



Woods Hole, Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket Steamship Authority

Media Contact

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FALMOUTH (December 17, 2018) – The Woods Hole, Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket Steamship Authority has released the final report produced by HMS Consulting, Glosten Associates and Rigor Analytics in response to its May 2018 request for proposals ("RFP") for a comprehensive review of the Authority's operations. The review was to cover five topics: vessel operations, fleet maintenance, management structure, information technology systems and public communications. As indicated in the report, the public communications portion of the study will follow in a supplemental document.

"The Steamship Authority is an organization that always strives to improve its operations and service to the public, and the report produced by HMS Consulting, Glosten Associates and Rigor Analytics will only help us in that regard," General Manager Robert Davis said. "We thank the team behind the report for their thorough work and professionalism through this process, and we look forward to continuing to use the report as a guide for the future."

The report highlights many things the Authority is doing well, including the commitment by its employees to providing safe and reliable transportation service to and from the islands of Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket. It also notes the Authority's unique funding structure, in that it does not rely on annual government subsidies and that its roughly \$100,000,000 budget is supported nearly entirely by fares. Since 1962, the Authority has had only four annual operating deficits and it has not had to assess its port communities for monetary support since 1963.

"Our dedication to fiscal responsibility has been a source of pride for our employees, but being prudent with our dollars has not led to a lack of resources for the crucial areas of maintenance and training," Mr. Davis said. For example, in the last three years, the Authority has spent an average of \$9,950,000 on maintenance per year (excluding labor costs, which averaged nearly \$4,850,000 a year) and an average of \$337,000 per year on training its employees.

"Where our fiscal strategy has affected us, which is demonstrated in the report, is in not adding resources, particularly in our management structure. We have, in some cases, had existing managers serving dual roles, and we will explore asking the Board to add some of the new positions suggested in the report to the Authority," Mr. Davis said.

The Authority has already made significant progress in a number of areas identified in the report, which are highlighted below.

Safety and training

- The Authority meets and often exceeds U.S. Coast Guard standards for training. Each vessel holds routine safety drills on weekly, monthly and quarterly schedules.
- The Authority staffs its vessels at or in excess of U.S. Coast Guard requirements. For example, it staffs a chief engineer on board the *M/V Katama* and *M/V Gay Head* although Coast Guard regulations do not require such a posting.
- It has begun work on vessel-specific manuals, starting with the *M/V Woods Hole*. That document, which includes checklists and performance standards along with photos and videos of emergency and operational procedures, will be used as a template to make the remaining work flow to create other vessels' manuals in the coming months that much smoother.
- Within the first year of being hired, all ordinary seamen new to the organization typically go through an International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping ("STCW") weeklong training program at the Massachusetts Maritime Academy. The certification, which is good for five years and is **not** required by the U.S. Coast Guard, is offered to up to 60 employees per year and covers topics such as first aid, firefighting, personal safety and personal survival techniques.
- The Authority offers regular CPR and first-aid training for its landside and on-ship personnel.
- It offers or funds more than two dozen professional development opportunities for its personnel, including those interested in obtaining licensing as a pilot or captain.

Vessel maintenance

- Beginning last spring, the Authority implemented a new policy whereby additional sea trials are performed by its personnel on vessels that are coming out of repair periods to identify potential problems with performance before submitting the vessel to the U.S. Coast Guard for inspection.
- For the past 10 years, it has followed a policy in which its vessels are dry-docked every two (2) years, which is above the Coast Guard standard for "H" classed vessels of two (2) every five (5) years, with not more than three (3) years in between dry-dockings.

Operations

- The Authority has begun to establish the Operations and Communications Center at its Palmer Avenue administrative office building, which will serve as a nerve center for communications from its vessels and terminals and to its employees and customers.
- It is implementing a new accounting system, Microsoft Dynamics NAV (Navision) Enterprise Resource Planning, that will replace its legacy, 40-year-old system and allow for seamless interfacing between time clocks, payroll and, human resources.
- It is replacing Maximo, its legacy system for tracking maintenance assets and work orders, with TAG, an off-the-shelf product that is being customized for its needs. TAG will allow for integration with the Authority's new accounting and inventory systems and will allow the vessels and terminals greater ability to access the system, even while out of range of wireless systems.

Information technology

- The Authority moved to govDelivery for its monthly e-News and trip alert emails to allow for better management and delivery of its messages to customers who have opted in to the service.
- It has performed load testing with an external firm to determine the maximum user capacity of its website and continue to test the system to its breaking point.
- It is working to develop a smartphone app that will include ticketing on traditional ferries and other new offerings.
- It has redesigned its general internet opening plans for the summer 2019 sailing schedule to start accepting reservations on each route on different days to make the customer experience as smooth as possible.

Internal information management

- Using a template created for the accounting department, all departments will be working to document policies and procedures to allow for more efficient transitions of institutional knowledge between long-tenured employees and new hires.
- As previously stated, the Authority has begun work on vessel-specific manuals, accompanied by photos and videos, to document operational and safety procedures for crew members who may not be familiar with a particular vessel.

Although the Public Communications portion of the study is not included in this release, the Authority has taken several strides in that regard, including creating a communications director position and hiring Sean F. Driscoll to fill the role; developing the Operations and Communications Center; and establishing a social media presence on Facebook and Twitter with which it can more directly communicate with its customers. Management had identified those areas as ones needing development prior to the events of March and April 2018.

“Now that the report has been released, it falls to the Authority’s management team, its Port Council and its Board to continue to review the document and determine which recommendations to implement and on what timetable,” Mr. Davis said. “Some of the suggestions are easier to implement than others, which may carry significant costs in terms of dollars and logistics. While these are very realistic factors that need to be considered, we will not allow them to impede our progress.

“The process of hiring HMS Consulting to perform this study was born from one of the most challenging periods in the Authority’s history, but I believe that our operations will benefit from the insight contained in the final product.”

The full report and a Staff Summary prepared by Mr. Davis on its contents is available on the Authority’s website, www.steamshipauthority.com/about/news. The report will be the sole subject of a special board meeting scheduled for 3:45 p.m. today at Falmouth High School, 874 Gifford Street, Falmouth, Massachusetts. Mr. Davis and Board Members will be available for further comment after the meeting.