



Cape Fear Firebird

The Light of Save the Cape

December 15, 2011

How can we be more effective in communicating the right message? If I were to do it over again I would focus on that and take more time maybe to interact with the community.

–Thomas Eagar, CEO, State Ports Authority

The Selling of the Megaport

They are doing it over. In his post-mortem interview with the *State Port Pilot* in July 2010, immediately after the North Carolina International Terminal project was put “on hold,” Mr Eagar did not admit any flaws in the project, only the failure to do a good job of selling it.

Now the strategy emerges. Put the project away, out of sight. Let the public think it is over. Then bring it back, wearing the legitimate uniform of a full-fledged State agency instead of the Ports Authority. And do a better job of selling it. Not to us, mind you. We don’t count. To the legislature, where the money is. Coaxing \$4.4 billion out of them takes some slick sales work.

So comes now the North Carolina Department of Transportation Maritime Strategy Study, “Positioning North Carolina as a portal to the global maritime economy.” A \$2 million project. Instead of using the State Ports Authority’s consultants, the NCDOT has hired their favorite engineering firms, AECOM and URS. A fresh look. As if the studies already bought for \$10.2 million have gone stale.

In observing the progress of the study, we note that the study team has learned most of what the marketing people at the State Ports Authority already know, and some of what CH2M Hill, Inc., Moffatt & Nichol, TEC, Inc., and PF Richardson have already reported. But that is not the point. The point of the AECOM/URS project is to legitimize the megaport at Southport (not called the North Carolina International Terminal any more). That involves wrapping it in analytical garb, but mostly, providing the “public outreach,” the missing element from the Ports Authority’s program.

That does not mean that what the public says will make a speck of difference. The public outreach is just a procedural box being checked, another step toward legitimacy. “See that Senators, we had a public meeting and heard what the people in Southport said.”

Will they say that 385 informed people showed up at the meeting? Will they say that 381 of them stood up to say NO! to the megaport at Southport? How about those 45 people who stood up to speak with passion and conviction and of those, only one spoke in favor of the port? Will the meeting at Southport influence the outcome of the study? LET’S MAKE SURE IT DOES.

What can you do? Join this battle. Email and call our elected officials. Call us and tell us you want to help. Donate money to Save the Cape – become a member for \$25. Details are in the cover message and our Web site.