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Thompson lauds harbor efforts, announces federal grant for shipping study, cuts ribbon at C Street Square

John Driscoll/The Times-Standard
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During a tour of the Eureka waterfront on Tuesday, Congressman Mike Thompson and harbor officials announced a \$275,000 federal grant meant to analyze the market for a marine shipping service along the West Coast.

The St. Helena Democrat said that the U.S. Department of Transportation's Maritime Administration grant is a step toward revitalizing Humboldt Bay as a harbor, which would bring jobs and provide for more efficient and cleaner shipping. Thompson said that he was immediately sold on the idea of having a feeder barge service that moves goods from smaller ports to larger ones, and that the Secretary of Transportation understood the potential for the project.

"This first phase is an emphasis of that commitment," Thompson said.

The West Coast Hub-Feeder Initiative proposed by Eureka-based Humboldt Maritime Logistics and a four-port effort called the Golden State Marine Highway Initiative were two of 35 projects chosen to be eligible for federal funding in August.

A designation of an "M-5 Marine Highway Corridor" by the Transportation Department recognizes how Interstate Highway 5 and a marine distribution network along the California, Oregon and Washington coasts may work together to increase efficiency and reduce pollution and traffic congestion.

The Humboldt Bay Harbor, Recreation and Conservation District is the public partner of Eureka-based Humboldt Maritime Logistics, which developed the West Coast Hub-Feeder

Project. District CEO David Hull said that the marine highway concept has been pursued locally for about a decade.

"This is the first real time that there's been money to go ahead," Hull said.

The Harbor District along with the Port of Redwood City and the West Coast Corridor Coalition will work together on the market analysis, which Hull said will take less than 16 months.

Humboldt Maritime Logistics President Stephen Pepper said that the analysis will help assure the company's public partners and stakeholders that the effort is a sound prospect. The goal of the project is to develop a distribution network among California, Oregon and Washington that Pepper said would be a far more efficient means of moving freight and would reduce traffic and emissions, as well.

Earlier in the day, Thompson took part in a ribbon-cutting ceremony at the city of Eureka's Boardwalk in 1994. It includes a Fishermen's Terminal Building, a Market Square and several other upcoming projects.

The terminal building and the market square are meant to provide space for buying, selling and processing fish and allow the public to see those activities and buy fresh fish or sit down for lunch or dinner.

Thompson said that the local community and public officials deserved recognition for their commitment to revitalizing the waterfront.

"They have just held steady on this," Thompson said.

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