

# Canada must 'unleash' port potential, official says

By Ron Samson

**T**ransport Minister Tony Valeri told a recent importers and exporters conference that Canada's goal should be to "unleash the potential of our assets, whether it be our ports, airports or other infrastructure."

Valeri was the keynote speaker at the Canadian Association of Importers and Exporters' 13th annual Emerging Issues in Customs Conference and Trade Show held in Toronto in April.

In demonstrating a sound understanding of the key challenges the nation faces and what is needed to maximize the potential of personal and commodity transportation, the transport minister said: "It is clear to me that transportation is one of the country's key economic sectors in the country.

"Certainly governments at all levels will have to take on a new perspective that recognizes the economic potential of our transportation sector. We need to develop our next generation of transportation policies, frankly a view to levelling the playing field with our main competitors."

Valeri said he believed that Canada's major ports and airports are economic generators and not just sources of rev-

enue for the federal government.

In a session on transportation and ports, Michael Broad, president of the Shipping Federation of Canada, presented a thorough overview of the changes that have taken place since Sept. 11.

He identified some of the major non-security issues, including insufficient port infrastructure, port and terminal congestion, inefficient intermodal transfers, lack of railcars plus other rail capacity, and

inadequate logistical planning.

BMO Financial Group and its vice-president and chief economist, Tim O'Neill, had some good news for conference participants: Fiscal surpluses are likely, which will further reduce government debt load.

O'Neill said Canada is the only G7 country expected to maintain a surplus and have the lowest debt-GDP ratio in the G7 next year. ⚓