

Waterways

A publication of the Upper Mississippi Waterway Association

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In Illinois and elsewhere...

Waterways are 'in Crisis'

A recently released Illinois Chamber of Commerce report leaves little doubt about its contents and conclusions. "Waterways in Crisis" focuses on the Illinois River and the state's Mississippi River infrastructure and says, "It is critical that economic development, regional planning and civic organizations join the Illinois Chamber of Commerce and lend their support to waterway modernization's inclusion in all future federal infrastructure improvement proposals in addition to their support for road, rail and transit projects."

Cargo shifts costly

The report also details what a shift of cargoes to other modes would mean for Illinois: "The failure of just one of the locks along the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal would require nearly 50,000 tons of cargo each day to be transported on the state's highways rather than via barge. That translates into nearly 2,000 additional semitrailer trucks, a line that would stretch from the Chicago Loop to Naperville."

The report says that barges rise and fall the equivalent of four stories at the Lockport lock, whose structure is currently headed toward "uncontrolled seepage." If things get worse, the Corps of Engineers says it may be forced to shut down the lock and that would mean coal, road salt and other commodities would be off-loaded to trucks and add congestion and pollution to area roads.

Cracked and crumbling

The Corps says the walls of the Lockport lock are cracked and crumbling and seepage is undermining portions of a 50-foot wide earthen and rock levee behind them. A \$141 million repair project has started to build new walls inside the old ones but, the Corps says, at the present rate of funding, those repairs will take at least until 2012 to complete.

The Chamber estimates that failure of the Lockport lock would mean about \$16 billion in commodities would be forced off the river and onto other modes, likely raising costs as well as pollution levels. As *Waterways* pointed out in a recent edition, the Iowa Department of Transportation's comparison chart shows that 870 semi-trucks would be needed to handle the coal or other product carried in one 15-barge tow. That would mean a line of trucks 1 1/2 miles long.

High risk

A Corps assessment of the waterway above the lock put it in the second-worst risk classification on a five-level scale. A report issued last year said that very limited advance warning time would be provided to businesses and residents in the event of a breach at the lock.

If you would like to find out more about the Illinois

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From the Executive Director...

NESP does not qualify for stimulus dollars

This is not breaking-news, but it does clarify that stimulus dollars may be used only on construction projects that are already funded or are currently underway. And since NESP projects have neither of these attributes, they must await funding in FY 2010. The Corps' portion of the nearly \$900 billion stimulus package allocates \$2 billion for construction, of which not less than \$200 million must be spent for water-related environmental infrastructure. From the wording in the environmental language, they, too, have restrictions against new-starts.

As for the good news, navigation related construction projects that qualify for the stimulus program will not be cost shared with the Inland Waterways Trust Fund, which, for the first time since its creation in 1986, does not have adequate funding to meet its 50 percent split of project cost.

Other good news is that the Corps is said to have more than \$10 billion in qualifying projects they can execute by the end of FY 2009, possibly including a portion of the embankment project at Lock & Dam 3. It is well recognized by the Corps and others that a flood condition at this site could cause the embankment to fail rapidly resulting in an accidental drawdown of Pool 3.

Corps gets \$6.4 billion from stimulus package

In addition to the above mentioned \$2 billion for Construction, the Corps was also allocated \$25 million for Investigations, \$375 million for Mississippi River and Tributaries, \$2.075 billion for O&M, \$25 million for Regulatory Program and \$100 million for Site Remedial Clean up. All accounts except the last two appear to bar new starts.

President Obama's 2010 Budget

On February 26, the President unveiled a \$3.5 trillion budget outline for fiscal year 2010 which includes a \$5.1 billion discretionary budget for the civil works program.

According to the *Chicago Tribune* website, the budget 'outline', as it is called, is not a budget per se – but more a political blueprint with broad goals and few

line items – reflecting deficits of \$1.7 trillion for 2009 and \$1.1 trillion for 2010, both of which will be twice as large as the worst previous year on record.

The section on Civil Works states that funding will focus on construction of high-return investments in the three areas of primary responsibility: commercial navigation, flood risk reduction and aquatic ecosystem restoration. To assure that all investments provide the Nation with quality benefits, the Budget outline supports projects with multiple purposes that integrate environmental principles into traditional infrastructure projects.

Proposed lock fee

The Budget outline also proposes to phase out the current tax on fuel and replace it with a lock usage fee to preserve the cost-sharing reform established by congress in 1986.

The Budget outline emphasizes funding that supports maintenance, the safe and reliable operation of facilities and elimination of deferred maintenance, all with the intent "...to improve the performance of aging Corps infrastructures.

The Budget outline will also focus on Corps management reforms to lower project costs, improve accountability and maximize return on waterway projects.

The Budget outline is silent, however, as to the major cause of cost and time overruns, and to the 1200-foot lock projects authorized in WRDA 2007.

Micro-managing with bandaids

While the Budget outline is without specifics, its overall tone suggests that commercial navigation will be forced to make do with band-aids on already aging infrastructures, while regulators micro-manage in an effort to get the Corps to lower projects costs, for which, arguably, others are responsible.

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Chamber study and its Infrastructure Council, go to www.ilchamber.org.

Spotlight on waterways

All the conversation about infrastructure projects prompted by the recently passed stimulus package has helped bring attention to the importance of the nation's waterways and their potential. For example, Associated Press reporter Steve Szkotak recently wrote a story titled, "25,000 miles of navigable waterways seen as efficient alternative to truck-clogged US highways."

In his story Szkotak says, "Increased concerns about fuel prices and global warming in recent years have revived interest in marine highways from the Erie Canal to the Chesapeake Bay to the coastal waters off Oregon, Massachusetts and Texas. Proponents envision further expansion of the country's 25,000 miles of navigational waterways by making greater use of the coasts and inland routes such as the St. Lawrence Seaway, the Great Lakes and the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers."

The story points out that before rail and road systems, most of the country's goods were shipped by water.

"Today, 94 percent of all domestic freight moves on rail or by truck. But not without some cost. Congestion on roads and rails costs the U.S. economy as much as \$200 billion a year and 44 billion person hours, according to the transportation department.

"One 15-barge tow removes 1,050 tractor-trailers from the highways. And with just a gallon of diesel, a barge can move one ton of cargo 576 miles. A rail car using the same amount of fuel moves that ton of cargo 413 miles, while a truck gets only 155 miles."

The writer points out that a major expansion faces several obstacles including locks which haven't been updated in decades and the scarcity of U.S. ships to serve domestic ports along short-sea routes.

"Despite these infrastructure and regulatory constraints, entrepreneurs are charting a way forward, one tugboat trip at a time," Szkotak says.



(above) High water last year reduced clearance at the I 35E bridge and sent large logs downstream

Mazurowski speaks to UMWA

After another cold winter and lots of snow on the watershed, shippers are again watching forecasts to assess the prospects for high water this spring. At the next Executive Committee meeting March 19, Cargill Meteorologist Al Mazurowski will give members his thoughts and long range forecasts for the season.

As Mazurowski will tell you, the accuracy of a forecast is inversely related to date in the future for which the forecast is given. However federal and state emergency services people in North Dakota, South Dakota and Minnesota are holding a series of flood preparedness meetings this month. Measurements show that Bismarck, N.D. has had more than 70 inches of snowfall so far, with more likely in March. Planners say that given a "normal" March snowfall of 8.5 inches, that area of the Missouri watershed would be just below the record snowfall of the 1996/97 season.

And the Corps of Engineers has been measuring Lake Pepin ice and finding up to two feet of blue ice in some areas. Shannon Bauer at the Corps says it seems likely that the shipping season open will come in April as did last year's.