

# Waterways

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## Breakthrough finally opens 2013 season

Rake barges were not designed as ice breakers, but they did the job last week when the ARTCO boat

Roberta Tabor pushed 12 -barges through Lake Pepin. There were still 12 to 16 inches of ice on the lake and it made quite a racket.

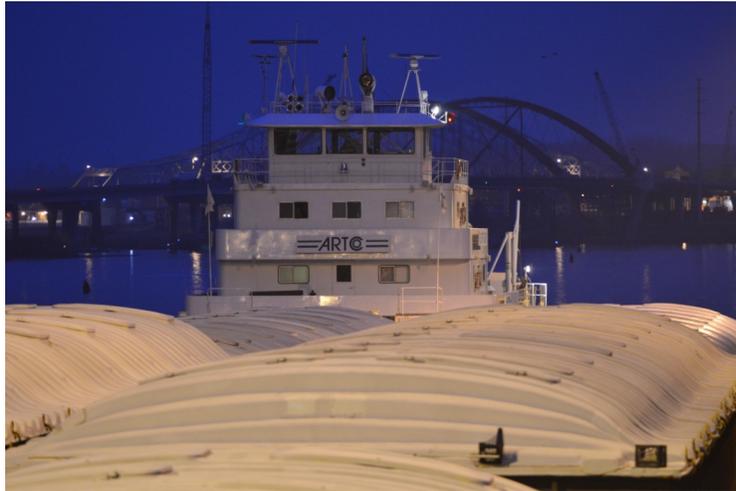
When the Tabor and its barges [locked through Lock and Dam Number Two](#) at Hastings, it was the latest shipping season start, not related to flooding, on record. Last year the Deana Ann came through the lock on March 17 and the Corps of Engineers says the average start date is March 20.

### A challenging year

The delay followed a challenging year that, for a

time, threatened to close the river entirely due to low water levels. And the new season begins on a waterway whose

examples of the low grade infrastructure on the inland waterways. Last Thursday, a piece of metal fell off a hy-



(above) In this COE picture by Patrick Moes, the Roberta Tabor locks through L&D #2 at Hastings

draulic gate on the [Emsworth Locks](#) on the Ohio River. Luckily the keeper pin assembly fell on top of the gate instead of into 20 feet of water. Repairs took eight men about six and a half hours and in that time tows tied up for about a mile above and below the structure. An estimated 80,000 tons of coal pass through Emsworth Locks every day.

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### Many other problems

Last month the Marseilles Lock on the Illinois River was shut down for almost a week because of miter gate leakage.

And water continues to gurggle up through cracks in the [Montgomery Locks](#) and

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infrastructure was recently graded D- by the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE). ASCE says its grades are based on system capacity, condition, funding, future needs, operation and maintenance, public safety, resilience and innovation.

One doesn't have to look far or long to see real-world

## From the Executive Director...

*Editors note: This is the second in a series of UMWA letters to Minnesota legislative committees regarding navigation lock closure to control the upriver migration of Asian carp.*

April 4, 2013

Members of the Upper Mississippi Waterway Association are concerned over expressions by legislators and others that the Mississippi River lock at Upper St. Anthony Falls should be closed as “it isn’t used for much anyway”.

That’s absurd – infrequent use of a navigation lock is what the waterway industry strives for over the entire system: To use locks only when absolutely necessary. That’s what makes locks efficient; that’s what makes them ecosystem friendly; that’s what makes them a positive economic force to the region, state and nation.

The above quote also overlooks the fact that one barge transports the equivalent of 70 truck loads. As a result, a normal two-barge tow in the Minneapolis harbor removes a minimum of 140 loaded trucks from local streets and highways. This should be applauded and encouraged by city officials and environmental groups, not belittled.

### **Important to the economy**

Transportation corridors may not be foremost in the minds of the general public, but are central to the agencies who construct and finance them and to the people and companies who use them. Perhaps this is why the Minneapolis locks are held in such disdain: The City does not own them, does finance them and does not maintain them; consequently, the City has little interest in them. Instead, they are seen as impediments to reclaiming the entire upper harbor for redevelopment and amenity purposes.

The business community, on the other hand, sees the Minneapolis locks as an asset, as facilitators of low-cost and environmentally friendly transport to domestic and export markets. Minnesota agricultural goods and other material that utilize barge transport is valued at \$1.9 billion of which 645,000 tons originated or was destined to Minneapolis with an estimated value of \$652 million (2011).

### **Important to landside infrastructure**

While neither the State nor City of Min-

neapolis have any ownership or investment in navigation locks, both have a vested interest in the street and highway infrastructure they complement. Navigation locks protect that investment.

For example, over a normal barge season, lock openings at Upper St. Anthony Falls to allow passage of barges filled with aggregates, scrap metal, fertilizer and other products would require 274 truck trips per work day along the Interstate Highway 94 corridor based upon 2011 tonnage (MnDOT). This has been substantiated by the Metropolitan Council’s June 2012 “Assessment of Economic Impact of Potentially Discontinuing the Operation of the Upper St. Anthony Falls Lock” study, although we are still waiting to see how the truck trip figures will be represented in the final Met Council report. The heaviest burden of this traffic will fall on legislative districts 52, 59, 60, 63, 64, 65 and 67.

All in all, according to the Met Council, the Minnesota economy will lose 127 jobs, along with a total of \$40.7 million in wages and other impacts. The Met Council acknowledged that while the impact would not be significant (a mere 4 percent of the state’s \$900 billion economy), the impact to specific business and individuals who lose their jobs would be.

### **Impact on the environment**

A river barge does not impact highway traffic, nor does it create drive-time gridlock. In addition, a tow boat can go more than 4 times further on a gallon of fuel than a truck, while producing only one-tenth the amount of green house gas. For this reason alone, barge transport should be publicized and supported by the DNR, federal and state policymakers along with environmental and water quality organizations. Unfortunately, to date too many should-be supporters are leading the charge to close locks while ignoring the environmental consequences.

### **Necessary for future growth**

Through 2020, the Minnesota Statewide Freight Plan (2005) expects truck traffic to grow by 79 percent, carload rail by 34 percent and water by 22 percent, suggesting that eliminating the water mode with a lock closure will put increase and unsustainable demand on the remaining modes. Efficient transport corridors are huge assets to a state, region or nation; care

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must be exercised in making future decisions. In an ideal world, the state's Transportation commissioner would go to great lengths to make policy makers and his Governor aware of corridor alternatives and consequences.

#### **Federal control of waterways**

While the State may have an interest in the environmental impact of the federal navigation system, the U.S. Congress has the ultimate authority to make policy and operational decisions for this system.

Although the Minneapolis legislature is currently considering HF 1472 to subsidize Minneapolis shippers for not using locks with funds from the invasive species account, two federal bills are currently before the 113th Congress. One would mandate the closure of the Upper St. Anthony Falls lock under certain circumstances, whereas the other would expand federal efforts over the control of Asian carp on the Upper Mississippi and Ohio River Basins.

Members of our association are concerned over the spread of Asian carp as well as other invasive species

threatening U.S. waters.

However, we are equally concerned that legislative debate at the state level recognizes the facts and consequences of additional truck traffic within a major corridor, whether that increase results from subsidizing shippers to use truck, or from federal legislation that mandates closure of the Upper St. Anthony Falls lock.

Sincerely,

Greg Genz  
President

#### **Barge freight still lowest cost for growers**

Even when barge rates went up during the drought-caused Mississippi River slowdown late last year, grain exporters found that barge transportation still cost less than other modes.

In an article in the [latest C magazine](#) published by UMW member CHS Inc., CHS Merchandiser Chris Stringer said, "We haven't really reduced the volume of grain we're moving on the river relative to export sales. The situation has just in-

creased the delivered price of grain to the Gulf."

Stringer says the usual 19- to 21-day trip from St. Paul to New Orleans was increased by as much as 10 days because of the slowed traffic on the middle Mississippi.

Barge drafts during the worst of the drought slowdown had to be reduced by as much as 2 feet, which diminished the per-barge load by about 400 tons. That at fewer barges per tow also meant higher prices, says Stringer.

He says that for grain grown in the Upper Midwest, it's the best transportation alternative available.

River levels and traffic have since returned to more navigable levels and with the opening of the 2013 season, barge rates will begin asserting downward pressure on other modes as well.

The article also reminded readers of the enormous and economical carrying capacity of barges versus other modes.

"There's no cheaper shipping alternative," Stringer says.

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*"...The U.S. Congress has the ultimate authority to make policy and operational decisions for this system..."*

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#### **Other items of interest:**

- The Army Corps of Engineers is changing operating hours at the three Minneapolis Locks and Dams. Commercial and recreational vessels will be able to lock through 8 a.m. to 3 a.m. at the Upper and Lower St. Anthony Falls locks and 3 a.m. to 10 p.m. at Lock and Dam 1. The St. Paul District says the changes are part of a Corps-wide effort to reduce operation and maintenance costs. More information is available at [www.mvp.usace.army.mil](http://www.mvp.usace.army.mil).
- Soybean Associations continue to spread the word about how a deteriorating infrastructure affects all of us. One example is [a television spot being shown in South Dakota](#) which links food prices to transportation costs.
- National Weather Service hydrologist Mike Welvaert says there will likely be a double crest on stretches of the Upper Mississippi River this year due to delayed snowmelt. However, he told reporters recently that the second crest or the recent rainfall aren't likely to have much impact. He says however timing and impact of the second crest will be dependent on how quickly snowmelt happens.

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Dam on the Ohio. During a recent tour by county, state and federal government representatives, Corps of Engineers representatives pointed out that a failure there could mean months of service interruption and big impacts on the economy.

#### **Calculating the cost**

UMWA members recall earlier this year when it looked as if the Mississippi River might be shut down by the drought and experts started calculating the cost.

One estimate said that a closure for the months of for December 2012 and January 2013, the hit to the economy would total about \$7 billion. That figure included the loss of up to 20,000 jobs and \$130

million in lost wages.

The size and scope of the problem is indicated by the [Congressional Budget Office's \(CBO\) estimate](#) of the investments called for in the 2013 Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) (S-601) recently passed by the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee.

#### **New WRDA**

The new WRDA calls for \$12.5 billion over ten years to modernize the locks and dams and complete flood protection and environmental projects.

CBO estimates that water projects in the bill would cost \$3.4 billion between 2014 and 2018, including \$900 million to finally finish the Olmsted Lock and Dam project in Illinois.

#### **2012 Figures are online**

A reminder that if you missed the earlier release from the Minnesota Department of Transportation's [2012 river tonnage](#), it's available online. The Ports and Waterways section of the DOT keeps watch on the river system which, "Stretches over 222 miles into and along Minnesota's border and supports 5 port areas whose combined 2012 tonnage was 10.7 million net tons."

"Minnesota's largest river tonnage commodities are agricultural products such as corn, soybeans and wheat. The river accounts for over 50% of Minnesota's agricultural exports. In 2012 Minnesota shipped over 4.4 million tons of grain down the river."

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