

Waterways

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Study calls for new thinking on infrastructure

The Texas Transportation Institute at Texas A&M University is out with [a new infrastructure study](#) that says it's time for some innovative thinking on infrastructure repair and revitalization. The study, titled "New Approaches for U.S. Lock and Dam Maintenance and Funding," was paid for by the soybean check-off through the Soy Transportation Coalition and released last month.

System degrading

In a release the Coalition says, "Despite the widespread acknowledgment of the importance of our inland waterway system to the viability of the U.S. economy overall, including the soybean industry, the condition of our lock and dam inventory

continues to degrade. Significant time, energy and resources have been de-



Above: River open is just weeks away, despite the weather

voted by agriculture and other stake holders to promote increased investment in the system, yet progress remains elusive."

The new study compares major maritime infrastructure projects in other countries with those in the U.S. and focuses on how well each country is able to complete projects on time and on budget.

Mike Steenhoek, executive director of the Soy

Transportation Coalition says, "It is discouraging to observe how many other countries are able to construct their major infrastructure projects more efficiently than we can." Study analysts examined the feasibility of a bonding style approach to lock and dam financing which would

generate initial lump sums and perhaps lessen cost overruns and project delays.

Good better than great

Steenhoek also says, "The other major principle advanced in our analysis is that a predictably good inland waterway system is better than a hypothetically great one. During this pe-

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From the Executive Director...

Puget Sound Mystery

It is somewhat troubling that in spite of well publicized negative environmental impacts, lock closure and other measures being considered by environmental agencies seems to indicate a high degree of self-importance on the part of some. This month's column is not about pending closures or barriers to stop the advance of Asian carp here in the Midwest, but about a similarly contentious situation in the Pacific Northwest.

In the January 2014 issue of [*Pacific Maritime Magazine*](#), Managing Editor Chris Philips reviews an example of a proposed state regulation that would impact a multi-billion dollar Puget Sound economy based on assumptions, not facts.

“...Do you want me to leave or do you want to listen?”

“Listen or leave”

Mr. Philips was reporting on a November “informational” meeting with the Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) regarding the establishment of a Puget Sound No Discharge Zone. Where the State had expected 30 representatives of commercial maritime industry that operate in Puget Sound, more than twice that number attended. The tone was set about 45 minutes into the meeting, when the speaker, a representative of Ecology, snapped to the room in general, “Do you want me to leave or do you want to listen?”

No data to back claim

Washington State, it turns out, is concerned that the heightened levels of fecal coliform bacteria in Puget Sound are dangerous to humans – and officials believe commercial vessel traffic is a large contributor to these elevated levels. The speaker, however, said the agency doesn't actually have any data to back up the claim and that the NDZ is needed because the State says it is.

Accordingly, reported Philips, the State's solution is to petition the U.S. EPA to create a NDZ in the whole of Puget Sound and forbid any discharge of waste,

either treated or untreated. This regulation would require that all vessels have a holding tank for blackwater, and would no longer allow the use of USCG-approved Type II maritime sanitation devices on tugs, passenger or fishing vessels. Instead, said the speaker, vessels could simply add a holding tank - at a cost of more than \$100,000 per vessel – to carry sewage on-board until it could be pumped out at existing shoreside treatment facilities. Philips wrote that the speaker seemed dismissive of industry pushback that there are currently not nearly enough existing shoreside facilities to serve vessels affected by the rule; and that she, the speaker, stated she doesn't know of any plans to increase the number of such facilities. When asked if the State appreciated that a retrofit of a vessel for that kind of tankage would approach \$125,000, if it could be accomplished at all, would affect the tonnage of the vessel, as well as stability, cargo capacity and effective range. “That's the first I've heard of that problem”, she said, admitting that the State hasn't actually consulted with any shipyards or naval architects, and was unaware of stability or tonnage issues.

Decision already made

At the time of the November ‘informational’ meeting, the decision to petition the EPA for the NDZ had already been made and that the “input” from the audience won't have any bearing on the decision. In the event EPA declares a NDZ, vessel owners will be forced to comply with the new regulations unless they receive dispensation due to unique challenges of the retrofit. And even that exemption will be valid only until the vessel is next drydocked, or 3 years, whichever comes first. Additionally, said the speaker, the State is not even required to have a comment period; this [the November] meeting is simply a courtesy, she said.

In response to the proposed NDZ, Philips reported that a coalition of affected

stakeholders is producing a position paper with concerns that Ecology needs to address before moving forward:

What are the scientific facts for its determination that areas of the Sound are at ecological risk from vessels' treated blackwater effluent.

Proposed solution needs to be proportional with the degree of risk.

Vessels would need fair and reasonable amount of time to retrofit vessels with holding tanks, if necessary.

A regulatory scheme that permits onboard treatment facilities that perform to best-achievable protection standards should be strongly favored and considered.

Need actual data

The article concluded that the entire discussion should be tabled until Ecology has actual and reliable data. "The State of Wash-

ington's baseless disruption of much of the robust West Coast maritime economy is short sighted and destructive, with negligible, if any, environmental benefit", said Philips.

Some have expressed opinions that the driving force behind establishing a NDZ is to rid the Sound of commercial traffic by increasing operating costs or forcing them to move up the Canadian coast to Alaska.

The Ecology website sees it differently. Puget Sound, it says, is a large coastal inlet comprised of a series of four 'bathtub' depressions each upwards to 60 feet deep, separated by shallow sills that prevent ocean water from flushing them. The result is a concentration of whatever harmful contaminants that happen along. The site also states that, currently, vessel blackwater may be discharged into the open ocean beyond the 3-mile

limit from Washington where it can be freely diluted by sea water. Or, treated sewage may be discharged any distance from shore, except into an established no discharge zone. The problem, says the site, is that some bad actors may be discharging untreated raw sewage into waters of the Sound, adding to the concentration problem. To its credit, Ecology apparently sees the Sound's proposed NDZ as a practical cure for a moral shortcoming. Perhaps it is; however it could also be a convenient option for an environmental agenda that mysteriously judges any human activity in a waterway, guilty as charged without a trial.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed with this column are the views of the writer and do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of the Upper Mississippi Waterway Association.

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Other items of interest:

- Members have complained that when calling into our teleconference system, they received only dead air and were unable to connect. Communications professional Mickey Kieffer of Ameritel Telecommunication said care must be taken to hold down each key in the code process for a count of "one thousand one," as there is a delay between digital-analog-digital conversion. The suggested count between key presses will prevent code run-on.
- UMWA President Greg Genz of Kaposia Marine, is setting up a farewell dinner for Dick Lambert (*see [January edition of Waterways](#) for more on Lambert*). The event will be March 28, 2014, with a UMWA hosted reception at 4 p.m. and an on-your-own dinner at 7:00p.m at the St. Paul Pool and Yacht Club, 1600 Lilydale Rd, Lilydale. We'll have more information in the next Waterways. And if you can't come, we'll also have information on how to send a testimonial.
- UMWA has just posted a black and white 1930s video of the newly built 9-foot Mississippi River channel produced in the day by UMWA. It's a 42 minute silent film with subtitles. Our thanks to the Corps and others for bringing this to our attention. It can be viewed at <http://www.umwa.net/Blank.html>

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riod of fiscal scarcity, we are concerned that our nation is failing not only in providing new and expanded locks and dams, but also in maintaining and preserving our current inventory.”

Farm Bill amendment

Interestingly, the newly passed Farm Bill includes [an amendment by Illinois Representative Cheri Bustos](#) that will require the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to quantify the impact that upgrades to river infrastructures – especially rehabilitation of the older locks – would have on agriculture.

“Waterway infrastructure is a vital component in our agricultural markets and this amendment will strengthen the case for investments in river transportation improvement projects,” Rep. Bustos says.

And, on his recent trip to St. Louis, Mo., [USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack](#) said that if Congress will not act to upgrade the locks and dams, the president will look for “creative” ways to accomplish that.

Vilsack gave as an example an energy company building a hydroelectric dam and financing improvements to a lock and dam and part of the project.

Meanwhile, the need for a reliable, modern river

system is being shown in other ways. For instance, the *Wall Street Journal* reports that [barge movements of crude oil](#) from the Midwest to the Gulf of Mexico are up 13-fold since 2010. The Journal says that’s because of the river’s bulk efficiencies and companies finding alternate ways to move U.S. and Canadian crude to refineries in areas where pipelines don’t exist or have enough capacity.

The *Journal* says nearly five million barrels of crude per month are being sent by barge after companies pump it from North Dakota’s Bakken Shale and Canada’s oil sands.

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