



China Vice Minister of Maritime Affairs Xu Zuyuan, left, listens intently to interpreter Zhang Hongbin during an inland waterways briefing and site visit Wednesday at America's Central Port in Granite City. U.S. Rep. Jerry Costello, D Belleville, members of the U.S. Department of Transportation and Chinese maritime officials discussed future economic development and maintaining a working relationship between the Americans and their Chinese counterparts.

## Chinese tour inland port facilities

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By SANFORD J. SCHMIDT

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GRANITE CITY - Officials of America's Central Port talked Wednesday with Chinese officials who may want to bring business from about 7 billion people to America's heartland.

Executive Director Dennis Wilmsmeyer told Chinese Vice Minister of Maritime Affairs Xu Zuyuan that the port's location and connections to other forms of transportation in a foreign trade zone make the port an ideal location for business.

"This foreign trade zone allows us to attract companies from overseas," he said.

He said a South Port now under construction will allow companies to ship products through a newly widened Panama Canal up the Mississippi River to Granite City.

"This offers the lowest cost rather than shipping to the West Coast, then shipping to ports across the country," Wilmsmeyer said.

The visit from the Chinese minister and his colleagues was part of the fourth annual Transportation Forum held in St. Louis and the surrounding area. The United States and China hold one of the forums each year, alternating between the two countries. Last year's forum was held in China.

The forums emphasize the importance of transportation infrastructure as a foundation for economic development.

U.S. Rep. Jerry Costello, D-Bellefonte, and officials of the U.S. Department of Transportation visited the port and other sites with the Chinese delegation. Costello sponsored the legislation that turned the under-used Granite City Army Depot into the port district.

He told the Chinese officials on Wednesday that the focus of the effort is to create jobs.

"The foreign trade zone offers one-stop service for Chinese companies looking to locate in the United States with an excellent location in the middle of the country," he said at a briefing at the port district offices. "This puts us above and beyond anyone else to provide distribution services in the United States."

The port is a two-day drive from 70 percent of the nation's population.

Costello pointed out the district has warehouse space available. The warehouses are operated under a contract, and the district collects rent.

The South Port under construction is below river from Lock and Dam 27, the southernmost such facility on the Mississippi River.

Minister Xu appeared to listen carefully to the presentation. He took notes and asked several questions through his translator and an aide.

The Chinese officials and U.S. Department of Transportation officials also visited the Melvin Price Locks and Dam 26 on the Mississippi at Alton.

The fourth annual Transportation Forum was held in St. Louis because the Chinese officials requested that the forum be held on an inland waterway system.

The new South Harbor will handle imports and exports of products produced in the Midwest and will create the most northerly rail, river and roadway freight transfer location south of the Mississippi River lock system.