

Waterways

April 2015



A publication of the Upper Mississippi Waterway Association

PO Box 7006

St., Paul, MN 55107

e-mail: umwa@umwa.net

<http://www.umwa.net>

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Season on the upper river opens quietly

It was a quiet open for the 2015 navigation season - which the Corps of Engineers says occurs when all of the locks and dams on



Above: Corps of Engineers photo shows New Dawn entering L&D 2

the Mississippi River are open and have passed upbound traffic. First up honors went to ARTCO's Mv. New Dawn

with nine barges early March 25th.

Although Upper River Services crews and boats

were too busy this year for a ceremonial opening, the [effect of past such events was readily evident in the pre-open stories carried in papers](#) across the state and stories about the New Dawn's arrival.

Ingram container demo

Downstream another quiet but significant river event took place last week as Ingram Barge Company made a test run of [container on barge shipping](#) into America's Central Port just north of St. Louis, Mo.

The single barge was loaded with 54 containers, but Dan Mecklenborg, senior vice president for Ingram says if you do the

math it shows the incredible economic and environmental potential for the concept.

'Underutilized'

"Currently, America's inland waterways are 50 percent underutilized," Mecklenborg says and utilization numbers can be improved even with the system's aging infrastructure.

He pointed out that single open hulled barges require no retrofitting to handle containers and can carry three columns of nine containers stacked three high.

Doing the math for

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AWO members 'Barge In' on U.S. House and Senate

Members of the American Waterways Operators (AWO) held their [2015 "Barge-In"](#) this week. About 170 vessel owners and operators were on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., to meet with Representatives and Sena-

tors.

Among the items on the AWO agenda were Vessel Discharge Reform Legislation (S373/HR 980) that would replace the present patchwork of federal and state regulations with a set of science-based

measures. The group also supported the Jones Act and asked that Congress maintain a balance between an open and reliable inland waterway system and invasive species management.

From the Executive Director...

Upper Mississippi River states know waterways

In 2014, Minnesota DOT released its first-ever Statewide Ports and Waterways Plan – recognition of the vital role its commercially navigable waterways play in the state’s current economic viability and its future challenges.

For years, neighboring Iowa has been a long-time leader in advocating the merits of commercial navigation and encouraging fact-based waterway investment decisions.

Then, this past December, Wisconsin initiated a plan to advance the recognition of water transportation in the state’s economic future, the Wisconsin Commercial Port Development Initiative (WCPDI).

Partnership touts value of water transport

The objective of the WCPDI, a university and multi-agency partnership, is to support increased freight movement and logistical development at Wisconsin commercial ports and to raise public awareness of its importance as an economic generator.

According to the Initiative, more than 47 million tons (the equivalent of 1.9 million fully loaded trucks) moved through Wisconsin’s lake and river ports annually during the period of 2006-2012.

National transportation shortages

And, as if to echo the statements of UMWA and others in arguing against lock closure as an Asian carp solution, or campaigning for more funding for waterway transport infrastructure, “the state and the nation” said the Initiative, “simply do not have the highway capacity, time, or even available truck drivers to manage that much additional freight.

And with rail capacity now challenged by the increased volume of energy products, the additional 433,000 rail car that would be needed to move [Wisconsin port] cargo would further overcrowd an

already congested rail system.” And, it continued, these numbers reflect only current levels of freight activity; they do not take into account ways to increase freight capacity at Wisconsin ports to leverage the economic potential of unused waterway capacity.

Wisconsin mirrors nation

While the above Initiative was developed to underscore Wisconsin transportation issues, it accurately reflects unresolved water and land transport problems nationwide.

For example, the Initiative states the highway and railway freight systems are at a tipping point not only in Wisconsin, but the Midwest and across the entire nation.

According to the Federal Highway Administration, overall freight tonnage is expected to increase by 40 percent by 2040. (President Obama said he looks to double U.S. trade in 25 years.) While much of this growth is expected to occur in the trucking industry, it is unlikely that highway capacity can or will be expanded to meet the growing needs.

In Wisconsin, according to Initiative, travel time and delay create unreliable scheduling times on 9 of 28 urban freeway corridors.

A nation-wide study revealed that traffic congestion consumes 1.9 billion gallon of fuel, costs each driver \$713 while spending 34 hours per year stuck in traffic; specifically, bottlenecks cause 40% of traffic delays.

Staggers Act

When the 1980 Staggers Act eliminated economic regulation of railroads, redundant rail lines were eliminated throughout the country. Wisconsin, said the Initiative, lost more than 1,200 miles of lines through abandonments resulting in a decline of rail service at intermodal connectors such as ports. This single act thoroughly disrupted the historic alliance be-

“According to the Federal Highway Administration, overall freight tonnage is expected to increase by 40 percent by 2040....”

tween railroads and marine freight.

As a consequence of this disruption, the state is left with only two rail intermodal facilities – both of which are landlocked – making the movement of cargo by water to a rail destination much more complicated. Authors of the Initiative and other interests have identified the lack of rail access at ports as a significant shortcoming of the Wisconsin port system.

Conclusion

The Initiative concludes that Wisconsin's commercial ports on the Great Lakes and the Mississippi River offer broad, but not easily accessed opportunities. To rectify this, the Initiative offers an overarching master plan to identify projects that will make better and more use

of Wisconsin ports and marine assets.

To this end, the Initiative focuses on the State's seven most significant and active freight ports: 5 on the Great Lakes (Superior, Milwaukee, Green Bay, Marinette and Manitowoc), and 2 on the Mississippi River (La Crosse and Prairie du Chien).

However, in order to continue the focus on marine investments, those investments must be identified and marketed to agencies, the legislature, and state businesses and industry.

In the final analysis, the most significant message throughout the 200-page report might be paraphrased in Econ 101 fashion:

Logistics and freight movement are competitive. States and even corridors are competitive in their

work to secure markets and the resultant economic development. Programs developed by the WCPDI are a first step in an ongoing effort to advance Wisconsin [or any other port system] as freight and logistics hubs.

Report is available at http://www.wistrans.org/cfire/documents/WCPDI_FinalProjectReport.pdf (16MB)

Remember that past issues of Waterways are archived online at

www.umwa.net

“...The state is left with only two rail intermodal facilities—both of which are landlocked—making the movement of cargo by rail...much more difficult...”

Other items of interest:

- When WCCO TV got a “good question” about some ‘round circular concrete structures’ in the river below the Plymouth Ave. bridge, they knew just who to call. [Lee Nelson of Upper River Services](#) explained that they are little used mooring cells.
- As some American ports continue preparations for bigger vessels coming through the newly expanded Panama Canal next year, it’s interesting to realize what an engineering feat finally accomplished by the United States. The [McCook Gazette](#) in McCook, Neb., recently carried a short, well written history recalling President Theodore Roosevelt’s role in pushing the canal to completion. And the phys.org web site says that the American [Apollo space program would have been impossible without the canal](#).
- Even though construction has supposedly started, there is a lot of skepticism about the proposed Nicaraguan canal. The government and the Chinese firm building the canal say it will surpass even the [newly enlarged Panama Canal](#), with a channel running 755 feet wide and 100 feet deep.
- You can’t always believe what you read in the newspaper. Take for instance, that April 1, story in the [Helena, Mont., Independent Record](#) about the shark caught by a Missouri River fisherman. The paper got so many calls and emails it had to print a story the next day owning up to the spoofed in the story.

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open river container-on-barge shipping is even more amazing, Mecklenborg says. A tow of 25 barges, each with 81 containers would mean that 2025 containers moving in one unit.

"If you've ever seen a tractor-trailer on the highway transporting a container or a railroad car with containers stacked two high, it's easy to see the benefit of water transport," he says.

But as the publication *National Journal* pointed out this month, even though the waterway industry supported and is now paying higher taxes

it's uncertain how much of the increased revenue will actually go toward improving the antiquated river infrastructure.

National Journal talked with Rick Calhoun, president of Cargo Carriers and said in its lead sentence, "Rick Calhoun is just waiting for a disaster."

Calhoun tells the *Journal*, "We have to do something before there's a meltdown. We're dead in the water, literally, if something were to happen."

The story says that even though he's often called for more infrastructure spending, President Obama's proposed Fiscal 2016 budget proposes cutting the Army Corps of

Engineer budget by 13 percent. It also does not acknowledge the new money in the Waterways Trust Fund.

The *Journal* writer says the money will likely be restored, but the budget blueprint is frustrating to those who've supported infrastructure renewal.

"It looks like whoever wrote his State of the Union and whoever wrote that budget came from different planets," said Senator Lamar Alexander (R-TN), who oversees the Army Corps budget in the Senate. "How are we going to increase a user fee, take the money, and then not spend it?"

Upper Mississippi Waterway Assoc.
PO Box 7006
St. Paul, MN 55107

Address label here