



TEXAS

GATEWAY OF THE AMERICAS VI
HOUSTON REGION

CO-HOSTS



FRIDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2023

Partnership Tower

701 Avenida Las Americas, Suite 900 – Houston, TX 77010

FINAL REPORT



FRIDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2023

8:30 AM – 2:30 PM

Location: Partnership Tower

701 Avenida Las Americas, Suite 900 – Houston, TX 77010



GCI - GRUPO CONSULAR IBERO AMERICANO

GRUPO CONSULAR IBERO AMERICANO (GCI) BRINGS TOGETHER CONSULATES OF LATIN AMERICA, SPAIN AND PORTUGAL THAT WORK TOGETHER TO PROMOTE A JOINT AGENDA OF THE COUNTRIES WITH SPANISH AND PORTUGUESE ANCESTRY, IN RELATION TO THE GREATER HOUSTON REGION. THERE ARE TWENTY MEMBERS OF GCI AND INCLUDE: ARGENTINA, BOLIVIA, BRAZIL, CHILE, COLOMBIA, COSTA RICA, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, ECUADOR, EL SALVADOR, GUATEMALA, HONDURAS, MEXICO, NICARAGUA, PANAMA, PARAGUAY, PERU, PORTUGAL, SPAIN AND URUGUAY. THE CONSULATE OF VENEZUELA IS TEMPORARILY CLOSED.



GHP – THE GREATER HOUSTON PARTNERSHIP

GHP IS THE PREMIER ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION OF THE HOUSTON REGION COVERING THE COUNTIES OF AUSTIN, BRAZORIA, CHAMBERS, FORT BEND, GALVESTON, HARRIS, LIBERTY, MONTGOMERY, SAN JACINTO, AND WALLER. GHP IS THE LEADING ORGANIZATION IN THE GLOBAL RELATIONSHIP OF HOUSTON, ORGANIZING TRADE MISSIONS TO COUNTRIES AND STRENGTHENING RELATIONSHIPS. IN THE PAST EIGHT YEARS IT HAS ORGANIZED TRADE MISSIONS WITH THE MAYOR OF HOUSTON TO MEXICO, BRAZIL, ARGENTINA, CHILE, COLOMBIA, PERU, PANAMA AND CUBA.

ABOUT THE REGION

THERE ARE TWENTY-ONE SPANISH AND PORTUGUESE COUNTRIES IN THE AMERICAS TOTALING 681 MILLION PEOPLE. TRADE WITH THE UNITED STATES IN 2022 WAS \$1,175 BILLION, 21.9% OF U.S. TRADE. THE HOUSTON REGION IS ONE OF THE MAIN TRADE PARTNERS WITH THE AMERICAS BEING THE #1 PARTNER WITH EIGHT OF THE TOP THIRTEEN ECONOMIES IN THE AMERICAS.

BESIDES ITS LARGE MARKET, HOUSTON HAS BECOME THE BUSINESS GATEWAY OF THE AMERICAS FOR LATIN AMERICA THANKS TO THE PORT OF HOUSTON, #1 IN TONNAGE IN THE UNITED STATES, AND THE HOUSTON AIRPORTS SYSTEM THAT CONNECTS THE AMERICAS WITH TEXAS AND THE REST OF THE COUNTRY. WITH 44% OF THE POPULATION OF LATIN ORIGIN, HOUSTON IS THE NATURAL PARTNER OF THE AMERICAS FOR BUSINESS, TOURISM, EDUCATION AND OTHER SECTORS. “GATEWAY OF THE AMERICAS” IS DESIGNED TO STRENGTHEN THIS RELATIONSHIP.

Note: Presentations, bios and photos can be access at <https://www.houstongatewaytoamericas.org/>

INTRODUCTION

“Houston: Gateway of the Americas VI” - Houston Region -

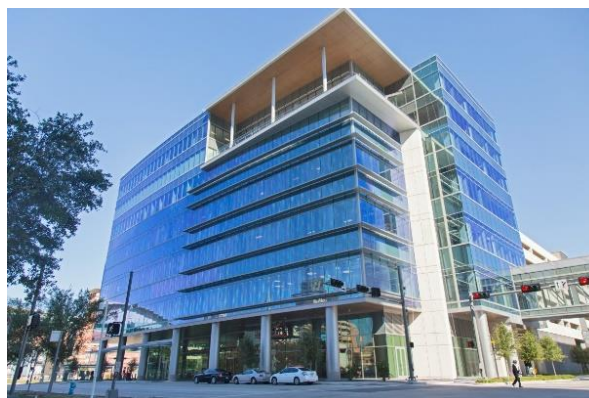
Houston, Texas. October 20, 2023

The sixth version of the Gateway conference took place on October 20 at the Partnership Tower in downtown Houston. The program, hosted by the Ibero America Consular Group (GCI) and the Greater Houston Partnership (GHP), was initially designed to promote the Houston Region as the natural partner of the Americas, supported by its connectivity, large presence of Latinos and complementary economies. In the last few years, especially since the expansion of the Panama Canal in 2016, Texas’s relationship with the Americas has grown exponentially which prompted a change in the branding to “Texas: Gateway of the Americas”, and the conference will be expanded in 2024 to North Texas (Irving) and San Antonio, in addition to Houston.

The conference, chaired by the Dean Emeritus of the Consular Corps of Houston, Ambassador Juan B. Sosa, started with a welcome address highlighting Houston as the #1 Global city in the United States and the leader of the region in sectors such as oil & gas, Life Sciences and Healthcare, manufacturing, conventions, transportation, logistics and others. The strategic partnership between the Greater Houston Partnership and the Ibero America Consular Group, co-hosts of the conference, was also highlighted.

Amb. Sosa explained the goals and structure of the conference. Five segments were programed beginning with 1) Sea and Land transportation, 2) Aviation, Air Hubs and Hospitality, 3) Business Services & Sports, 4) Institutional Support and, 5) Luncheon with several updates. Nineteen first-class speakers spoke for about fifteen minutes each; at the end of the segment the moderator opened the floor for questions and comments from the audience. There was a late lunch starting at 1:30 PM. During the lunch there were five short updates by the Dean of the Consular Corps of Houston and several business leaders. The lunch ended around 2:30 PM when the conference was formally adjourned.

The conference was financially supported by Chevron as Platinum partner; Foster Global, University of Houston, HDR Inc. and Houston Airports System Development Corporation (HAS DC) as gold; Port of Houston, DN Commercial, PROPANAMA, Real Time Analytics as Bronze, and the US-Mexico Chamber of Commerce, the U.S.-Panama Business Council, URmarketeam and Casa Cultural de las Américas as supporters. There were 95 confirmed participants and 88% turned out, an exceptional rate, plus five unconfirmed attendees. Seven consulates of the Americas were represented at the conference.



CORPORATE PARTNERS

PLATINUM



GOLD



SILVER



SUPPORTERS





Date: Friday October 20, 2023
Time: 8:30 AM – 2:30 PM
Location: Partnership Tower

PROGRAM

TIME	PROGRAM	SPEAKERS	ORGANIZATION
8:30 AM	CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST Networking Gateway of the Americas Welcome	Juan B. Sosa	Gateway
9:00 AM	SEA & LAND TRANSPORTATION Overview - Moderator Sea transportation Logistics and Supply Chain Technology Railroad transportation	Kevin Keller Ty Reasonover Margaret Kidd Catherine McCreight Arielle Giordano	HDR Port Houston Univ. of Houston TX DOT CPKC
10:15 AM	AVIATION/ TRAVEL & HOSPITALITY Moderator Aviation Travel & Hospitality	Juan B. Sosa Agustin Arellano Pete Garcia	Gateway HAS DC USMCOG
11:00 AM	COFFEE BREAK		
11:25 AM	BUSINESS SERVICES Immigration Sports Artificial Intelligence	Joe Perez Chris Canetti Claudia Rojas	Foster Global World Cup 2026 Real Time Analytics
12:35 PM	INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT Government Business Culture	Christopher Olson Martha Cruz-Guzman Jenny Fula	City of Houston GHP Casa Cultural de las Américas
1:00PM	TEXAS EXPANSION TO THE AMERICAS	Carmen Gisela Vergara	PROPANAMA
1:30 PM	LUNCH Remarks UPDATES Institute for Global Engagement Port Freeport DN Commercial Port of the Future	Herbert Espinoza Michael Pelletier Jason Miura Danny Nguyen Kevin Clement	Dean of CCH University of Houston Economic Develop. Commercial Real Estate University of Houston





TEXAS
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HOUSTON REGION

Speakers and Presenters

Click on each panelist name to view individual profile



[Agustin Arellano](#)
President & CEO
Houston Airport System
Development Corporation



[Chris Canetti](#)
President
World Cup 2026
Harris Sports Authority



[Kevin Clement](#)
Executive Director
Port of the Future Conference



[Martha Cruz](#)
Senior Director Americas,
Int. Investment & Trade
Greater Houston Partnership



[Hon. Herbert Espinoza](#)
Consul General of Costa Rica
& Dean of the Consular Corps
of Houston



[Jenny Fula](#)
Chief Development Officer
Casa Cultural de las Americas



[Arielle Giordano](#)
Assistant Vice president USA
Government Affairs
CPKC



[Pete Garcia](#)
President
USMCOC
The Woodlands & Gulf



[Kevin Keller](#)
Senior VP
Director Multimodal
HDR, Inc.



[Margaret Kidd](#)
Program Director
Supply Chain &
Logistics Technology
University of Houston



[Catherine McCreight](#)
Senior transportation Planner
Texas Department of
Transportation



[Jason Miura](#)
Director of Business and
Economic Development
Port Freeport



[Danny Nguyen](#)
President
DN International, LLC



[Joe Perez](#)
Partner
FOSTER GLOBAL, LLP



[Christopher Olson](#)
Director of Trade &
International Affairs
City of Houston



[Michael Pelletier](#)
Founding Executive Dir.
Inst. Global Engagement
University of Houston



[Claudia Rojas](#)
Partner, CEO
Real Time Analytics



[Ty C. Reasonover](#)
Senior Manager
Trade Development
Port of Houston



[Amb. Juan B. Sosa](#)
Chairman - Gateway of the
Americas & Dean Emeritus
Consular Corps Of Houston



[Amb. Carmen G. Vergara](#)
General Administrator
PROPANAMA

WELCOME

Amb. Juan B. Sosa, Chairman of “Gateway of the Americas” Conference



Juan B. Sosa highlighted the importance of “Gateway of the Americas VI” conference, started in 2015 together with Pete Garcia and Claudia Rojas, that shows the importance of the relationship of Texas with the Americas and the growing interaction not only of Houston but of all of Texas, especially after the expansion of the Panama Canal in 2016.

This Texas relationship has been especially evident in the movement of containers and energy related products through ports of the region. As such, in addition to Houston, the largest port in tonnage in USA, the ports of Corpus Christi, Port Freeport, Beaumont, Galveston, Port Arthur and Brownsville among others, have shown significant increases in trade with the Americas and with Spain and Portugal, part of the Ibero America Consular Group that together with the Greater Houston Partnership are co-host of the conference. The Houston Region is the #1 trade partner with eight of the top thirteen economies of the Americas and has significant trade with the Iberia Peninsula.

NEW FORMAT OF THE GATEWAY CONFERENCE

To reflect the growing relationship between Texas and the Americas, the branding was changed from “Houston: Gateway of the Americas” to “Texas: Gateway of the Americas -Houston Region-”. In 2024 North Texas (Irving) and San Antonio will be added to the conference and they will be named by region. for instance, Houston’s conference in 2023 added “-Houston Region” to the branding of “Texas: Gateway of the Americas”. The conference in North Texas will take place in the last week of February and in San Antonio in mid-year 2024. The 2023 the conference has been divided into five segments:

- Sea and Land Transportation
- Aviation, Air hubs and Hospitality
- Business Services and Sports
- Region’s Institutional Support
- Texas Expansion to the Americas

For the luncheon, the Dean of the Consular Corps of Houston, Herbert Espinoza Solano, gave opening remarks, followed by four updates: on the University of Houston’s Institute for Global Engagement, Port Freeport development, commercial real estate, and the University of Houston’s Port of the Future conference, to take place the first week of April 2024.



SEA AND LAND TRANSPORTATION



Keving Keller, HDR, was the moderator of the Sea and Land Transportation segment. The transportation system of Texas is one of the most important in USA and the main link to the Americas, spearheaded by the Port of Houston. There are several energy and two container ports in Texas with links to the Americas and the land transportation system of Texas, which includes roads and railroads, is a well-established network that connects Mid-America with Mexico through land and railroad and the rest of the Americas through the ocean. The recent merger of Canadian Pacific and Kansas City Southern has strengthened the Texas transportation system.



Ty Reasonover, Port of Houston, showed the growth of the port since 2017, coming close to 4 million TEU's in 2022 and becoming the #1 USA port in overall tonnage; the Americas represent 20% of its trade. Four major shipping lines: Maersk, CMA-CGM, MSC and Hapag Lloyd operate with the Americas and Seaborne Marine with Central America. Railroad connection with Mid-America through Union Pacific and BSNF provides an excellent service, and the Panama Canal has become a strategic partner of the port, servicing Asia and the Pacific coast of the Americas. The Port is undertaking an ambitious expansion program in the channel (Project 11) and upgrading its container terminals.



Margaret Kidd, University of Houston, made a presentation on economic development and supply chain that during the pandemic faced intense pressures for the delivery of goods in a timely fashion, especially from distant sources, that has opened opportunities to ports of the Americas, closer to USA. Today Mexico #1, Brazil #4, Colombia #11, Spain #15, Perú #18, and Chile #19 are in the top 20 trade partners of USA and the Panama Canal is an important transit for goods to and from the Port of Houston and other Texas ports. As such, Texas has become an important player in the on and nearshoring that is occurring, attracted by its increasing market size, connectivity and pro-business policies.



Catherine McCreight, Texas Department of Transportation, gave a briefing on new technologies that are being introduced in the region to improve transportation in the Greater Houston area and in the state, that for years has faced vehicular congestion problems. Texas is investing \$105 Billion in the next ten years, 10% of it in the Houston region, to be able to move more people and goods efficiently. The next phase of transportation will be heavy in technology and infrastructure and Houston, through the mobility platform Houston ConnectSmart is introducing a number of technologies that will make transit of vehicles more efficient which includes the "Regional Express Access Lane" that will be able to redirect traffic in areas facing congestion.



Arielle Giordano, Canada Pacific Kansas City (CPKC), made a presentation on the impact of the merger between Canadian Pacific and Kansas City Southern on transportation improvements between USA and the Americas. CPKC is finalizing what will be the first single line railway between USA and Mexico; it is expanding its Chicago hub and Laredo Bridge and improving infrastructure that will allow transit from Mexico to Chicago in four days. Through the Meridian & Bigbee Railroad in Southeast USA, it will improve connectivity with the Americas through Southeastern ports and has introduced Hydrogen innovation in locomotives converting diesel fuel to hydrogen, thus improving carbon footprints.

AVIATION, AIR HUBS AND HOSPITALITY



Agustín Arellano, Houston Airports System Development Corporation, made a presentation on the services of HASDC, a part of HAS, which is devoted to assist international airports in its planning, infrastructure, financing, operations, compliance, marketing, passenger and cargo growth, emergency response and other aspects. HASDC does this as advisors, developer, administrator or any formula that fits the interest of the airport and HASDC. At present HASDC has relationships with several airports in the Americas including airports in Quito Ecuador, Barranquilla Colombia, two in Costa Rica, and airports in Honduras, Puerto Rico and others. 70% of international passengers to Houston airports come from the Americas and between Houston & Miami they represent 80% of travelers from the Americas. HASDC has a unique number of services that no other airport in the USA offers to their airport counterparts. This has helped establish a personal relationship with countries and airports that is part of Houston's partnership with the Americas.



Pete Garcia, US-Mexico Chamber of Commerce, made a presentation on the importance of Houston to the Americas, beginning in the 1990's when Continental Airlines opened dozens of routes to Mexico, which was followed in 1998 with the establishment of the "Hub of the Americas" with Copa Airlines in Panama. Texas has seventeen airports that connect to Houston and Dallas, making it an impressive air connection. The airport of Houston has several "banks" throughout the day which are essential to the connectivity with the Americas. With 187 connections for Houston Intercontinental and 87 for Hobby, it provides the base for an extensive route structure that includes 5 airlines and 22 non-stops flights to Mexico, 3 airlines and 10 non-stop to Central America, 8 to South America and three to the Caribbean. Between the two airports Houston moves 54 million passengers on 26 carriers. As airports come back from the pandemic, more emphasis is being given to leisure travel than corporate travel.



BUSINESS SERVICES & SPORTS



Joe Perez, Foster Global, had a conversation with Juan B. Sosa on the controversial topic of immigration. Perez's cautioned the conversation with a warning: "It is nearly impossible to be politically neutral when discussing immigration law/policy. This is so since immigration politics and policy are intertwined and inseparable. Nonetheless, a serious and respectful discussion must be had by our elected leaders in a spirit of compromise and bipartisanship". Prepared questions were presented by Juan Sosa with participation from the audience. Perez's answers are included in a document that has been published in the website of the conference <https://www.houstongatewaytoAmericas.org>



Chris Canetti, Houston World Cup 2026, made a summary of what has transpired since Houston became a potential host of the World Cup and the process that led to been selected as one of the eleven USA cities and 16 including two in Canada and three in Mexico. The 2026 World Cup will be breaking new ground with 48 teams (nations) for the first time. This change will give more opportunities to countries from the Americas, perhaps twelve or thirteen, which will bring a record amount of fans from abroad, generating an income for the Houston region of more than a Billion dollars in the three weeks of the tournament. Houston will host five or six games and they will be played at RNG stadium. This will impact relations with the Americas positively.



Clauda Rojas, Real time Analytics, The transformative potential of Data Analytics, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and ChatGPT was explored, the significance of each, from improving decision making with Data Analytics to the diverse applications of AI, including voice assistants. The presentation emphasized synergies between data analytics and AI, its future potential and challenges like privacy and bias, and the importance of the human element, ethical responsibility, and balance between automation and human judgment. Nearshoring of talent from Latin America, specialized in Data Analytics, AI and now ChatGPT, was addressed as business opportunities with the Americas. Chat CPT and its language generation capabilities was highlighted.



HOUSTON'S INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT



Chris Olson, City of Houston, made a presentation on Houston's Economic Landscape and the role that the City plays in international relations, working closely with the Consular Corps of Houston and the Greater Houston Partnership. Under the leadership of Mayor Sylvester Turner, several trade missions have been coordinated to countries of the Americas including Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Cuba, Perú and Panama. The Office of International Affairs has also been active in bringing new consulates which today exceed more than ninety accredited consular offices. The office of International Affairs also plays a large role in supporting the establishment of companies from abroad, and in the relationship between the Mayor's office and communities from abroad, which has made Houston the most diverse large city in the USA. The City has been active in the development of its tech and innovation, energy transition and others. Houston is considered the Oil & Gas capital of the world, and has been selected as one of seven hydrogen centers.



Martha Cruz-Guzman, summarized the role that the Greater Houston Partnership plays in relation with the Americas. Besides organizing trade missions, receiving trade & investment groups from abroad and assisting companies to establish and grow in Houston. In 2022 GHP received 168 trade delegations which translates to two every three working days. Today, close to one out of every two business projects have an international component. Some of the initiatives that GHP has been pursuing include manufacturing and logistics, aerospace and aviation, headquarters and professional services, energy, health and life sciences, digital technology, carbon capture and others. GHP has been for four years co-host of the "Texas Gateway of the Americas" conference and as a strategic partner of the Consular Corps of Houston is host of their monthly luncheon. One of the divisions of GHP is devoted entirely to international and the Americas is part of that.



Jenny Fula, Casa Cultural de las Américas. On November 29, 2023 at Grand Hall, Rice University, la Casa Cultural de las Americas pays a tribute to the great Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges on the 100th anniversary of the publication of his first book, "Fervor de Buenos Aires" with a bronze bust created by Carlos Benavidez and an art exhibition featuring 20 scale replicas of the bust, each interpreted by a different Texas artist. The combination of literature and visual arts is a fantastic way to create a unique and intimate connection between Borge's written words and the artistic interpretation they inspire. Visit <https://www.ccamericas.org/>

TEXAS EXPANSION TO THE AMERICAS



Ambassador Carmen Gisela Vergara, PROPANAMA. Panama and Texas have developed over the years a "Strategic Partnership" anchored in the relationship between the Port of Houston and the Panama Canal, between the Intercontinental Airport of Houston and Panama's "Hub of the Americas", and the solid contributions of multinationals such as Dell Technologies, Chevron and Caterpillar among others.

At the heart of this is Panama's role as a trade hub for more than 500 years, with one of the most impressive connectivity of any country, with 180 maritime routes, 170 countries, 1920 ports through the 14,000+ Panama Canal transits. Air connectivity is also impressive with 85 destinations to 39 countries, 133,000+ air operations, 15 commercial airlines and 15.8 million passengers.

Panama has become a regional headquarters for multinationals from all over the world, with 189 corporations using Panama as a base, which allows them to house personnel in a secure (lowest crime rate of the region) environment, using the dollar as currency, good housing and living conditions, and connectivity to all countries of the regions allowing for an efficient transfer of personnel. Several Texas companies use Panama as center of operations for the region including Dell Technologies, Caterpillar, Halliburton, Port of Houston while others like Sysco, United Airlines, Chevron, Bell Helicopter and others prosper locally.

Panama's relationship with other countries is strengthened by 23 trade agreements that cover 54 countries and a potential market of 1.6 billion people. It has one of the best sustainable economies with a superior growth to the regional average performance. Its special economic zones and laws are a magnet for attracting corporations and it has the highest direct foreign investment ratio of any country in the region. Its business parks such as Panama Pacifico and City of Knowledge are efficient and the Colon Free Zone, with 3000 companies operating in its premises trades \$19 billion dollars a year, second largest free zone in the world, after Hong Kong.

The "Strategic Partnership" between Texas and Panama, reinforced by a consular office in Houston, and being Texas the #1 economic partner of Panama, presents an opportunity for Texas companies to incorporate Panama in their South American strategies which would help expand Texas' presence in the Americas.



LUNCHEON



Herbert Espinoza, Dean of the Consular Corps of Houston & the Ibero America Consular Group, talked about the Consular Corps of Houston with more than 90 accredited consular offices and more than 80 active, making it the third largest in USA after New York and Los Angeles. The Consular Corps has established strategic alliances with important stakeholders such as the City of Houston, GHP, Houston Airports, Port of Houston, World Affairs Council and others, to promote the work of the Corps, and holds monthly luncheons. The Ibero America Consular Group, part of CCH, devotes its energies to promote the relationship between countries of Ibero America and Houston and is the co-host of the Gateway conference.



Amb. Michael Pelletier, Institute for Global Engagement, University of Houston, has led the institute since its inception two years ago. In a short time, the Institute, following the objectives of Educate, Engage and Lead, has established 85 global partnerships to internationalize and increase global knowledge of the Houston community. This is being done through a number of initiatives that include learning abroad, collaborative international learning, membership in international associations, and the creation of a number of activities designed to incorporate students into the globalize world that we live in.



Jason Miura, Port Freeport. Port Freeport is part of the Greater Houston Region located sixty miles Southwest from the City of Houston. It hosts several energy related corporations such as Dow Chemical, Freeport LNG, Phillip 66, BASF and others, and is ranked in the top ten of chemical ports in the United States. Port Freeport has the Velasco Container Terminal which is in the top thirty of USA, it is in the top-ten of roll on-roll automobiles terminals, and is one of the top ten ports in growth. In 2021 had 1,283 vessel arrivals and moved 37 million tons. At present is undergoing an ambitious channel expansion and container terminal renovation.



Danny Nguyen, DN Commercial, one of the leading commercial real estate firms in the Houston Region. Originally from Vietnam, his firm, DN Commercial, has been instrumental in supporting businesses from Asia which has made Houston one of strongest cities in diversity. Danny Nguyen has also been active in the politics of the region having been member of the Missouri City Council and active in many associations which has strengthened Asian population in the region especially from Vietnam. DN Commercial works closely with international clients and believes that the opportunities of the Houston region with the Americas should be pursued.



Kevin Clement, UH - Port of the Future Conference. It is an initiative of the University of Houston. In 2023 the conference attracted 400+ participants and 57 ports representatives from all over the world. The conference will be held at the Hilton Hotel of the University of Houston's campus on April 2-4, 2024 and will have ten tracks: (1) Port infrastructure (2) Decarbonization & alternative fuels (3) Workforce development (4) Port development (5) Port energy & sustainability (6) Terminal operations (7) Security & Cybersecurity (8) Marine wind energy (9) Intermodal connectivity (10) Other relevant topics.

A PARTIAL LOOK AT THE PARTICIPANTS / NETWORKING

