

LIGTT: FULL SPEED AHEAD

Also speaking at the conference, La. State Senator A.G.Crowe, R-Slidell, said construction of the Louisiana International Gulf Transfer Terminal Authority or LIGTT should be completed by 2015, when widening and deepening of the Panama Canal is finished. LIGTT is a planned, public-private transfer port east of Southwest Pass in the Gulf at the entrance to the Mississippi River. “The largest ships can't get into the mouth of the Mississippi River, which can currently only handle ships with about 8,200 TEU containers,” Crowe said. In comparison, Danish business conglomerate Maersk ordered ten, 18,000 TEU ships early this year, with an option to buy more. A TEU is a twenty-foot container. The Port of New Orleans and the state have invested heavily in building the city's container facilities, and have expanded market share, Crowe said. “However, as container ships get larger, they will be less able to reach ports upriver.” LIGTT and the Port of New Orleans have agreed that LIGTT will only accept vessels that can't travel to the Crescent City. “The long-term strategy is to maintain and enhance container-cargo market share at New Orleans by drawing the biggest ships to LIGTT,” Crowe said. “From there, development of the Asian, inland tug-and-barge model should begin for the benefit of New Orleans and ports in 33 states, establishing a supply chain connecting South America to Canada through the U.S. interior.” Crowe added that the LIGTT will serve as the catalyst so that container traffic at New Orleans continues to increase. Crowe estimated the Gulf transfer terminal will cost \$250 million to \$500 million to build, based on a 250-acre footprint, with no public or government funds needed. Members of the LIGTT board have met with executives from Maersk, WalMart, grain exporters, tug-and-barge companies and ship builders interested in participating in the project, and will meet with Chinese companies and investors, along with port authorities in Shanghai and Yangtze, this summer, he said.