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Distinguished TRANSPORT LECTURE Series 2017

Shrinking Supply Chains and the Consequences for Ports and Maritime Logistics



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Lecture Abstract The growth of container traffic has fallen from three times the growth of GDP before the global financial crisis to less than one times the growth of GDP now, as a result of a number of long-term structural changes in the global economy. There has been a shift in GDP from tangible goods to intangible goods and services, replacing physical supply chains by digital supply chains for things like music, films, books and documents. The spread of automation in manufacturing has reduced the importance of labour costs for some products, leading some manufacturing to move closer to its consumers, thereby shortening supply chains. The consequent weakening of demand for maritime container shipping has been accompanied by the arrival of larger ships, as shipping lines seek to minimise their unit costs. In order to help fill the new capacity, container shipping lines have formed three giant alliances to reduce the duplication of services and increase the economies of scope. For ports, the result of these developments

has been larger batches of containers to load and unload, increasing the demand for space and machinery, but not matched by increasing container throughput. The automation of ports, which has been spreading gradually from Europe and Australia to other parts of the world, will at some point be accompanied by the arrival of autonomous ships. This presentation will discuss these momentous changes in the container shipping industry and explore the implications for ports, in particular, for port cities like Hong Kong.

About the Speaker Michael Bell is the Foundation Professor of Ports and Maritime Logistics in the Institute of Transport and Logistics Studies, at the University of Sydney Business School. Prior to this, he was for 10 years the Professor of Transport Operations at Imperial College London and for the final 5 years at Imperial the Founding Director of the Port Operations Research and Technology Centre (PORTeC). He graduated from Cambridge University with a BA in Economics and obtained an MSc in Transportation and a PhD on Freight Distribution from Leeds University. Before arriving at Imperial College London, he worked as a Research Associate at University College London, as an Alexander von Humboldt post-doctoral Research Fellow at the Technical University of Karlsruhe, and as a Lecturer at the University of Newcastle, where he was promoted to a Readership and then a Personal Professorship. His research and teaching interests span ports and maritime logistics, transport network modelling, traffic engineering, and intelligent transport systems. He is the author of many papers, a number of books (including *Transportation Network Analysis*, published in 1997), was for 17 years an Associate Editor of *Transportation Research Part B*, the leading transport theory journal, and is currently an Associate Editor of *Transportmetrica A* and *Maritime Policy & Management*.

Date: **20 October 2017 (Friday)**
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