



## DATA

### The missing piece

**W**e've all seen the recent gamut of television, radio and print ads professing the benefits of freight rail: providing fuel efficiency, congestion relief and environmentally-friendly transport of goods. So why isn't the maritime transportation mode similarly portrayed? We can and should be, but there is a compelling need for a collection of accurate, statistical data for the marine industry that can be drawn upon to make the industry's case.

The Great Lakes maritime story can't be fully communicated to the public if there is minimal or even erroneous data driving the public perception of shipping. The most glaring example of erroneous data came last fall, in an article published in the *Toronto Globe and Mail*, depicting the comparative fuel efficiencies of various modes of transportation; rail, truck, pipeline, air and ship.

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Surprisingly, maritime came in last, based on information provided by a U.S. governmental entity. It was subsequently learned that the governmental agency had applied a flawed energy efficiency formula calculation, which relied on marine data that had not been carefully sorted. The data did not differentiate between types of vessels (i.e. recreational, passenger, fishing, harbor tugs, foreign) thus leading to flawed reporting of the maritime industry's fuel efficiencies for moving freight.

Dr. Richard Stewart, Co-Director of the Great Lakes Maritime Research Institute, has presented his analysis of what happened in this case in his paper, "The Energy Inefficiency of Marine Transportation: A Case Study of Flawed Data and Analysis." We can all learn from his research.

Likewise, there needs to be a collection of statistics and analysis of data on job creation, economic impact, commodity type

and cargo value, tons carried, fuel consumption, environmental impact and other factors so that the public can understand the benefits of using waterborne transportation. That data must come from all of us as maritime stakeholders. There is no benefit to withholding information from the media and the public. The industry routinely collects this data, but it must be shared, aggregated, analyzed, verified and disseminated in an understandable way in order to make a strong business case for the entire industry.

Reliable, credible reports, rather than outdated statistics, inaccurate data collection processes and improper data analysis methodology must be the basis on which regulators and policy-makers at the federal, state and local level make informed policy and funding decisions impacting the maritime industry. An existing body of maritime data and verifiable analysis needs to be collected, maintained and updated continuously if we expect a credible evaluation of the performance and needs of the system. Regulation based on flawed data is bad regulation and should be preventable.

It will take the collective will of a united maritime industry to overcome any fears of providing commercial information to "the competition" and come to trust the best use of information for the benefit of the industry. Surely there is a way to maintain confidentiality of proprietary data when it's necessary.

We have a good story to tell, based on fact and verifiable with data. Let's make a concerted effort to fill in that missing piece of our story. ■

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