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ST. LOUIS BASED TECH FIRM PARTNERS WITH PORT OF LONG BEACH TO CREATE A SUPPLY CHAIN INFORMATION HIGHWAY

[ST. LOUIS, MO/May 22, 2023] New technology that provides shippers the ability to access, analyze, and integrate data regarding the movement of freight through the nation's largest ports and helps improve in-transit visibility was highlighted on opening day of FreightWeekSTL 2023. The week-long freight and logistics expo presented by the St. Louis Regional Freightway kicked off with Innovation Day featuring emerging technologies aimed at enhancing global freight movement. This included a spotlight on St. Louis-based technology consulting firm UNCOMN, and its partnership with the Port of Long Beach, highlighting their efforts to establish a Supply Chain Information Highway and the role it can play in improving the movement of freight in ports throughout the country.

The FreightWeek panel discussion featured Jason Carter, Founder and CEO of UNCOMN, and Noel Hacegaba, Deputy Executive Director/COO of the Port of Long Beach, which is the second busiest port in America. Hacegaba said virtually every container that crosses the Port of Long Beach docks on a given day breaches all 435 congressional districts, so the cargo that moves through the port complex truly is of national significance.

The partnership between the two organizations began in 2021, when the Port of Long Beach was seeking a prototype to give shippers the ability to track and trace containers and shipments along all aspects of the supply chain. Hacegaba said more than 9 million container units move through his port in any given year, continuing their journey by truck or rail, and cited how the lack of visibility and the inability to track and trace those containers with a high degree of certainty is very disruptive to the supply chain. He and Carter believe it is the number one problem preventing the beneficial cargo owners from achieving optimum supply chain efficiency.

“This innovative solution that we’re developing in partnership with UNCOMN is not only going to help Port of Long Beach customers, it’s also going to be a game changer for our industry here in the United States and possibly even the global supply chain,” said Hacegaba.

Carter said the prototype was delivered to the Port of Long Beach in early 2022 in time for the Transpacific Maritime (TPM) Conference, where it showed the art of the possible and gained a lot of visibility and interest, paving the way to advance from the prototype to phase two, where operations and real data are needed.

“This is where the complexity of the problem set comes in, because you need to get data from multiple stakeholders into one place for those stakeholders with a need to know the information to have visibility into it. Well, not a lot of people want to send their data off to potential visibility by their competitor,” Carter said.

Fortunately, that was where his experience and background became a valuable tool as the company focused on the data sharing agreements necessary to build trust in the Supply Chain Information Highway.

“As a DOD contractor, security is at the forefront of everything we do,” said Carter. “We’re protecting not simply against competitor proprietary information, but from sophisticated attacks from nation states. So, we’ve been able to, over the last year, broker many of those data agreements. We’re getting data from ocean carriers and the Port of Long Beach’s terminals, and now we are working with the beneficial cargo owners – the BCOs – who really are the primary customers of the Supply Chain Information Highway. We’re working with 10 of the

nation's most recognizable consumer brands right now to make sure their requirements are being realized. Instead of going from stakeholder to stakeholder to get your information, you're going to a single place to gain enterprise visibility.”

Hacegaba said his customers had been waiting years for a solution that would enable them to have true end-to-end visibility and that need for visibility across the supply chain was magnified through the pandemic and the related supply chain crisis.

“When we designed the concept that, with UNCOMN’s help, became a prototype and is now in the process of being scaled up across all of our terminals, we listened very closely to our customers,” Hacegaba said. “It was important for us to develop something that was actually going to add value and become a true solution. In my view, technology in and of itself is not a solution. It’s a tool, but it becomes a solution when it is properly designed and integrated into the operation. What we realized early on, is that the only way the Supply Chain Information Highway is going to become a true solution that enables end-to-end visibility is if we have coast-to-coast connectivity. We realized early on that this has to be a national initiative.”

To that end, in December 2022, Hacegaba and Carter convened a meeting in St. Louis, bringing together the leadership of several partner ports to educate them about the Supply Chain Information Highway and engage them in the initiative. Hosted by the St. Louis Regional Freightway, the participants included representatives from the Port of Oakland (Calif.), the Northwest Seaport Alliance, the Utah Inland Port Authority, South Carolina Ports Authority, Port of Miami (Fla.), the Port of New York and New Jersey, and Port Hueneme.

“Our focus is interoperability, velocity and reliability to improve the flow of goods by providing data visibility,” Carter said.

He added that, looking to the next phase, they are planning to extend the initiative beyond the initial group of 10 BCOs. By this fall, they hope to be extending it to other stakeholders, including trucking companies, 3PLs, the railroads, cargo carriers and others who also need visibility of goods flowing through the supply chain. He said a primary objective is to design resilience into the supply chain in anticipation of any future disruptions.

“This is a really exciting project for us and is the culmination of 12 years of technology history in the transportation industry and is one of the most impactful projects we've worked on in our lifetime,” Carter said. “When we started this project, we were calling it the data visibility tool, and Noel and his team came up with the moniker, the Supply Chain Information Highway. I thought that was really insightful because a highway is simply infrastructure and, by itself, doesn't provide value. It is value transiting along that infrastructure that is the really important element for the nation. And so as we continue to build out the Supply Chain Information Highway, usage is what brings value.”

The FreightWeekSTL 2023 panel session was moderated by Mary Lamie, Executive Vice President of Multi Modal Enterprises for Bi-State Development, which operates the St. Louis Regional Freightway as one of its enterprises.

“I must compliment both of you and your organizations for your leadership on this program and the work that you're doing to improve freight flow through our nation's ports and deliver value for the beneficial cargo owners. I think the biggest takeaway is that the solution you're fine-tuning through this partnership is truly scalable and that makes it a game changer for the industry.”

To review the full panel session, visit www.freightweekstl.com.

FreightWeekSTL 2023 continues through May 26 and will feature virtual panel sessions with industry experts and leaders in freight, logistics and transportation. The week-long freight and logistics expo is being delivered by the St. Louis Regional Freightway and Bi-State Development. To learn more or to register for the remaining panel sessions or view past sessions for FreightWeekSTL 2023, visit www.freightweekstl.com.

About St. Louis Regional Freightway

A Bi-State Development enterprise, the St. Louis Regional Freightway is a regional freight district and comprehensive authority for freight operations and opportunities within eight counties in southwestern Illinois and eastern Missouri, which comprise the St. Louis metropolitan area. Public sector and private industry businesses are partnering with the St. Louis Regional Freightway to establish the bi-state region as one of the premier multimodal freight hubs and distribution centers in the United States through marketing and advocacy for infrastructure development that supports the movement of freight. To learn more, visit www.thefreightway.com.