Welcome to Container Cast, the Trade and Transportation Podcast from the Center for International Trade and Transportation at California State University, Long Beach. I’m Mat Kaplan. Our guest is Dr. Thomas O’Brien, the CITT’s Director of Research and Research Coordinator for the Metrans Transportation Center at CSULB and USC.

Mat: Tom, Welcome back to Container Cast.

Tom: Thank you Mat.

Mat: We’re once again looking back at one of your columns for the Long Beach Business Journal. This one titled, “Competitive Visioning.” And you began this with a description of a conference that was put on by another group that is based here at Cal State Long Beach, which for once, I had something to do with.

Tom: Right, maybe this is an opportunity for me to interview you for a change.

Mat: Ah, go for it. Sure.

Tom: Well, Mat tell us about the Center for Commercial Deployment of Transportation Technology’s integrating efforts.

Mat: Well, what happened was that this group, the Center called CCDoTT for short, put on a program called “Delivering the Goods,” and it was a very interesting collection of spokespeople, because the session I had - which focused on technology, which you I’m very glad to say stuck around for most of - had people from the railroads, we had people from utilities, the academics, a fellow who had come down from Lawrence Livermore who everyone was in awe of. But the discussion was absolutely fascinating as we talked about different modes of transportation. Much of it kept on coming back interestingly, to electricity, but we certainly did not reach a consensus, and I think that was a lot of what you wanted to write about.

Tom: Right, but by the way I like it way better on this side of the microphone.

Mat: ok, we’ll switch places.

Tom: ok we can go back, we can go back.

Mat: I actually like it better on this side, so...

Tom: Yea, the purpose of this piece which I called “Competitive Visioning,” came out of my experience sitting in this conference, which if my understanding is correct, and you as a
moderator can help answer this, was designed to sort of figure out where you can build consensus around technology...

**Mat:** We were looking for common ground.

**Tom:** Right, among all different industry stakeholders, and including our elected officials. And what was clear is that there was a general agreement on the need to do so, but that it’s very difficult to develop consensus on what the future of the industry looks like.

**Mat:** You know, I’ll pretend that you are still interviewing me, because I want to add we had a really diverse disparate group there. They all wanted to work together, at least from what they were telling us. They want to see a common vision, but really, nobody’s pulling that together, either in that little meeting or nationwide.

**Tom:** Right, and I quote a member of the breakout group that I sat in, which I think may be the most sort of distinct message that came out of this session which was that “one man’s vision is another man’s hallucination.” And when you talk about advanced technology, that sometimes is the case. But I mean you need big thinkers but you also need somebody to say what are the potential of unintended consequences, what’s the real cost of doing this? And that’s where some of the consensus breaks down, I think in my opinion. It’s worth asking the questions but difficult to do nonetheless.

**Mat:** At another conference which you’re very intimately tied to that takes place every year, sponsored by the Center for International Trade and Transportation and METRANS ...

**Tom:** And Metrans, right.

**Mat:** which as we speak is about to happen, but may have already happened as people hear this, but that is the Urban National Freight Conference, is there some overlap in concern?

**Tom:** I think there is. One of the things that came out of the [CCDoTT] Conference was the need to make sure you have good data and good information if you are going to make decision about investments - whether it’s infrastructure, technology, or environmental mitigation, whatever it is. And one of the purposes of the National Urban Freight Conference is to try to figure out who’s doing research in those areas and to share it with not only fellow researchers but people in the industry, elected officials, and to do so across boundaries, to find out what’s happening in other places in North America and in Canada in particular. There will be a large contingent from Europe this year, particularly places like Belgium and the Netherlands where some of these technologies have already been tested or implemented. Different political context, but that’s why it’s worth exploring them to see whether there’s lessons that can be learned for Southern California or the US as a whole.
**Mat:** Good that you mentioned Europe, since that’s a big part of the meat of this column, where Europe apparently looks like not only are they trying to coordinate research but they’re making good progress on coordinating policies across at least the European Union.

**Tom:** Yeah, the EC is putting forth a public education campaign at the continent-wide level called “Key Performance Indicator,” right an exciting title...

**Mat:** Not really.

**Tom:** No, it’s not, but members of the media have sort of dubbed it the “sexy shipping campaign” which I like a lot better...

**Mat:** Much better.

**Tom:** It actually conveys a lot more of some of the difficulty in getting the message out about the benefits of the industry in terms of jobs, potential employment, economic development, linkages between the various companies in the EC, so the campaign looks at educating the public, but also gathering data to make sure that the message that goes out there is robust. And I think that’s what interests me as a researcher, and to go back to NUF, why a gathering of researchers is so valuable particularly if it includes dialogue with industry members to find out what research might be used to allow the industry to sort of get the word out about what it does, why it does it, what benefits accrue to the public, and also what the costs are in terms of the environment. And I mean, all of those are part of the equation. But, I think the fact that we don’t have a National Goods Movement Strategy makes it much harder for us to have a National Goods Movement Educational Campaign, and you know that’s why it would be interesting to hear what our Canadian colleagues have to say at the Conference; because there is a much more strategic effort underway in Canada, looking at the role of their trade gateways, including the ports but also, border crossings. We often forget that the Detroit-Winsor border crossing plays a significant role in international trade and NAFTA trade in particular. So, I think the give-and-take at the conference will be valuable and we will have a better understanding after October 23rd, when the conference ends, if the potential for a sexy shipping campaign is possible or likely here in the US or in North America.

**Mat:** Or as you say, if not sexy, at least well-coordinated and good.

**Tom:** Good, I mean we’ve got to start somewhere. I said we have our puitanical tendencies here, so we may not want to go from zero to sexy right away.

**Mat:** I do want to mention that we will be doing some recordings at the National Urban Freight Conference, and so our listeners can watch for those to appear online. I think we’re going to
talk to some of the prominent speakers there and I think we may be recording a session that you’ll be leading at the conference.

**Tom:** Right, I’m going to be moderating a session on what researchers need to know about the industry. It’s an opportunity for the audience, in particular, the academic members of the audience, to hear how our work is used in industry if it is used in industry, whether it’s understood to be relevant or not; if it’s not, then how can we make it more relevant. How we can identify opportunities for data sharing and partnerships which is a lot to cover, and if we get to half of that, I’ll be very happy. But I think it is an important dialogue that needs to take place.

**Mat:** Yea, and an important bridge that needs to be built as well. I hope that we’ll also be able to get to you to recap the whole conference for us in one of these future editions.

**Tom:** I would love that, I look forward to it.

**Mat:** Excellent, ok Tom, as always, great talking with you.

**Tom:** Thanks Mat.

**Mat:** You just heard Container Cast, where our guest has been Dr. Thomas O’Brien. Container Cast is produced by the Center for International Trade and Transportation, a division of the College of Continuing and Professional Education at California State University, Long Beach, and in partnership with the METRANS Transportation Center. We’d love to hear from you. Write to us at CITT@ccpe.csulb.edu. We offer an outstanding selection of events, programs, and courses, including the Global Logistics Specialist program. Visit us online at www.ccpe.csulb.edu/CITT or call 562-985-2872 that’s 562-985-2872.