



# Maritime routes of the Greater Caribbean

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Efficient and safe air and maritime transport systems with their adequate airport and maritime-port infrastructure are an inevitable challenge that we face

This is a topic that has been discussed thoroughly in recent times. It is an issue that dates back centuries. In fact, there are those who place it at the same time as the first arrival of the European culture back in 1492 or even the earlier arrival of other navigators who came from the north or the east. Then there are those who approximate it closer to our time, dating it at 1879 when the schooner known as *The Telegraph*, began its first commercial voyage in the Caribbean.

However, the reason for the current dialogue on this subject is not for the purpose of solely determining the moment of origin of maritime traffic and who were its pioneers or furthermore, who will be given credit for having contributed to the commencement of transporting goods via the sea in this region. Today, there are other reasons for examining this subject that are quite different, among which several questions are posed:

- Are there maritime routes among the countries of the Greater Caribbean?
- What are those routes and at which ports do they dock?
- Who are the agents represented at ports, with whom at least one consignment of general cargo can be shipped?
- Do they meet the expectations of Caribbean foreign trade in terms of frequencies, prices and general transport conditions?

Some also move from the practical to the academic debate:

- There's no transport because there's no trade or there's no trade because there's no transport, what is now popularly referred to by some as "the story of the chicken and the egg".

The countries involved in this prodigious maritime scenario called the Greater Caribbean do not have the time right now to dwell on theories involving stories of eggs and chickens. There is an urgent need not to allow this medium that unites us geographically to

facilitate isolation or represent a significant obstacle to trade, due to the lack of the means or strategies necessary to achieve it.

In particular, many regional organisations aware of these realities and taking very seriously the current challenges that we are facing in this area, have pooled efforts and joined strategies in order to, under the noble principles of south-south cooperation, develop multinational projects that would respond to the existing questions and allow concrete strategies to be outlined in the short and medium term. These strategies would allow them to tackle as a united front, the numerous challenges of the current scenario. They are optimistic strategies, real strategies that would pave paths that would genuinely unite the Greater Caribbean by air and sea. This is the case with the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), the Central American Commission on Maritime Transport (COCATRAM) and the Maritime Routes of the Greater Caribbean Project (MRGCP), a project in which a group of regional experts representing COCATRAM, the Ministry of Transport of the Republic of Cuba and the Panama Canal Authority (ACP), have joined efforts. They have proved that a lot can be done with a little, when there is the will to do so, coupled with a sense of urgency and dedication to the task at hand.

The first phase of the project has already been completed and a CD published with the database and the user software created. There have been interesting data and preliminary results that were compiled in July 2009:

- In total, 114 shipping lines cover the Caribbean Basin via 167 routes serviced by a general fleet produced by 614 different types of vessels.
- The total capacity of that fleet is 1,357,992 twenty foot equivalent units (TEUs), of which 149,649 TEUs are refrigerated.
- The frequency for short routes is averaged at 7 days, for intermediate routes, 10 to 14 days and for transatlantic routes, 28 to 45 days.



• For a better analysis during the stage, the services have been categorised into five groups as presented in the table below.

**Regarding the fleet: Types and number of vessels and TEUs**

- The vessels with a greater presence are the container ships (Fully Cellular) that total 56 ships with an overall capacity of 1,280,183 TEUs;
- 456 Fully Cellular ships with 1,280,183 TEUs, 142,583 refrigerated TEUs;
- 54 Ro/Ro ships with 30,313 TEUs, 1,902 refrigerated TEUs.;
- 45 Multi-Purpose vessels with 26,940 TEUs, 2,412 refrigerated;
- 49 Reefer vessels with 16,275 TEUs, 2,310 refrigerated, and
- 10 Car/Truck Carrier vessels with 4,281 TEUs.

The fleet includes substantial quantities, types and TEU capacity to meet the needs of the zone.

**Brokerage Services in the Greater Caribbean**

Shipping agent services are presented in four categories:

- 1) Proper brokerage, which refers to that provided directly by the most important shipping companies through offices that they themselves establish and control in specific countries.
- 2) Sub-contracted brokerage, through which the shipping companies use the services of independent agencies.
- 3) Combination of categories, through which shipping companies have a head office in the capital

and sub-contract independent agents at the ports that they service.

4) Temporary brokerage, where the shipping companies do not have an agency in the countries but they provide services directly from their headquarters. These are the least frequent and occur with a few companies operating from Miami.

In almost all countries, shipping companies have their direct or sub-contracted representation. It is during subsequent stages that the level of satisfaction with the existing services is determined, with regards to the information they provide, prices and degree of benefits.

It is during the future stages of the project that the database formulated would be updated and enhanced according to the specific requirements and recommendations of the users and a thorough examination performed on the studies conducted and the projections made. It will be of prime importance to adequately establish the supply of information that would guarantee the sustainability of these initiatives to foster trade and activities. The tool created by this project will certainly prove helpful for the users if, and only if, it is always kept up to date.

Efficient and safe air and maritime transport systems with their adequate airport and maritime-port infrastructure are an inevitable challenge that we face. Added to that is the growing need for direct connections among the countries that constitute the region, direct links for both sea and air that do not exist currently; links that we are called to create as soon as possible, since uniting the Greater Caribbean by air and sea continues to be the objective. ■

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Zone	Services	Total Routes	Shipping Lines	Total Vessels	Total TEU's	Refrigerated TEU's	Frequencies Days
A	Caribbean/USA/South Am./CA	94	53	196	259,190	38,712	7 to 19
B	Caribbean/ South Am./Mex/CA	17	16	52	74,779	7,825	7 to 14
C	Caribbean/Europe/USA/CAN/Mex/CA	38	38	203	404,214	48,994	7 to 28
D	Caribbean/Asia/Europe/USA/CAN/CA	13	12	125	543,160	43,596	7 to 8
E	Caribbean/ Oceania/Africa/Asia/USA/	5	5	38	76,649	10,522	7 to 45
Total		167	114	614	1,357,992	149,649	