

# The Paducah Sun

## A ways to go for Waterways

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Representatives of the nation's inland waterways continue to push for more consistent funding for and construction of the river industry's locks and dams.

Leaders of Washington-based Waterways Council Inc. said they don't want the industry's significant projects sent up the river and forgotten.

"We can't ignore our infrastructure for the next decade," said Cornel Martin, president of the public policy advocacy organization.

Martin and other council representatives met with the Sun's editorial board Friday to share recommendations they hope a new Congress will embrace to better improve locks and dams in 2011 and beyond.

Projects such as the expensive repairs at Locks and Dams 52 and 53 on the Ohio River below Paducah are the kind that need to be more efficient, said Steve Little, president of Crouse Corp. in Paducah. Little serves on the Waterways Council's executive committee.

In 1994, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers started building Olmsted Locks and Dam at Olmsted, Ill., to replace 52 and 53. It took a decade to build the locks, mostly because of insufficient funding and cost overruns. Dam construction began this year and could take another decade. The entire project could cost close to \$3 billion before it's completed, nearly four times the amount Congress authorized in 1988.

Little led a study conducted alongside the corps looking at why the funding system is broken and how it can be fixed. Recommendations to Congress and the assistant secretary of the Army in April include:

n Adding 6 to 9 cents on top of the 20-cent-per-gallon fuel tax commercial waterway users pay. The increase would generate an estimated \$110 million per year to pay construction costs. This would add to the money going into the Inland Waterways Trust Fund.

n Asking for more money from Congress (about \$270 million total) to ensure more steady funding for projects.

The Inland Waterways User Board approved the findings and won backing from 20 U.S. senators and 200 companies and agricultural organizations.

Little said Sen. Mitch McConnell, Senate Republican leader, supports the initiative, and the council is waiting to hear from Sen.-elect Rand Paul.

President Barack Obama's administration hasn't responded to the report, Martin said.

"It's puzzling to us that the administration wouldn't endorse something like this," said Debra Colbert, Waterways spokeswoman.

Colbert said money to improve river transportation should be an easy sell since it is safer, more energy efficient and more environmentally friendly than rail and truck transportation.

Perhaps as important as securing steady financing is educating a new Congress and nation at large at how pivotal river transportation will be to competing in global trade, said Richard Calhoun, president of Cargo Carriers, a shipper in Minneapolis and chairman of Waterways.

"Unless we face the (river industry's) infrastructure in the country," Calhoun said, "we're going to have a very hard time competing on the global stage."

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