

Waterways

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Oberstar says TWIC needs readers

Minnesota Congressman James Oberstar's House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee held a hearing on the Transportation Worker Identification Credential (TWIC) last month to hear about progress and problems. Oberstar emerged expressing concern that the biometric cards are no better than current IDs until reader technology is implemented by Lockheed. Oberstar says that the card does offer an additional layer of security, but is not serving its intended purpose.

The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) is putting the card in place to keep people who are potential security threats away from secure areas of U.S. ports.

Maryland Rep. Elijah Cummings told the hearing that progress has been made on opening enrollment centers, but those original estimates of 750,000 workers needing cards was too low. One reason for the underestimate was there are higher

than expected numbers of companies and workers who want container terminal access. Anyone wanting to do business in a secured area will need a TWIC by Sept. 25, of this year.

More employees may be covered by TWIC once the Coast Guard puts out its rules on which type of vessels need the card to control access to secure areas.

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Within the Upper Mississippi river Sector, the TWIC coordinator is LCDR Carl Kepper.



(left) Progress continues on the new Interstate 35W bridge in Minneapolis. Crews have now begun making visible progress with concrete forms for bridge piers. The picture shows that the new foundations will be close to the right descending bank and will make exiting the Lower St. Anthony Falls lock somewhat easier.

From the Executive Director:

What's Next for NESP?

A mere 3 weeks after the President's Christmas signing of WRDA 2007, the Corps of Engineers (COE) held a Jan. 14, meeting with the towing industry to, in their words, 'advertise' NESP and update all on projects, funding and plans.

Funding always a problem

Funding continues to be the major impediment to design and engineering work already started for 2 locks (22 & 25), with PED scheduled for the remaining 5 locks starting in 2010. When asked where yet-to-be-appropriated funds may be spent, the COE responded that new funding would be distributed according to each project's comparable progress. This sounds like another way of saying that projects nearest to completion will get the money. That sounds logical, but may not always be appropriate.

As for new construction, NESP project will follow a staggered construction schedule from 2010 to 2018 with completion some 8-10 years hence – with a total cost of \$1.94 billion (Oct 2006 price levels). Fortunately NESP projects have their own funding mechanism, making it less likely that scarce funds will be applied to non-NESP projects. Although it remains unclear how NESP funding will be allocated between environmental and navigation projects, clarification may come when the President issues his FY 2009 budget due out as we write.

Trust fund going south

The COE's PowerPoint® presentation included several graphics depicting project funding and dollar flows into and out of the Inland Waterways Trust Fund that weren't too encouraging. The Trust Fund graphic, with an annual income of \$100 million, forecasts that the Fund balance will approach zero in 2008 and will go negative, reaching a minus \$800 million in 2013 then recovering to a minus \$400 million in 2017.

These numbers, of course, represent projects authorized under the COE's 2005 program, which does not include NESP. Nevertheless, this negative trend prompted the White House last

year to suggest other funding mechanisms, but nothing specific developed.

A new barge tax?

While the Corps did not address this issue at the January meeting - other than to say that they build authorized projects, they don't fund them – others have. WCI's Barry Palmer expects the President's FY 2009 budget will probably involve a barge lockage fee of about \$70 per barge. "They want to capture about \$200 million with a barge lockage fee, and have that replace the diesel fuel tax, which generates about \$100 million", said Palmer.

The President's FY 2009 Budget

While writing this column, we got word that the President released his budget for FY 2009. According to information received from WCI, the proposed budget includes allocations for the COE's Civil Works program in the amount of \$4.741 billion in new funding plus \$5.761 billion for emergency needs, making the total request \$10.502 billion.

O&M in this year's budget request is \$2.475 billion compared to last year's \$2.243 billion.

The following WCI priority projects were funded:

Olmsted L&D (Ohio River, IL/KY), \$114 million; Kentucky Lock Addition (Tennessee River, KY), \$22.3 million; McAlpine Lock (Ohio River, IN/KY)\$6.2 million; Marmet (Kanawha River, WVA), \$9 million; Lower Monongahela River 2, 3 and 4 (PA), \$40.8 million; Chickamauga Lock (Tennessee River, TN), \$42 million, and Emsworth Dam (Ohio River), \$25.8 million, totaling \$260 million.

At this time it is not possible to determine the amount of major rehabilitation dollars for Mississippi River Locks and Dams 3, 11, 19, 24 and 27, plus Markland on the Ohio.

Not included, according to WCI, are monies for NESP on the Upper Mississippi River and the Upper Ohio River Navigation Study.

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New barge tax confirmed

As some predicted, the FY 2009 budget proposes a “barge lockage fee”, albeit not fully defined.

“The Administration has proposed creation of an alternative funding source to the fuel tax. It would consist of a fee imposed on commercial barges using locks operated by the United States Army Corps of Engineers. The fee would be phased in beginning October 1, 2008, with increases each year through December 31, 2012. Automatic adjustments to the fee would be made annually beginning in 2013, based on the total net assets in the Trust Fund.”

Born cynics, after reading the above quote, may be moved to note that the Administration proposes an ‘alternative funding source to the fuel tax’. Does this mean the proposed alternative would be in addition to the current fuel tax, or a replacement for it? If the latter is the intent, that should be made clear from the outset.

But then obscurity always has been known to serve many ends.

L&D 3 work on schedule

Some of the work at Lock and Dam 3 will be done underwater. The Corps of Engineers says the lock sill will be modified near the upstream and downstream gates to accept new bulkheads. Getting this done will require some tricky underwater placement, done by the Corps’ Maintenance and Repair and Diving Section out of Fountain City, Wis.

The Corps says repairs are on schedule and the refurbished structure will be ready for its March 15, reopening.

Maintenance items include vertical concrete joint and surface repair on the walls, horizontal concrete repair on the floor and corner, protection armor replacement and replacement of parts of the miter gates and bubbler systems, as well as sandblasting and repainting gates.

(Page 4) Crews remove old timers on upper L&D 3 miter gate.

You own riverfront property

Did you catch the OpEd column by Paul Labovitz in the Jan. 13, StarTribune? In his column he talked about the gasoline spill on I-94, which demonstrated that, “We all live on the riverfront.”

Labovitz reminded readers, “If you live near a storm drain, you own riverfront property. Yet who normally considers that something spilled onto the highway in downtown Minneapolis will end up 5 miles away in the Mississippi River? Or that the same will happen to leaves swept into a storm drain in St. Anthony Park?”

“This accident reminds us that the Mississippi River catches everything we drain within its watershed, good and bad. We have a great river, a national park, in our back yards, and it needs attention and protection.”

Editor’s note:

As you have no doubt noticed *Waterways* comes to you in a new format. Because of this and the steep learning curve for the editor, our apologies for any inconsistencies and outright mistakes in this newsletter.



