

Waterways

A publication of the Upper Mississippi Waterway Association

PO Box 7006, St. Paul, MN, 55107

e-mail: umwa@qwestoffice.net

<http://www.umwa.us>

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On the Lower River...

Supplemental funds needed

It's been a frustrating season on the Upper Mississippi and the exasperation is epitomized in the regular updates on the Lock and Dam 3 Project web site run by contractor Edward Kraemer and Sons. Since early April the weekly update on the project has been simply, "Work is still suspended, awaiting lower water levels." This past week, a footnote was added: "Getting tired of this? So are we!"

While levels on the Upper River have been slowly dropping, problems continue to build - literally - on the lower Mississippi and will or already are affecting the entire system. As predicted, silting at the mouth and delta of the river has already begun to cause problems for vessels arriving and departing New Orleans and for the first time in 13 years The Associated Branch Pilots has begun enforcing a draft restriction of 43 feet.

Corps short funds

As has been pointed out in this and other industry publications, the problem is compounded by a shortage of dredging money in the Army Corps of Engineers maintenance budget.

Things are so critical that Rick Calhoun, President of Cargo Carriers and Chairman of the Waterways Council, Inc., has called on the Obama administration to submit an emergency request for supplemental dredging funds.

In a news release Calhoun says, "The inland waterways navigation system is the most important



(Above) It's been a wet spring on the Upper Mississippi, but now most of the problems are on the lower river.

transportation asset in the United States and is vital to the economic well-being of this country."

He points out that, "The President has announced his intention to double exports in the next five years, but without a viable Mississippi River there will be no possible way to reach that goal. Commerce to and from 38 states moves throughout the port complex in south Louisiana."

Call echoed in La.

That call for more dredging money to keep vital commerce moving was echoed by the entire Louisiana

Dredging to 3

From the Executive Director . . .

Greens have control of inland navigation policy

“Greenies” seem to have the upper hand in inland navigation policy according to an article in the recent issue of *WorkBoat* magazine. “As lawmakers signal their intention to make deep cuts in federal spending, green groups are finding that their arguments to fund environmental programs and shelve pricey infrastructure projects are falling on sympathetic ears.”

“Their mark on waterways policies and projects has become more apparent in recent months”, according to workboat industry insiders in Washington, D.C.,” as key policies and decisions have been announced.” Further, states *WorkBoat’s* Washington Correspondent, Pamela Glass, industry officials believe that environmental groups, with the help of green-leaning officials in the Administration, are nudging federal policy toward environmental concerns to the detriment of river navigation and maritime commerce.

The above *WorkBoat* article is only one of a handful of recent articles reporting on the horrific condition of the U.S. transportation infrastructure. Others include two in the *Wall Street Journal* and one in *Inland Ports* magazine.

National freight policy must include rivers

A January article in the *Wall Street Journal* was all about inland navigation; a following article in May in that same publication talked about all transportation except the river. A March story in *Inland Ports* talked of the national freight policy with no mention of any river. Rounding out the collection were articles in an April issue of *The Waterways Journal*, discussing the marine highway, sans all rivers, along with an extensive discussion with Jim McCarville of the Port of Pittsburgh about all things river.

These articles and others, to some degree, recognized that transportation infrastructure is the backbone of the U.S. economy, while one lamented that the transport system which was once the envy of the world, has been allowed to crumble by neglect into disrepair and, if left untended, will reach the tipping point of being beyond rescue.

For all of the words in these articles, there seems to be a distinct disconnect from reality. One article stated that environmental groups are fighting the

Administration’s plans to boost use of waterways to haul freight; although unstated, this must have been a reference to short-sea shipping, as the Administration is severely cutting COE civil works budgets. “The environmental impact to the rivers involved has been quite devastating over a long period of time”, said David Conrad, a senior water-resources specialists at the National Wildlife Federation.

Nonsense, respond river shippers. “Rivers are more pristine than ever before, with the navigation industry adhering to safety and environmental protection standards exceeding federal law and regulations”, said Debra Colbert of the Waterways Council.

On the issue on new national priorities, Pamela Glass of *WorkBoat* writes that President Obama’s FY 2012 budget for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers civil works program favors environmental projects such as water quality and ecosystem restoration at the expense of inland waterways infrastructure modernization. In the Corps’ proposed budget, for example, “a single environmental restoration project comprised 10 percent of the entire construction budget, and the only four new study starts proposed all have environmental restoration as the primary purpose,” said Fred Carver, chairman of National Waterways Conference.

WRDA 2007’s forgotten Comparable Progress

While Ms. Glass’ article made no reference to WRDA 2007 or NESP projects therein authorized, the Administration’s singular support of environmental restoration projects raises issues with the intent of the Comparable Progress proviso under Section 8005 of Title VIII. That requirement, you’ll recall, mandates that if navigation and environmental restoration projects are not moving toward completion at a comparable rate, all funding requests shall be adjusted to ensure that projects move toward completion at a comparable rate in the future. That proviso now appears toothless and questionable.

A rare voice of reason

Finally, there’s the issue of road-building and electric cars. In one *Wall Street Journal* article, writer Robert Puentes states that at the government’s urging, companies are gearing up to produce large number of electric cars, with no assurance that drivers will have anywhere close to enough places to recharge them.

Executive Dir. to 3

Executive Dir. from 2

For that and other reasons, Mr. Puentes concluded that the nation lacks a clear-cut vision for transportation and has no way to target spending to make sure all those billions of dollars achieve economic and environmental goals.

“We can’t afford to do this anymore, with the economy struggling and the nation trying to achieve a host of conflicting priorities”. “Clearly, we need a new approach. Transportation needs to be put squarely in the service of the American economy.”

Bravo, Mr. Puentes, Bravo!

Editor’s note: Mr. Puentes is a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution’s Metropolitan Policy Program.

Other river related items:

- The Coast Guard’s Marine Safety Detachment has moved. Their new office is located at **5600 American Boulevard West, Bloomington, Minn. 55437. Phone number is (952) 806-0021.**
- The city of Quincy, Ill., is studying its options after the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) has denied the city’s appeal and upheld an earlier decision to deny a license and permit for a hydropower project at Lock and Dam 21. The city is still looking into options for Locks and Dams 24 and 25.
- Meanwhile, Free Flow Power company says it is applying to FERC for licenses to allow slow spinning turbines on the river bottom at locks 3,4,6,7 and 9 in the St. Paul District and five others in the Rock Island District.
- On a recent edition of the History Channel show, “How the States Got Their Shapes,” host Brian Unger told viewers that Illinois’ shape has a lot to do with water transportation. He says Chicago became the “Second City” when the ship canal was opened, connecting the Great Lakes with the Mississippi River system in 1848. Unger says Illinois’ border with Wisconsin was pushed north because the state wanted to make sure that its borders included the Illinois and Chicago Rivers.

Dredging from 1

congressional delegation.

Representatives Steve Scalise and Charles Boustany Jr. called a recent news conference to talk about economic impacts and warn about a possible draft restriction to 38 feet later this summer.

U.S. Senator Mary Landrieu says the river system is “critical” to the U.S. economy.

“The Mississippi allows these products to be transported in a way that does not hurt the environment and it will play an important role in helping the U.S. reach the president’s goal of doubling exports by 2014. The president should use his authority to include funding for dredging in any emergency supplemental appropriations bill,” Landrieu says.

‘Incredible tonnage’

In a guest appearance on NPR’s *Weekend Edition* in late May, Garret Graves of the Louisiana State Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority, pointed out just how critical river commerce is to the local and national economy. Graves told host Scott Simon that one in seven jobs in his state is tied back to the river and that the system carries “incredible tonnage” everyday in an environmentally friendly way. He added that there will be “economic reverberations” from any shipping impediments because about 20% of the national maritime commerce moves through the area.

Economic damages high

And a newly published report by Dr. Michael Hicks, director of Ball State University’s Center for Business and Economic Research and Dr. Mark Burton, director of transportation economics at the University of Tennessee’s Center for Transportation Research talks about damage costs from this year’s flooding and river traffic shutdown.

Among other things, the report says that the drop in river commerce will have lingering effects on both governments and private industry. As an example, they say economic turnover means an estimated five dollars in impact for every one dollar of payroll money. They say their calculations show that the loss to a casino town like Tunica, Miss., could be about \$90 million per month.