

Vessel Traffic Services

What is expected of a Shipmaster

Co-operation and understanding between the ship and the shore is essential to the safe operation of vessels in a VTS area. Masters are expected to make the best use of VTS in navigational decision making.

Participation

Regulations or instructions are issued as to the types or classes of vessels that are required or requested to participate in the VTS. These regulations or instructions will include the radio frequencies to use in communicating with the VTS and a detailed list of the information to be provided. At all times VTS expect alertness on the part of the bridge team in monitoring VTS communications.

Compliance

Vessels operating in a VTS should acknowledge information from the VTS when asked and respond promptly to inquiries. Shipmasters are expected to adhere to VTS operating procedures and react to all warnings, advice and instructions.

Responsibility

As in any navigation situation, Shipmasters and mariners are expected to exercise good seamanship and comply with the Collision Regulations. The authority of the Master is never compromised by participation in a VTS.

further information

Information on VTS may be found in IMO Resolution A.857(20), The IALA VTS Manual (2008), the World VTS Guide and in numerous nautical publications.

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What a shipmaster
can expect of the VTS,
and what is expected
of the shipmaster.



A Vessel Traffic Service is a service implemented by a Competent Authority, designed to improve safety and efficiency of vessel traffic and to protect the environment. The service should have the capability to interact with traffic and respond to traffic situations developing in the VTS area.

IMO Guideline for Vessel Traffic Services Resolution A.857(20)



Vessel Traffic Services (VTS) differ significantly from routing measures and ship reporting regimes. VTS are equipped, staffed and enabled to interact with marine traffic through the provision of specific services and to respond to developing situations in the interest of safety and efficiency. This guide briefly explains those services and how these interactions might take place. It also provides insight into the expectations the VTS would have with regard to vessels operating within its area of responsibility. It is important to note that, of the following services, only the Information Service is available at all VTS. Traffic Organization and Navigation Assistance Services are available at the discretion of the Competent Authority. ■■■

Services Provided by the VTS

Information Service (INS)

The VTS Centre receives, processes and disseminates information about conditions and events important to shipping and safety at sea. VTS endeavour to deliver information that is timely, relevant and accurate. This may include information on the position, identity or intentions of other participating vessels in the VTS area; visibility or weather; the availability of berths or anchorages; the status of aids to navigation, or any other information that could impact a vessel's safe transit. Vessels are provided information at regular broadcast intervals, on request or whenever circumstances so require.

Traffic Organisation Service (TOS)

VTS manage space in the waterway. In doing so, VTS may allocate arrival or departure times, assign anchorage space, manage traffic in one way zones or employ other measures related to preplanning of vessel movements.

Navigational Assistance Service (NAS)

VTS can provide positioning or navigation assistance on request, in times of uncertainty or if a vessel's navigation equipment is malfunctioning. Such assistance can also be given if the VTS deems it necessary. In providing navigation assistance, the VTS delivers advice to assist with on-board navigational decision-making. This may include bearing and range to a nearby danger or landmark, a course to make good to a waypoint, advice on a course to steer, or assistance in determining a vessel's position. Information to assist navigation decision making must be provided in a timely manner, and must be clearly understood by both parties and not open to misinterpretation. Message markers as per IMO Standard Marine Communication Phrases (SMCP) will likely be used. The VTS may ask the vessel to provide additional information so they may properly assess the ability of the vessel to safely participate in NAS.

What a Shipmaster can Expect

VTS are equipped, staffed, and organized to deliver the aforementioned services.

VTS Equipment

Mariners can expect that VTS have complete and reliable communications coverage of their area of responsibility. Most VTS have surveillance using radar and the Automatic Identification System (AIS) in order to detect, identify and monitor vessel movements. Modern VTS employ data processing systems to manage information and produce a reliable and accurate traffic image upon which the VTS operator bases his or her decision making. Mariners can also expect that the VTS records all communications and activities within range of its sensors.

VTS Personnel

Authorities that provide VTS endeavour to train their VTS personnel to high international standards and in accordance with the types of services being provided. Mariners can expect that the training of VTS personnel is to the same standards imposed on shipboard personnel and that VTS personnel are aware of the demands placed on the bridge watch team.

VTS Procedures

Most VTS operating procedures have been designed to meet international standards. For example, mariners can expect that VTS are familiar with and capable of communicating using the IMO SMCP. However, local conditions may also dictate how the VTS delivers services.

Shipmasters should note that each VTS operator may be monitoring a number of vessels within the VTS area. Therefore, the operator will not be able to devote the same level of attention to each vessel as an individual vessel is able to dedicate to its own ship domain.