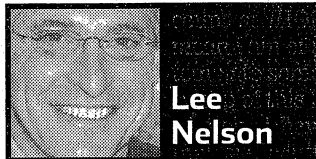


> **Locks and dams**

Keep goods moving. Invest in waterways

This week, St. Paul will play host to more than 200 waterways industry executives, shippers, transportation providers, members of the labor community, representatives of the conservation/environmental community, investors, bankers, officials from ports and federal, state and local governments, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, consultants, academics and more.

They are all here to attend the Seventh Annual Waterways Symposium and Annual Meeting, sponsored by Arlington, Va.-based national trade group Waterways Council, Inc., Informa Economics and The Waterways Journal.



Lee Nelson

The theme of this year's Symposium is, "Waterways Transportation: Obstacles and Opportunities," and will examine such areas as forecasting the transportation of commodities that our country and the world rely on, commodities such as small grains, corn, petroleum, aggregate materials; what world economic trends hold for the future of waterways transportation, and how what happens on Capitol Hill affects transportation on our country's waterways and right here in the Upper Midwest region.

Why are the waterways important to our region and to the nation? Our nation's inland waterways are envied by the world because this natural "water highway" running throughout our country provides key access for commerce. Modern lock and dam infrastructure on those waterways is critical to the United States remaining competitive in the world marketplace, to environmental protection, to energy efficiency, to the sustainment of 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. It keeps energy costs down, our agriculture exports up, and Americans — Minnesotans and Wisconsinites — gainfully employed.

One critical issue to be discussed at this week's symposium is a legislative proposal

known as the Inland Waterways Capital Development Plan, a comprehensive, consensus-based package of recommendations formulated by nationwide experts to address the need to

improve the continued vitality of the U.S. inland navigation system. If adopted, perhaps as part of a potential Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) in 2010, this plan will better address the needs of the entire inland waterways system and provide more funding for greatly needed infrastructure improvements. Minnesota's own Rep. James Oberstar, chairman of the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee, is very influential in the process to see this important proposal be included in a final WRDA bill this session of Congress.

To date, the proposal is supported by more than 200 industry stakeholders including national, state, regional and local organizations, and companies including the National Council of Farm Cooperatives, the National Association of Manufacturers, American Land Conservancy, the North Central States Regional Council of Carpenters, the Carpenters District Council of Greater St. Louis and Vicinity, National Corn Growers Association, the Transportation Research Board/Marine Board, the International Propeller Club of the United States, National Grain & Feed Association, Steel Manufacturers Association, National Mining Association, United States Chamber of Commerce, and many others from diverse segments of our national economy — all of whom benefit from inland waterways transportation.

The plan would commit the federal government to spending of about \$270 million a year (the average over the past five years

has been \$246 million) and also raise the tax that barge companies pay toward new construction and major rehabilitation of waterway infrastructure.

This plan would — for the first time ever — prioritize navigation projects across the entire inland waterways system, improve the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' project management and processes to deliver projects on time and on budget, and recommend a funding mechanism that is affordable to meet system needs.

Why do we need such a plan? There's no better example than the Olmsted Lock and Dam project on the Ohio River. Currently under construction, Olmsted was originally estimated to take eight years to build at a cost of \$775 million, including \$387.5 million from the industry-paid share of the Inland Waterways Trust Fund. Begun in 1996, Olmsted is not expected to be finished until 2016, and cost estimates exceed \$2.2 billion. Industry has had no say in prioritization of funding, or project management issues that have led to these cost increases.

In addition to getting better control on costs and project timelines, this plan would benefit our nation by strengthening our energy-efficient, congestion-relieving U.S. waterways transportation system.

If we maintain the status quo and do nothing to improve the delivery process, only six projects can be completed over the next 20 years. However, if Congress adopts the Capital Development Plan as proposed, 25 critical infrastructure projects will be completed over the next 20 years.

This proposal is practical, reasonable, reins in escalating costs, and provides a path for the future of transporting our nation's — and Minnesota's — valuable bulk commodities. Let's welcome the waterways community to St. Paul this week, and support the way forward for our region in the Inland Waterways Capital Development Plan.

Lee Nelson of South St. Paul is president of Upper River Services, a St. Paul-based river harbor operation that moves, parks, cleans and repairs barges. He has been in the commercial navigation business here for 29 years.