



Cost increases dominate discussion at IWUB



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The Inland Waterways Users Board (IWUB), the federal advisory group that makes recommendations to Congress on matters related to the inland waterways system, gathered for its 99th meeting in April in Pittsburgh. The meeting also included a tour of the Lower Mon Project, which will modernize and improve navigation on the Monongahela River in southwestern Pennsylvania.

This meeting of the IWUB may have been like any other meeting of any other group addressing U.S. infrastructure projects, with cost increases and overruns most likely a very common theme across the gamut of transportation modes and other sectors. On the inland waterways transportation system, decades of under-funding led to delays in completing lock and dam modernization projects. But a 2020 IWUB-Corps partnership developed what's known as the Capital Investment Strategy (CIS) that evaluates and prioritizes the highest needs and provides a blueprint for funding priorities for infrastructure projects on the inland waterways. To date, the CIS has served as the IWUB's and the Corps' guiding document to ensure that federal and industry funds are appropriately invested to realize benefits to the nation.

And although there is now a CIS plan in place, cost increases on inland waterways system projects continue to dominate the discussion at IWUB meetings. For example, among priority navigation lock projects, Chickamauga Lock (Tennessee River) requires an additional \$237 million to complete; the Lower Mon project requires at least an additional

\$41 million; Montgomery Lock (Ohio River) requires an additional \$300 million, and Lock 25, for which ground was just broken on May 18, will see significant costs increases, totaling nearly \$3 billion, according to Deputy Commanding General for Civil and Emergency Operations MG William (Butch) Graham, who attended the April IWUB meeting.

In the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs

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Act (IIJA) of 2021, \$2.5 billion in full federal funding was allocated to the inland waterways. That funding represented a 400% increase for inland waterways construction and major rehabilitation projects from the last infrastructure package (American Recovery and Reinvestment Package of 2009), and of all construction funding provided, the inland waterways received two of the three largest allocations in the IIJA workplan.

While IIJA identified and funded seven priority inland waterways projects—and even

noted that five of them were funded to completion—billions more is now needed to finish them. For some, that may be tough to hear, but ROI to the nation is clear, with the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee recently noting a return of about \$12 for every \$1 expended as the annual net economic benefit generated by the Corps' Civil Works mission. Unfortunately, the reality is that additional funding is needed to complete these critical priority navigation projects on the nation's inland waterways system.

As the IWUB stated in its 2020 Annual Report to Congress, “The U.S. has long recognized the vital contribution that waterborne transportation makes to overall prosperity. Achieving an ever-more-sustainable and resilient inland waterways system has been a commonly held national goal for more than 200 years. Navigation channels have been created and locks and dams constructed with continually advancing features to increase the system's capacity, improve its performance, and prevent or minimize the risks posed to the system. Just as public expenditures to create and maintain these navigation channels and construct and maintain these locks and dams have been among the country's earliest infrastructure investments, similar investments are just as critical today to ensure an efficient 21st century freight system and to maintain the critical competitive advantages the waterways system creates for our nation's economy.”

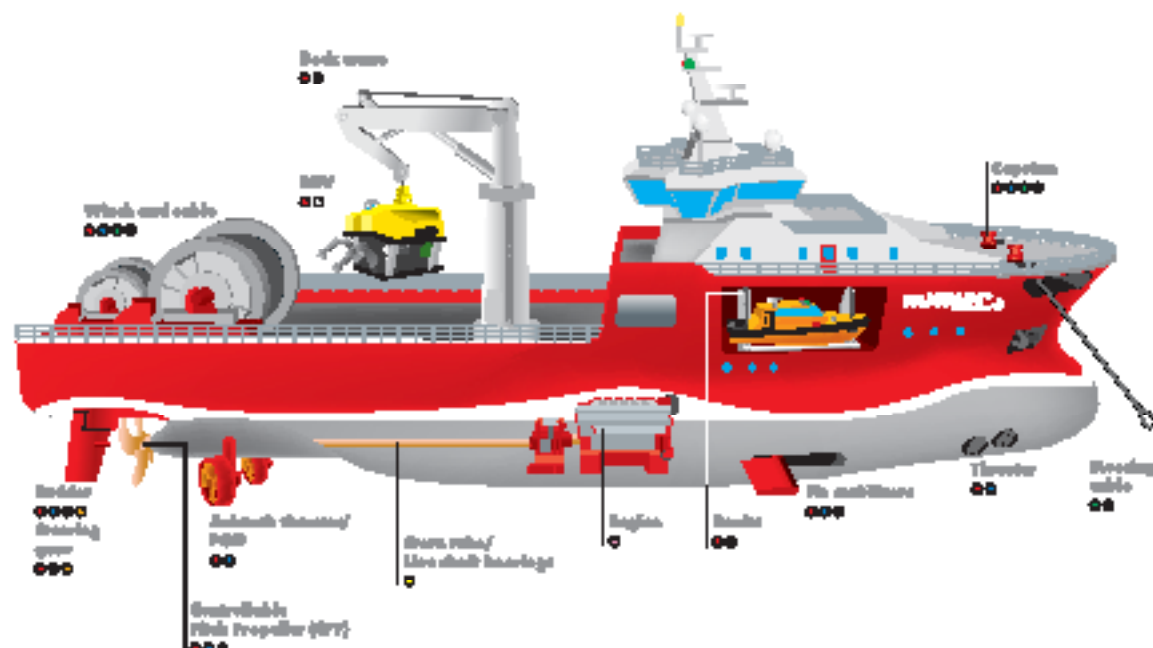
It continues, “each year, approximately one-seventh of the nation's total intercity commercial tonnage travels on the river transportation system, which, in addition to the economic advantages of river transportation for our nation, alleviates significant congestion and wear and tear on our national highway system. Additionally, the national infrastructure that creates the pools the river system depends on to support navigation, is essential to providing drinking water for tens of millions of Americans, generates hydropower to meet national energy demand, provides cooling water for manufacturing facilities and controls waterflow to protect communities from flooding and to help grow agricultural products, all of which further sustain the nation's economy.”



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