Testimony of Roland Lewis, President & CEO
New York City Council Subcommittee on Landmarks, Public Siting & Maritime Uses
Oversight Hearing
re: South Brooklyn Marine Terminal
December 15, 2014

The Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance (MWA) is a bi-state coalition of over 800 community and recreational groups, educational institutions, businesses, and other stakeholders committed to restoring and revitalizing the New York and New Jersey waterways. Our waterways have been revitalized with active recreation, environmental education, and waterborne transportation, but the harbor has for centuries been a vital conduit for commerce and an engine of economic development.

Unlocking the value of South Brooklyn Marine Terminal (SBMT) as an active working waterfront site is an important step forward to sustaining an economically productive harbor. The proposed Master Lease between NYC Economic Development Corporation (NYCEDC) and the City of New York will allow EDC to leverage the over $100 million that have been invested to date to bring the facility to a state of good repair and activate the site with maritime uses more quickly and efficiently than under the current agreement.

SBMT is an underutilized public asset that can serve a wider variety of cargo ships and industrial maritime uses with streamlined oversight. Although NYCEDC manages SBMT, it cannot enter into short- or long-term agreements with potential users, limiting the options for delivery of important freight and cargo shipments that keep our regional economy afloat. This administrative obstacle can result in losing shipments to ports in northern New Jersey or even Philadelphia, creating additional truck traffic as well as a missed opportunity for good jobs for New Yorkers. Waterborne goods delivery is ten times more efficient than truck freight, and our tug and barge fleet already prevent 3.1 million truck trips per year.

SBMT is located within one of the city’s six designated Significant Maritime Industrial Areas (SMIA), and its use as an active working waterfront site is consistent with the City’s policy goals as part of the Waterfront Revitalization Program (WRP). The WRP stipulates that “public investment within the SMIAS should be targeted to improve…maritime and industrial operations” and that “activities which support industrial or maritime activity are consistent with this policy” (The New Waterfront Revitalization Program, pg 12). The 197-a community plan developed by Brooklyn Community Board 7, which represents Sunset Park, has also called for the revitalizing SBMT as a “job-intensive high performance maritime, industrial and transportation uses.”

A partnership called DockNYC represents a strong precedent for the reactivation of City-owned waterfront assets with maritime activity. By entering into a contract with a private operating agent, BillyBey Marina Services, to facilitate docking and berthing at six City-owned piers and marinas, NYCEDC has helped facilitate water-dependent activity across a wide variety of uses: industrial, commercial, recreational as well as educational community programming. A Master Lease for SBMT will enable NYCEDC to immediately issue short-term licenses and permits for maritime activity while also pursuing the option to engage a long-term master tenant.

Shipping, marine transportation and maritime businesses are the economic engine of the city and provide thousands of jobs to New Yorkers. MWA calls on this Council and the administration to continue promoting key programs and facilities to ensure the viability of the working waterfront and preserve good jobs and infrastructure that must not be lost.

Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance