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Cruise terminal will be boon to city

BY John Darby

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A new cruise terminal will enhance maritime commerce while opening a path to redevelop Union Pier, so the Trident CEO Council joins with many others in the community to support this initiative. We also applaud the City of Charleston and council for working with the Ports Authority, endorsing the new terminal and redevelopment plan that fits the city's vision for the waterfront.

In addition to providing a new and more appropriate cruise terminal, the Union Pier concept plan will relocate existing cargo operations off Union Pier and shift the cruise operation north. This opens 35 acres of harborfront land for redevelopment and provides unparalleled public access to the water's edge. Think Waterfront Park — times three.

The basis for this is converting an existing warehouse into the new passenger facility. The new \$25 million cruise ship terminal will provide a much improved space to greet passengers boarding the cruise ships that embark here in Charleston.

Several national firms, in partnership with local architects, engineers and others, have proposed to help design the facility. Design and construction of the new terminal, slated to begin in the fourth quarter of this year, will boost jobs in the design and construction industry, which has been hard hit during the recession. Hundreds of construction workers in our region have been without work for many months.

The impact of the construction of the facility is just the start of the positive contributions the cruise industry has in our area. The cruise sector is an integral part of our commercial port. For decades, the cruise industry has been part of our working waterfront, which brings jobs, business and investment to Charleston.

Expanding interstate waterborne commerce to generate jobs for our state is the heart of the Ports Authority's mission. Every time a cruise ship is in port, more than 200 residents are directly engaged in this maritime commerce.

There is also a tourism dimension to the business. While not all cruise passengers are tourists, many of them are. Passengers who come to Charleston to board the cruise ships are spending money — on hotel rooms, in restaurants, at attractions and in retail shops — throughout the area. In fact, many hoteliers report an increase in room bookings when the cruises are at port. Many are visiting Charleston for the first time, and 87 percent of them indicate they will be back to visit again in the future.

Cruise lines also purchase supplies and services from area businesses, products like milk, flowers, water and paper products are purchased locally.

While cruise ships bring street closings for a few hours during the embarkation for those who live and work on the peninsula, all that will change with the construction of the new terminal. The existing port cargo business will be moved out of Union Pier Terminal resulting in a dramatic decrease in rail and

truck traffic associated with moving the cargo aboard the 200 ships that currently use Union Pier each year.

The new terminal will be shifted north on the Union Pier terminal site and will be designed to accommodate traffic flow and parking for the passengers boarding the ships. In addition, north-south traffic flow and capacity will be enhanced, benefitting anyone traveling on the peninsula, even on non-cruise days.

The area where the current passenger terminal is located will be redeveloped, opening incredible views of the harbor that have been blocked for decades by the existing structures.

This time represents a critical moment for the future of the port and maritime commerce. The Trident CEO Council supports the Ports Authority and all of its maritime operations, both cargo and passenger. Charleston port facilities provide the single largest economic driver to our state. Throughout our history when our port thrives, South Carolina's economy thrives. Cruise ships connect the port industry with another of our state's economic drivers — tourism. The arrival of Southwest Airlines to our community in just a few short weeks will bring new visitors to our region, including cruise ship passengers.

The current passenger terminal is old and dated and does not provide a positive first impression to our community. By shifting the location farther north and developing the traffic management and parking plan into the project, the new terminal will relieve congestion, create jobs, address environmental topics and open access to our waterfront — a win-win for everyone.

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