



Testimony of Roland Lewis, President and CEO

On Maritime Support Services and Transportation

THE METROPOLITAN WATERFRONT ALLIANCE

Before the Waterfronts Committee

250 Broadway, 16th floor, Monday, April 28, 2008 at 1:00 PM

Good afternoon. My name is Roland Lewis and I am President of the Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance, a coalition of 329 groups working together to transform the New York Harbor and its waterways into a world class resource for work, play, transit and education.

I'd like to thank the Committee and especially Chairman Nelson for bringing us all here to discuss the critical issues facing our working waterfront, and particularly the needs of waterfront and water-dependent businesses. I would also like to commend the New York City Economic Development Corporation and its dedicated staff and consultants from SUNY Maritime for the creation of the thorough and updated Maritime Support Services Location Study.

My testimony will focus on four areas: 1) improving air quality through waterborne transit of goods and people, 2) land use innovations that can help our maritime economy; 3) simplifying the waterfront permitting bureaucracy; and 4) the pressing issue of what to do with – and how to pay for – the dredge from harbor.

- 1) Increasing water transit of people and goods can help improve air quality and reduce asthma in neighborhoods overwhelmed by traffic and congestion.

Our city suffers from an epidemic of asthma especially among children. A recent Columbia University study done in conjunction with the Harlem Children's Zone found that one in four Harlem children suffers from asthma. Another recent NYU study found a direct correlation between truck traffic and asthma rates. Waterborne movement of goods can be a key part of solving this problem. But, to really make the most of our waterways as transportation resources, we need to a) invest in clean fuels and clean fuel technology for our ferries and tugboats, and b) make water transit for people and goods more accessible by finding ways to subsidize our water transit system just as our highway system is subsidized.

Currently, the US Army Corps of Engineers is helping to re-power a number of tugboats serving this Port to help reduce the levels of air emissions that these working vessels create. The Report we are discussing here today reminds us that there are literally hundreds of tugboats based and in operation in this Port and we should allow all of these businesses access to cleaner fuels, such as creating grant programs just as

we do for private vehicle fleets such as school buses. The Council and the Mayor have taken a great step forward for cleaner air by providing the Staten Island Ferry with Ultra Low Sulfur Diesel and Biodiesel. , We should make these fuels more accessible and cost-effective for smaller maritime businesses too. Ultimately, every ton of cargo and every passenger commuter that moves by water is reducing the stress and congestion on our land-based transit and highway system, and therefore they are creating a public benefit that is worthy of public support.

2) The Maritime Support Service Businesses of dry docks, graving docks, and ship repair facilities can only continue to function in our area if they are protected by a Land Use Regulation framework that gives greater priority to job creation and retention rather than property values.

Over the last five months, MWA has been bringing together a number of Policy Task Forces to identify major issues facing our waterfront and to build support for solutions. On our Waterfront Works Task Force, which includes representatives of nearly 50 private businesses, civic groups as well as public agencies, there is wide agreement that the land use pressure to convert working waterfront to luxury housing is still pervasive, even in a seemingly “slower” economy. MWA is now researching possible models, including Chicago’s “Industrial Sanctuaries” and Maine’s “Transfer of Development Rights,” two different but potentially useful mechanisms that might help us protect working waterfront jobs. There is also the proposal for an Eco-Industrial Park in Sunset Park that the New York Industrial Retention Network and

others are pulling together, which could help us all see how not to just simply *protect* working waterfront jobs, but proactively create and grow working waterfront jobs, as well as “Green Jobs,” those forms of employment which through their processes and through their end products represent a more sustainable approach to manufacturing and economic development.

- 3) The health of Maritime Support Services and water-dependent jobs are undermined by the rising cost of dredging our harbor and determination of who should bear that cost.

Waterfront businesses such as marinas and ship repair facilities are faced with huge dredging bills – due to no fault of their own. One of the legacies of the Industrial Revolution has been a huge volume of contaminants along the bottom of our Harbor, Rivers, Bays, Canals and Creeks. Much of this contamination is Dioxin that came down the Passaic River or PCBs that came down the Hudson. Unfortunately there is currently no public funding so small maritime businesses are forced to pay for the dredging themselves, which is prohibitively expensive and an unfair burden on them. To preserve our maritime industry, we desperately need to address this.

- 4) The health of Maritime Support Services and water-dependent jobs are also undermined by the myriad of government regulations that provide the needed permits for waterfront construction and uses.

Securing permits for waterfront construction (including dredging) can be arduous and expensive. Caddell Dry Dock, for instance, has now spent as much money just testing their dredged sediment for contamination as they spent a few years ago on the entire dredging project. New construction on the waterfront is formidable because it requires getting permits from a variety of New York City Agencies, as well as New York State DEC, the US Army Corps of Engineers, and sometimes the National Marine Fisheries Service. One of the proposals recommended by our Waterfront Works Task Force is the creation of a “One-Stop Shop for Waterfront Permitting” to help make this sometimes byzantine system of regulation a more transparent and efficient. Most governing agencies agree that supporting maritime use of the harbor is a very critical goal. Helping the businesses that comprise this vital industry “get to yes” for necessary waterside repair and improvement projects is essential to achieve this goal.

Attached to this testimony are the minutes from the launch of our Waterfront Works Task Force, as well as the list of agency and organizations working with MWA to address these issues.

Overall, MWA believes that increased water transit for people and goods is critical to solving city’s Air Quality problem which gives our residents asthma and other health problems. We very much appreciate the Council drawing attention to these issues and

also for recognizing that waterfront and water-dependent businesses can be a part of the solution.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and I'd be happy to answer any questions you might have.