partners and the maritime industry, the Coast Guard established a system for assessing and mitigating long-term disruptions of the MTS. That system was activated and is in action in the port of Baltimore.

¹ NTSB was designated the lead Federal agency pursuant to the "Memorandum of Understanding Between the National Transportation Safety Board and the United States Coast Guard Regarding Investigations and Related Matters," dated June 17, 2021.

Every Coast Guard COTP is required to maintain an all-hazards MTS Recovery Plan. These plans set the foundation for safe, timely, and efficient restoration of the MTS following a significant disruption. While these plans are most frequently used following natural disasters, they apply to any incident that disrupts the MTS, such as the Francis Scott Key Bridge collapse. Included in the plan is a joint protocol to determine potential national-level needs and priorities developed by the Coast Guard and U.S. Customs and Border Protection. Informed by this protocol, the UC considers the following (in order) when developing recovery priorities: national response and recovery supplies; national defense materials; other national priority cargo; local response and recovery supplies; local energy cargo; local consumption food; and any other local priority cargoes. The protocol does not make operational decisions or establish regional and local priorities, which are being conducted by the UC.

The Marine Transportation System Recovery Unit (MTSRU) within the UC coordinates port recovery efforts by engaging industry stakeholders, identifying broader impacts, and recommending courses of action to prioritize vessels and cargo activities. Several incident-specific factors inform their recommendations, including vessel characteristics such as cargo, draft, height, tonnage, maneuverability; waterway restrictions such as draft restrictions, tides, air gaps for vertical clearance, visibility, sea state concerns, tug and pilotage requirements; and facility restrictions such as berth availability, power availability, security, labor availability. For this response, the UC used the MTS recovery process to enable the flow of limited commercial traffic into and out of the port while also managing complex salvage operations. Immediately following this incident, the shipping industry independently identified alternative ports or transportation modes to re-route traffic and sustain supply chains given the expected long-term closure, limiting a need for commercial transits through the port during salvage operations.

The UC's timely and transparent communications with the public and community stakeholders was critical to recovery efforts. The UC routinely broadcasts waterway status to the port community through Marine Safety Information Bulletins, which provide information on accessing USACE hydrographic survey data, controlling depths for the various alternate channels, transit requirements for deep draft vessels, and other restrictions and limitations such as weather.

As the salvage work progresses, UC continues to leverage the MTSRU to engage with port stakeholders, share information on waterway status, identify any emerging factors that could affect port recovery efforts, and mitigate impacts wherever possible.

CONCLUSION

Through the UC, the Coast Guard is applying its full array of authorities, capabilities, and resources to re-open the Port of Baltimore safely and efficiently. Our ongoing collaboration with international, federal, state, local, and industry partners is essential to facilitating a timely recovery. We are grateful for the tremendous contributions of responders and driven each day by the trust and support of surrounding communities. While encouraged by progress made to date, the Coast Guard remains focused on the work still needed to restore the affected portions of the MTS.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to your questions.