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CGVMSL

Richard Corfe

President and CEO, St. Lawrence Seaway Management Corporation.

The way forward

The St. Lawrence Seaway passed a significant milestone on August 10, 2004. That was the date, 50 years ago, when construction began on the modern waterway. The Seaway gave ocean vessels their first direct access to the heart of North America and stimulated the growth of industry and trade in the Great Lakes region. In the half-century that has passed, the Seaway has become perhaps the most successful example of co-operation between Canada and the United States and, at least in this one area, there has been increasing alignment and unanimity in the bi-national agenda.

Both nations have the same goals for the waterway and expect the same economic, environmental and social benefits. And consensus is growing on how to make the most of the system we began building fifty years ago, to keep those benefits flowing in the 21st century. We have an excellent window of opportunity between now and the 50th anniversary of the Seaway's opening in 2009 to redefine what we want from our waterway in its next 50-year cycle. But we should look not just at the Seaway alone, but at the entire integrated transportation system of which it forms a part, and on which so many livelihoods depend.

Trade on the Seaway has changed in the past half-century, and is changing still. We need a two-pronged response. We must

adapt to changes that are thrust upon us, find whatever opportunities they bring and take advantage of them. And we must act decisively to create other changes in directions that are favourable to us.

The Saint Lawrence Seaway Management Corporation (SLSMC) and its U.S. partner, Saint Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation (SLSDC), have worked hard to modernize the Seaway over the years in response to changing customer demands. I can mention Automatic Identification System (AIS), our Web site and other electronic business services, deeper draft, improvements in traffic control, ISO certification in a number of areas, streamlined procedures. Other projects are in the works, and the improvements will continue. This year, we have also opened up our second line of attack. We are focused strongly on growing our business – increasing use of the Seaway by old and valued customers, and attracting new markets, new cargoes and new delivery methods.

In the past year, we have participated in a trade mission to Belgium and the Netherlands, and in the important *Posidonia* shipping exposition in Greece, which attracts marine industry representatives from all over Europe and the Mediterranean. Closer to home, we have a committee working on promoting



Pierre Terrien

SLSMC and its U.S. partner, SLSDC, have worked hard to modernize the Seaway over the years as witnessed by this AIS display on Upper Lakes Shipping's SS Montréalais.

short-sea shipping along the Seaway and Great Lakes, as an alternative to short-haul trucking. We have examined the possibilities of attracting container traffic to the waterway, and this remains a mid-term goal. Joint initiatives with the Port of Québec, such as their annual "Open Day," are building up the city's position as the entrance to the Seaway. And in the Seaway forum, with key stakeholders such as ports and carriers, we are working together to create greater awareness among the public and governments of the benefits of marine transportation and the Seaway System in particular. Our marine industry is on the way to translating common interests into common promotion measures, and a common, highly visible brand for the entire waterway and its components.

In part due to the work of the Seaway Corporations, our stakeholders, and the marine industry at large, and in part simply because of the upturn in the world economy, traffic on the Seaway has increased significantly this year. The future looks bright, and it holds many opportunities. To take advantage of them, we are all going to have to co-operate and do our parts.

For instance, cargo transshipment is on the rise, from ocean vessels too large to pass through Seaway locks to lakers and Seaway-sized vessels. For this delivery method to succeed, we need a strong Canadian fleet. The laker fleet has been fully booked for two years in a row, and this year, it was booked solid already in the spring, soon after navigation opened. We need more vessels – the cargoes are there. We also need to look at new vessel designs, specifically built for Seaway niche markets and new delivery methods. Tug-and-barge traffic holds promise, as do Seaway-sized container vessels. And finally, we should look into strengthening intermodal links along the Seaway, making sure the right connections are there, in the right places, using the strengths of the different modes efficiently.

SLSMC is taking up the challenge of the future, and we trust all our partners and stakeholders will join us. It's time to create a new Seaway for ourselves, and for all those who depend on the waterway. Today's planning and actions are essential to achieving another prosperous and successful fifty years. **M**