

Transportation Management Committee
September 10, 2020

Preliminary Report and Recommendations by the Transportation Management Committee
Regarding Transportation Related Impacts of Steamship Authority Freight Operations

The Woods Hole, Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket Steamship Authority (SSA) freight operations and practices have been widely criticized for decades. While the 5:30 a.m. freight boat and freight boat schedule have been garnering recent headlines and consternation across Falmouth, the schedule and early freight boat departure with its attendant truck traffic through town are merely a symptom of a more systematic problem and poor operational design. At a Select Board meeting in 2018 when asked about alternatives to roll on/roll (RORO) off freight, the SSA staff answered that they have always done it that way and consider themselves good at doing it that way.

The Committee is not in a position of knowledge, experience or capability to recommend specific ways to move freight to the islands, we do believe that "we have always done it that way" is not an ideal operational philosophy in a rapidly changing technological world. A 21st century examination of options and alternatives is overdue.

Facts the committee considered include:

1. The SSA enabling act calls for the SSA "to provide adequate transportation and necessities of life to the islands of Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard." St. 1960 ch. 760. (emphasis added).
2. Based upon SSA reports between 61 and 75 percent of freight destined for the islands passes through or close by the port city of New Bedford.
3. The percent of freight "destined for the islands" excludes freight that is delivered to Cape Cod businesses, later sold to island customers and then delivered to the islands.
4. Based upon reports by MassDOT and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers the only two bridges providing passage to/from Cape Cod are functionally obsolete.
5. In Falmouth, between 500 and 600 trucks pass along the 2-lane corridor of West Falmouth Highway, Palmer Avenue, North Main Street, Locust Street, Woods Hole Road and Crane Street on a typical busy day during peak season.
6. There are no discernable freight improvements or facilities associated with the pending Woods Hole Terminal project beyond a truck cueing zone.
7. In the past the SSA charged freight by weight. This incentivized inefficiency because it didn't matter what size truck was used to haul the freight. Currently the SSA charges by length of the vehicle and weights are not checked. This incentivizes overloading. Overloaded, overweight vehicles damage roadways and pose added public safety risks.
8. Adding to inefficiency approximately half of the trucks (mostly on the return trip) are empty.¹ According to trucking experts, empty trucks are more likely to speed, more likely to flip over and require more stopping distance.

¹ Based upon older data when weight was tracked for most trucks. There is no reason to believe that this statistic has changed.

9. In 2000 and 2001 the SSA operated a pilot freight program from the port of New Bedford. As noted by the 2001 Kass report examining SSA operations, the pilot program had flaws with its schedule. The Falmouth representative to the SSA criticized the program as being designed to fail by its schedule, vessel selection, minimum size of trucks and reservation policies.
10. The closest interstate highway to Woods Hole is approximately 29 miles in West Wareham. The closest interstate highway to New Bedford runs through New Bedford and across the top of New Bedford Harbor. Route 18, a connector multi-lane, limited access highway runs between I-195 and New Bedford Harbor
11. Freight movement has emerged as a highly competitive, creative and technology driven industry. Companies like FedEx, UPS, USPS and Amazon have developed systems for moving freight both efficiently and expeditiously. Containerized shipping modules were developed in the maritime industry. Hybrid short haul models in the maritime industry have been developed to mix bulk, containerized and RORO freight on a single vessel.
12. Even if RORO were the only alternative, having a freight port accessible via interstate highway is preferable to transporting freight over 5 miles of two-lane residential streets and crossing obsolete bridges.
13. Travel time under zero traffic scenarios between the New Bedford State Pier and Woods Hole is 51 minutes. Bridge delays can easily add 45 additional minutes to the trip. Travel time via SSA ferry to the Vineyard is 45 minutes. The 2000 – 2001 pilot program operating a vessel whose maximum speed was less than SSA ferries took 2 hours and 30 minutes through Quicks Hole. Travel time could be shortened by routing through Woods Hole Passage, which some consider a challenging route to navigate.
14. Understanding SSA finances especially profit and loss centers can be confusing and confounding. Summer passenger revenue subsidizes everything else the SSA does.

Committee Recommendation:

The committee has been in contact with federal officials at the U.S. Maritime Administration. In those consultations the committee determined that there are a number of federal grants that might be utilized to study and evaluate the island freight program and options. Some of the stated purposes of the grants are:

- create and sustain jobs in U.S. vessels, ports and shipyards;
- relieve landside congestion;
- reduce maintenance costs and improve the U.S. transportation system's overall state-of-repair (wear and tear on roads and bridges);
- improve U.S. economic competitiveness by adding new cost-effective freight and passenger transportation capacities;
- improve environmental sustainability of the U.S. transportation system by using less energy and reducing air emissions (such as greenhouse gases) per passenger or ton-mile of freight moved; and
- improve public safety and security by providing alternatives for the movement of hazardous materials outside heavily populated areas.

Our recommendation is that the SSA in partnership with port communities and MassDOT develop appropriate grant applications to be submitted during the next cycle of grants to obtain funding to carry out an investigation of freight options and improvements to provide a reliable and adequate system to move freight between the islands and mainland. We have attached a proposed letter to be sent by the Select Board to the SSA.

Draft Draft Draft

Robert B. Davis, General Manager
Woods Hole, Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket Steamship Authority
P.O. Box 284
Woods Hole, MA 02543

Re: Freight from the Interstate to the Islands

Dear Mr. Davis:

For years the Town of Falmouth and Woods Hole, Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket Steamship Authority (SSA) have engaged in an amicable dialogue of the impact of certain SSA operations upon the town and the citizens of Falmouth. One of our takeaways has been a reluctance by the SSA to change or alter its traditional and long-standing methods of operation. We understand that, for some, the current operating system is working just fine. Our view is that while the current operations might seem adequate for some island needs, overall these operational practices are far less than optimal particularly in cost, efficiency and community impact. One of the most inefficient and impactful operations is the transfer and movement of freight/goods to the islands.

Roll on/roll off (RORO) freight has been the mainstay of transferring freight/goods to islands. It is nineteenth century technology that has largely gone unchanged. Approximately 50 percent of the SSA's RORO freight is empty trucks and containers. The overwhelming majority of goods to the islands originate elsewhere (off of Cape Cod) and travel to Woods Hole or Hyannis via the interstate highway system. The interstate system ends in Wareham. From Wareham freight travels on overburdened bridges and roads to the 2 principal freight ports on Cape Cod. Of the SSA port communities, only New Bedford is located on an interstate highway, i.e. I-195. I-195 directly connects with I-95 and I-495.

Our Transportation Management Committee has been examining the impact SSA freight operations have on our community not from a perspective of how best to carry out this important function, but rather what are the tools available to develop and measure alternatives/improvements. Companies like FedEx, UPS, USPS and Amazon have been making huge steps in optimizing freight movement. Maritime operators in other parts the world have developed hybrid modes of moving bulk, containerized cargo and RORO to optimize efficiency and reliability. Thus, there are alternatives but evaluating best options requires expertise beyond our committee's experience and capability. Indeed, the committee believes the SSA also lacks the capability to fairly and completely evaluate 21st century freight and port structure alternatives.

In considering tools the committee has been in contact with various federal and state agencies that have an interest in maritime transportation and specifically maritime freight. Our region is not alone in moving freight from mainland to island communities. Developing 21st century solutions has measurable benefit beyond the SSA. The committee has identified a number of federal grant programs that would provide tools and alternatives to better manage and move

freight. Because of New Bedford's access to the interstate system that port is of special interest to those involved in the Marine Highway System. A modern freight management facility in New Bedford would allow for freight to move directly from the interstate to islands.

We urge the SSA to investigate, and pursue grants to develop better ways to move freight from the interstate highway system to the islands. These grants would allow the SSA to bring together the academic and industry experts needed to provide the options for improved freight delivery. According to federal officials these grants are not highly competitive. There is a good return on investment so that a successful application is highly likely.

These programs include:

1. Marine Highway Grant Program - small grants but precisely on target.
2. Port Infrastructure Development Grant Program – a portion of this program is specifically set aside for smaller ports like New Bedford.

Our committee can provide you additional information and contact information if you desire. The committee can be reached via email at transportationmgmt@falmouthma.gov.

Please take the necessary steps to have an application ready for the next round of grants. Falmouth sees this as a key priority for the region.

Sincerely,

Select Board

Enclosure

cc: Kathryn Wilson
 SSA Board of Governors
 SSA Port Council

