Could forward accommodation blocks become mainstream?

Sam Chambers June 10, 2025

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Maersk has shown the way for other shipping sectors to radically shift ship design with the decision it took earlier this decade to shift accommodation blocks forward for a series of methanol-fuelled boxships. Other sectors are now looking at similar shifts.

Two new projects focus on relocating the crew living quarters and navigation bridge from their conventional aft position to the bow of the vessel.

In a joint development project between Lloyd's Register (LR), HD Hyundai Mipo Dockyard (HMD), and PanOcean, a new ultramax bulk carrier design has been introduced, featuring a forward accommodation block. This layout, traditionally used

only in niche vessel types, is being reimagined to address a new challenge: spatial limitations for integrating decarbonisation technologies.

Similarly, a second initiative—an approval in principle agreement between LR, HMD, and the Liberian International Ship & Corporate Registry (LISCR)—revealed plans for a 50,000 dwt MR tanker with forward accommodation. The novel configuration is designed to enhance visibility for wind-assisted propulsion (WAPS) while providing space for technologies such as ammonia dual-fuel systems and carbon capture units.

Discussing the new tanker design, Sung-Gu Park, LR's president of Northeast Asia, commented: "This project demonstrates the urgent need for commercially viable and regulation-ready vessel designs that accommodate decarbonisation technologies without compromising operational efficiency. It represents our shared commitment to enabling the maritime industry's transition to net-zero through intelligent design, practical innovation, and collaboration."

Historically, forward accommodation blocks have been restricted to specialised vessels—such as heavylift ships, ice-class vessels, Great Lakes bulkers, and river barges—where visibility, cargo access, or regional constraints justified the layout.

Now, the push for low- and zero-carbon operations is driving shipbuilders and owners to re-evaluate legacy designs. The aft-located superstructure, once ideal for balancing cargo and machinery, has in the view of some naval architects become a bottleneck for modern emission-reduction technologies, many of which require significant real estate and specialised positioning onboard.