

*Maritime***Administration's Infrastructure Plan Won't Work for Inland Waterways, Group Says**

The Trump administration's plan to use public-private partnerships as part of its \$1 trillion infrastructure proposal won't work for funding the country's inland waterways system, a maritime group said.

Private investors need to see returns for public-private partnerships to be successful, Michael J. Toohey, president and CEO of the Waterways Council Inc., told reporters at a June 1 media briefing in Washington. A common method to recoup private funding for highways is charging tolls, he said. But a similar user-fee approach wouldn't work for the inland waterways system that is comprised of locks and dams, Toohey said, citing failed industry tests.

"In order to get the private sector to invest [in waterways infrastructure], you're going to have to charge other beneficiaries," Toohey, whose group represents barge operators, said. He cited recreational boaters as users of the system's waterways.

Since private investment won't work, according to Toohey, the federal government must continue paying at least half of the money to maintain and improve the inland waterways system, he said. The current funding structure is a 50/50 cost-split between commercial users of the waterways and the federal government.

**Pay Double, Get the Same** The group lambasted the administration's recent budget proposal for suggesting that commercial inland waterway operators pay double to increase the Inland Waterways Trust Fund. The fund

is used for upkeep, construction, and other inland waterway projects.

The Office of Management and Budget's FY 2018 budget proposal called for \$108 million in new revenue to be generated yearly by the trust fund. The request drew the ire of the waterways council because it called for commercial users to pay more into the trust fund while simultaneously cutting the government's appropriations for the inland waterways.

"Inland waterways operators should not be looked upon to pay DOUBLE what we pay now in our current user fee/fuel tax when the Administration proposes to spend only 12.3% in FY 2018 of the amount that we are generating into the Inland Waterways Trust Fund," Debra Calhoun, the council's senior vice president, told Bloomberg BNA in a June 1 email. "Commercial operators are just one of many waterways beneficiaries, among them recreational boaters that put as much, if not more, wear-and-tear on the infrastructure."

Calhoun recently told Bloomberg BNA the administration's proposed user fee would result in higher shipping prices that would get passed along to consumers. Communities along the Mississippi River—those that voted heavily for President Donald Trump—would likely be hit hardest by the fees, she said.

The Mississippi plays a large role in international trade because it is the central artery of a sprawling river system and drains into the Gulf of Mexico. Bustling ports in Louisiana line the river between New Orleans and Baton Rouge.

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