

proponent of AIS technology since its inception. AIS is an effective navigation and communications tool for reducing collisions, enhancing situational awareness, and playing a part in U.S. maritime domain awareness. Its corollary function, as a surveillance tool, has taken on greater import in these times of heightened vigilance and proactive homeland security. Achieving accurate, real-time maritime domain

awareness is of vital interest to the Coast Guard and the Nation. Congress passed the MTSA and the international community, upon the initiative of the United States and through the actions of the International Maritime Organization (IMO), amended SOLAS to accelerate the implementation of AIS.

Our AIS interim rule (USCG–2003–14757), published elsewhere in today's **Federal Register**, is the first step in that

process. That interim rule will implement AIS in accordance with the schedule agreed to at the IMO Diplomatic Conference held in December 2002 on vessels on international voyages (see table below), and it also imposes an AIS requirement on all commercial VTS and VMRS users.

TABLE—SOLAS AIS SCHEDULE (CHAPTER V, REGULATION 19.2.4) FOR VESSELS ON INTERNATIONAL VOYAGES

Constructed	Type of vessel	Implementation date
On or after July 1, 2002 .....	All .....	July 1, 2002.
Before July 1, 2002 .....	Passenger ships (carrying 12 or more passengers) ..	July 1, 2003.
	Tankers .....	First survey for safety equipment on or after July 1, 2003.
	Ships, other than passenger ships and tankers, greater than or equal to 50,000 gross tonnage.	July 1, 2004
	Ships, other than passenger ships and tankers, greater than or equal to 300, but less than 50,000 gross tonnage.	First safety equipment survey after July 1, 2004, or by December 31, 2004, whichever occurs earlier.

The process of deploying this technology into all existing and future VTS areas is well underway. The Coast Guard intends to expand the safety and security benefits of AIS by extending the shore-tracking surveillance capability throughout our Nation's waterways as a major element of maritime domain awareness and homeland security.

Design and installation of the expanded capability is underway but not yet fully operational. Therefore, we want to take this opportunity to ask some questions of the public to (1) assist us in developing an overall AIS strategy, and (2) address expanded carriage of AIS beyond SOLAS vessels, VTS and VMRS areas, and certain other commercial and non-commercial vessels that are omitted from the AIS interim rule (USCG–2003–14757) published elsewhere in today's **Federal Register**.

### Questions

We need the public's assistance in answering the following questions, and any additional information provided on this topic is welcome. In responding to each question, please explain your reasons for each answer as specifically as possible so that we can carefully weigh the consequences and impacts of any future actions we may take.

In preparing your response to these questions, please indicate your position in the maritime industry as well as the type of vessel, cargo, and charter agreement specific to your situation, if applicable.

(1) Recognizing that AIS may ultimately be required on all navigable waters, what particular waterways or

ports should be implemented before others?

(2) Are there particular waterways where the AIS requirements should be waived? Why?

(3) AIS is not specifically mandated (by the MTSA) on all vessels. The MTSA, however, does allow the Secretary to require AIS on any vessel if deemed necessary for safe navigation. Should other vessels (e.g., commercial vessels under 65 feet in length, towing vessels under 26 feet and 600 horsepower, dredges and floating plants, recreational vessels, offshore facilities, or Mobile Offshore Drilling Units) be required to have AIS?

(4) SOLAS expects nations to implement their AIS carriage on their domestic fleet (vessels over 500 gross tonnage and passenger vessels not on international voyage) not later than July 1, 2008. However, the MTSA requires AIS by December 31, 2004. Knowing this, should certain vessels be granted temporary exemptions regarding the compliance dates in MTSA?

(5) Under what circumstances, if any, should a vessel be exempted from the AIS requirements per the MTSA exemption?

(6) SOLAS defines a passenger vessel as carrying 12 or more passengers. VTS regulations define VTS users as passenger vessels over 100 gross tons carrying 1 or more passengers or those certificated to carry 50 or more passenger. The MTSA allows the Secretary to determine the threshold number of passengers when determining which passenger vessels are required to have AIS. Should we expand AIS

carriage beyond what is already defined in SOLAS and our rule?

(7) Should the Coast Guard encourage or require the use of systems such as electronic chart display and information system (ECDIS) and electronic chart system (ECS) to display AIS information to enhance navigation safety? Are there other systems that could be used for this purpose?

(8) Would you be more likely to install an ECDIS or ECS on your vessel, to display AIS information, if the system could be used to comply with an existing requirement to carry nautical charts?

As noted previously, comments regarding these questions, and any other pertinent matters brought to our attention during the comment period, will be taken into account in our future actions regarding the issues raised by these questions.

### Public Meeting

The Coast Guard is considering having two public meetings on this topic, in addition to the public meeting announced in the AIS interim rule, published elsewhere in today's **Federal Register**. We would like your comments on the questions and particular issues that should be addressed at these meetings, as well as where the meetings should be held. Send your comments requesting a public meeting to the Docket Management Facility at the address under **ADDRESSES**. We will announce a time and place for each meeting by a later notice in the **Federal Register**.