

What if a container ship hit a bridge in New York waters?

Six months on from the horrific vessel disaster in Baltimore involving the Dali senior executives in New York grappled with what would happen if a similar incident was to take place in the Big Apple's harbour.

[Barry Parker](#), New York Correspondent

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From left to right: Brian Maloney - Partner: Seward & Kissel, Capt. Tim Ferrie - President: New Jersey Sandy Hook Pilots Association, Capt. Jonathan Andrechik - US Coast Guard, Beth Rooney- Port Director: Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, Discussion moderator Chris Aversano- Product Manager: Veson Nautical Credit: Barry Parker

New York Maritime (NYMAR), in conjunction with the Port of New York and New Jersey chapter of the Propeller Club, hosted a dialogue on measures in place protecting the New York waterfront, and, if such an event did happen, how it might be handled). The hour-long discussion, held at a facility of New York law firm Seward & Kissel, and moderated by Chris Aversano, well known in maritime circles for his "Last Dinosaur" podcast, delved deeply into the practical side of keeping ahead of unknowns.

"As well prepared as you think you are- there's always something more," explained panelist Beth Rooney, the top executive in charge of maritime activities at the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey (PANYNJ), said, responding to a question on whether the Dali caused a rethink of protocols and comprehensive contingency plans already in place.

After reminding the audience that, in Baltimore in the minutes before the collision, the local pilot was able to place an emergency phone call to Key Bridge staff who were then able to immediately close off access to motor vehicles, and avoid massive casualties, Rooney said that PANYNJ staff now routinely makes sure that vessel pilots have communications details for the numerous bridges around the sprawling port area, and that Vessel Traffic System (VTS) operators monitoring routine ship traffic on VHF radio are prepared for initiating emergency communications - not previously in their job descriptions.

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Fellow panel member Capt. Jonathan Andrechik, Commander, [US Coast Guard Sector](#) New York, and Captain of the Port, with considerable experience in response operations and crisis management, said that the “USCG is doing something similar...looking at infrastructures around major US ports.”

He explained that, in May 2024, “the Coast Guard...convened a Ports and Waterways Board of Inquiry...ports across the country have seen increasing volume of port calls...and increased vessel size.” He explained that the effort, which receives high level attention within the Coast Guard, involves looking carefully at 11 high risk ports, including New York, and engaging in discussions with local stakeholders, regarding “the infrastructures around the port and the associated risks.”

Rooney cited successes of cofferdam structures at the base of various bridges, including the Outerbridge Crossing, situated at the entrance to a channel heavily utilized by tanker traffic, saying, “To date, they’ve worked, but [referring to containerships approaching 16,000 teu also calling at the port] the size of the ships has also changed.” She said, “We are now in the process of doing an engineering analysis [of bridges in the port] to insure that the cofferdams are designed for the latest ship designs.”

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There is also an impromptu element complementing organised plans, where the maritime sector responds to disasters in the port; the panelists cited both 11 Sept 2001 events,(where downtown New York saw a massive evacuation, dubbed “The BoatLift”, as well as the January 2009 “Miracle on the Hudson” when a commercial airplane was forced to ditch in the Hudson River after losing engines from bird strikes shortly after take-off from LGA airport. In both cases, commercial and passenger vessels around the port were deployed.