



New Administration, New Push for Waterways Infrastructure



As we fully settle into the New Year and a new presidency, the Waterways Council Inc. (WCI) is preparing for the possibility of an infrastructure package to be offered from the administration and/or Congress. The inland waterways are well positioned to be included in a broad infrastructure package since locks and dams offer benefits to the nation's transportation challenges, to the economy and U.S. exports, and to all that enjoy the rivers. The United States depends upon a resilient and sustainable transportation system and the waterways are a key part of the intermodal network.

According to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, approximately one-sixth of the nation's total intercity commercial tonnage travels on the river transportation system. Additionally, the pools created by the lock and dam system support commercial navigation and recreational boating and activities. The pools also provide drinking water to millions of Americans and cooling water for manufacturing facilities, generate hydropower, facilitate U.S. energy and agriculture production and exports, and transport construction and aggregate materials. All said, the rivers help to sustain the nation's economy and societal well-being.

America's inland waterways transportation system is comprised of 12,000 miles of navigable waterways in 38 states. In 2019, 514.9 million tons of cargo valued at just over \$134 billion moved on the inland system.

The inland waterways offer the lowest environmental footprint among other modes of surface transportation, with minimal noise and air pollution. Barge

transportation also makes the most of its fuel efficiency, with towboats moving one ton of cargo 647 ton-miles per gallon of fuel, compared to trucks moving it 145 ton-miles per gallon, and locomotives transporting that cargo 477 ton-miles per gallon. A standard inland river configuration of one towboat pushing 15 barges of dry cargo moves as much cargo as 1,050 semi-trucks on our highly congested roadways, or six locomotives pulling 216 rail cars.

Historically, the U.S. has recognized the vital contribution that waterborne transportation makes to overall prosperity. Achieving sustainable and resilient inland waterways has been a national goal since the country's founding more than 200 years ago.

Public expenditures to create and maintain these navigation channels and to construct and maintain locks and dams have been among the nation's earliest infrastructure investments. Similar investments are even more critical today to assure an efficient 21st century freight system that facilitates U.S. competitiveness.

Congress, in bipartisanship, continues to embrace the national goal of making resilient improvements to the inland waterways transportation system. In recent years, lock modernization projects have been authorized, like the Navigation and Ecosystem Sustainability Program (NESP), which will add additional lock capacity at seven existing small-chamber projects on the Upper Mississippi River and the Illinois Waterway, and the Upper Ohio Navigation Project, which will modernize three of the oldest lock and dam projects on the Ohio River.

When constructed, these projects will

provide significant transportation benefits and contribute to overall transportation system sustainability. To this end, in addition to the Kentucky Lock and Chickamauga Lock projects currently under construction, Congress has authorized the construction of 15 priority modernization projects at a total cost of \$7.1 billion to be built by the Corps of Engineers.

When seeking economic recovery through infrastructure investment, the inland waterways should be considered to stimulate our economy, create jobs, and be a key part of our nation's environmental sustainability. The National Waterways Foundation commissioned a study that analyzed the economic impacts of preserving the current inland waterways transportation system and expediting the construction of Congressionally authorized lock and dam projects to be completed in 10 years rather than the current estimate of more than 20 years.

The study surmises that preserving the current system is critical, helping to sustain nearly 541,000 full-time jobs and \$21 billion in annual incomes. According to the study, expediting waterways' modernization over a 10-year timeframe will add 35,000 jobs to the total, create \$14 billion in additional incomes over 10 years, and decrease overall system construction costs through greater efficiency.

Recognizing President Biden's stated interest in a potential infrastructure package, WCI will be advocating for the inclusion of lock modernization projects to create a sustainable advantage to American industries/shippers, to increase the reliability and efficiency of the waterways, and make U.S. industry more competitive at home and in world markets.

A meaningful infrastructure package should include at least \$7.1 billion of infrastructure funds for ongoing and new construction projects to modernize locks and dams contained in the Corps of Engineers 2020 Capital Investment Strategy.

The nation's goal this year should be to finally invest in its foundational infrastructure so that it can continue to serve our country well.



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