

YMS Nears Critical Phase: A Status Report

Nearly two and a half years in the making, the Port of Charleston's revolutionary Yard Management System takes a shakedown trial run in February with the roll out of its pilot project at the Columbus Street Terminal.

Countless hours of code writing, terminal infrastructure preparation and software engineering will culminate in February as the Port of Charleston boots up its newest productivity-enhancing tool. The computerized Yard Management System (YMS) promises to further speed terminal turnaround times by introducing a revolutionary level of container organization.

The new system will be capable of tracking equipment and instantly reporting its status through the use of radio frequency (RF) computer interaction. This will include monitoring of equipment as it is received from or discharged to

a vessel, received or delivered through one of the Authority's operated gates, or as it is re-handled to complete yard requests. "We are looking to start the pilot project beginning in early February," said Steve Kemp, SPA manager of operations processes. "We will continue testing the software/hardware configurations and civil/electronic infrastructure systems through January. Piloting the new system means we're actually going to accept motor carriers in through the gates using the YMS." Once the Columbus Street pilot project is complete and revisions are made to the hardware and software, the YMS will be rolled



The YMS will incorporate touch-screen technology and radio frequency-based computers.



Working ships fast is only part of the port's productivity. The YMS will yield even higher efficiency.

out to the Wando and North Charleston terminal facilities.

The purpose of the pilot project is to ensure the system is working properly, to iron out any problems, provide any initial enhancements, and get the Authority, motor carriers, lines, agents, brokers, and all other waterfront communities prepared for this innovative move toward the "electronic terminal."

"We have already proved the concepts of the YMS system and we're now going to confirm the code and verify that the applications and infrastructure of the system are working properly," said Ed Tuosto, Vice President of the Transportation Systems Group of Communication Technology for Business, Inc. (CTB). CTB was selected over 2 years ago to assist the Authority in the development of YMS.

Compared to the present paper-driven terminal process, the YMS will provide a more accurate perspective of the ter-

minals. The system keys off of pre-lodged equipment interchange receipts (EIR's), which are inputted by lines, agents, brokers, freight forwarders and other agencies using the present ORION computer system. The data associated with the EIR will interact with the on-terminal computers at the gates; those mounted in container handling equipment and other handheld computers. With this information a container can be tracked in "real time" or information about a specific container can be defined instantaneously (see "Excellence in Real Time", Port News February '98).

"With the information generated by the YMS we will know where the containers are, which will enable us to get to them faster. The personnel completing the work in the container yards will also know what work is coming to them automatically. With this kind of information flow we will be working in a proactive mode

instead of a reactive mode," explained Kemp. "Instead of directing drivers to a 'ballpark' location," said Kemp, the "YMS will generate exact locations for container storage areas as well as stacking orders. The system will automatically assign locations at the gate. Computer generated *Carrier Routing Slips* will be printed instructing the driver exactly how to execute his tasks. At the same time, this information will be transmitted to the appropriate toplifter or RTG operator. This data will be viewed by the operator via a touch screen computer located in his container handling equipment. The operator will then have all the information required to complete the task before the container leaves the gate."

"The whole intent of the pilot project is to confirm the parameters of the system, to make sure everything that we designed both from the network side and the application side are working properly," explained Tuosto. The motor carriers will be issued announcements in advance of the pilot start, describing what to expect while the system is being introduced.

The YMS is not an evolutionary change in terminal operations; it's a revolutionary one.