

# WCI Urges Obama to Invest in America's Future: The Marine Highway

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Imagine the excitement of the waterways industry in early September to learn that President Obama was set to announce a new \$50+ billion long-term spending plan focused on infrastructure improvements for the nation. The nation's lock and dam infrastructure certainly meets the need for increased funding, consistently earning a "D" grade because more than half of the 240 Corps of Engineers' operated lock chambers in the United States are more than 50 years old and have exceeded their economic design lives.

But the initial announcement by the White House highlighted only funding for "roads, railways and runways." How can this administration once again forget rivers? If only they were included in that list, industry would have been pleased rather than puzzled by the omission.

Cornel Martin, President/CEO of Waterways Council, Inc., issued the following statement in response to President Obama's announcement:

"While the nation celebrated Labor Day and all that the workforce has done to make America great, the waterways trans-

portation industry was left disappointed and puzzled about why the President's announcement earlier this week to fund at least \$50 billion in infrastructure projects over the long term does not include any waterways or port projects. Our inland waterways not only support people who work on our rivers, but workers in our agricultural community and the many industries that rely on our waterways for affordable transportation of their goods, both domestically and for world markets. To not include and dismiss our nation's most environmentally sound, energy efficient and congestion-relieving mode of transportation is unreasonable and unacceptable. Just one jumbo barge moving our nation's and the world's critical commodities carries the same capacity as 70 trucks on our already over-crowded highways. Inland transportation has the lowest carbon footprint of the other modes and has the best safety record.

"For all these reasons and more, the inland waterways industry remains a solution for the future and its infrastructure is critical to maintain a modern and efficient system of transportation for cargoes like grain, petroleum, corn, coal, steel, and aggregates that the United States and the world rely upon.

"In support of our nation's labor force, our nation's waterways have helped to make our country great. It is time to stop dismissing waterways transportation infrastructure and instead work together to keep America moving," the statement concluded.

## Out of Sight, Out of Mind

While often "out of sight, out of mind," the benefits of America's inland waterways are many. They are a precious resource, and the envy of the world because of the natural "water highway" the waterways system provides for commerce.

Modern lock and dam infrastructure is critical to US competitiveness in the world market, to environmental protection, to energy efficiency, to sustaining well-paying American jobs, and to congestion relief. Inland waterways transportation is a key component of the intermodal transportation network, and is essential to our nation's economy, environment, and our quality of life. And while the Administration may not fully recognize the need for waterways infrastructure modernization, there is significant activity related to that goal right now on Capitol Hill.

Last April, the Congressionally-chartered Inland Waterways Users Board adopted a final report that accompanied a comprehensive, consensus-based package of recommendations formulated by a group of experts assembled to address the need to improve the continued vitality of the US inland navigation system. The proposal – known as the Inland Waterways Capital Development Plan – is now being considered by Congress, with the hope that it will be included in a potential Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) in 2010. If adopted by Congress, this plan will better address the needs of the entire inland waterways system and provide more funding for these greatly needed infra-



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structure improvements.

A proposal this comprehensive was developed over a year-long period by the Inland Marine Transportation System Investment Strategy Team, composed of key US Army Corps of Engineers personnel and members of the Users Board.

A proposal of this magnitude, that would – for the first time ever – priori-

Association of Manufacturers, the Transportation Research Board/Marine Board, American Land Conservancy, National Corn Growers Association, National Grain & Feed Association, Steel Manufacturers Association, National Mining Association, National Council of Farm Cooperatives, and many others from diverse segments of our national

tal investment plan will necessitate a 30% to 45% increase in the existing fuel tax of 20-cents-per-gallon that is paid by the barge and towing industry, the **only** users of the system who currently are taxed. And while it may not be a great time to raise taxes, it is never a good time to waste money. These recommended reforms to the Corps of Engineers' project manage-

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alize navigation projects across the entire inland waterways system, improve the Corps of Engineers' project management and processes to deliver projects on time and on budget, and recommend a funding mechanism that is affordable and meets the system's needs – does not stand alone.

To date, the proposal is supported by more than 200 industry stakeholders including national organizations, state, regional and local organizations, and companies.

The United States Chamber of Commerce supports the Capital Development Plan, as does the National

economy—all of which benefit from inland waterways transportation.

These stakeholders endorsed the long-term Inland Waterways Capital Development Plan because they feel it will help our nation continue to enjoy the benefits of our energy-efficient, congestion-relieving US waterways transportation system. The plan's recommendations call for funding parameters for the entire system rather than just on a project-by-project basis. This should enable us to address more of the system's critical projects so we can complete them more efficiently.

Among its recommendations, this capi-

ment and delivery process would ensure that these additional resources are spent wisely and with purpose.

In order to bring navigation projects online and completed efficiently, positive change in the industry and for this vital infrastructure must start now. The Inland Waterways Capital Development Plan proposal will help maintain America's competitive edge and keep its critical cargo – and our nation's economy – on the move.

For a copy of the full report and recommendations, and to endorse the plan, please visit Waterways Council's online at [www.waterwayscouncil.org](http://www.waterwayscouncil.org). IP

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