

## Pa. waterways infrastructure must become a priority

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In October, President Barack Obama said “We’ve lost our ambition, our imagination and our willingness to do the things that built the Golden Gate Bridge and Hoover Dam and unleashed all the potential in this country.”

Throughout our nation’s history, our country has never lacked willingness to unleash its vast potential, but rather seems to have lost its willpower to bolster the foundations that made us who we are in the world, chief among them our nation’s transportation infrastructure. And the locks and dams on our nation’s rivers, many of the most important of which are in Pennsylvania, are critically important for creating jobs and expanding exports.

It took from 1933 to 1937 to build the Golden Gate Bridge. Construction on the Hoover Dam began in 1930, and the last concrete was poured in 1935, at a cost of \$49 million. But today, lock and dam projects costs have soared out of control.

For example, Charleroi Locks and Dam on the Monongahela River is part of a project estimated to cost \$556 million but which has now ballooned to nearly \$1.5 billion. This additional cost is passed on to Pennsylvania’s consumers from food to electricity to oil prices.

Some of the oldest locks and dams on the inland system are in Pennsylvania. Age deterioration, inefficient federal infrastructure funding and more than \$400 million in backlogged critical maintenance are pushing that part of the waterways system toward catastrophe.

Pennsylvania’s rivers and its infrastructure serve as an important partner to its industry, as the state’s steel, ore, coal, chemicals and aggregate materials are transported on the rivers to their destination within the state, throughout the United States and abroad for

export. Its rivers also provide other benefits such as stable pools of water behind the dams that offer Pennsylvanians drinking water, irrigation and vast recreation opportunities.

The state's and nation's agricultural sector — the only sector of the U.S. economy that consistently posts a positive trade balance — simply could not compete and sell its products worldwide if not for the presence of the waterways that allow more than 60 percent of grain products to be transported to export ports in the most competitive way.

And we can't discount the other commodities that move on the waterways: 20 percent of the coal that is used to power our nation's electricity (much of it from Pennsylvania coal mines) and 22 percent of our petroleum products. Moving these products on the waterways keep prices low for consumers and the other modes, like rail and truck, competitive.

This is no more important than today in tough economic conditions. But these commodities and the shippers who grow and produce them are in danger of losing their competitive edge unless we give needed focus on and proper funding for the lock and dam infrastructure that allows their transport.

In this country, with unemployment stubbornly holding steady at 9 percent and the number even higher in the construction industry, jobs are another commodity that we cannot afford not to invest in.

Building locks and dams on the waterways system will create and sustain American, family-wage jobs in Pennsylvania. There is a road map for modernizing our lock and dam system, growing our exports, keeping the positive balance of trade in the agriculture industry and adding jobs to the U.S. economy known as the Inland Waterways Capital Development Plan or CDP.

The CDP is a consensus-based plan developed by the navigation industry and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The idea is to nationally prioritize navigation projects through objective criteria such as economic benefit and project condition; efficiently fund and complete 25 navigation projects in 20 years versus just six projects under the current broken model; better utilize taxpayer dollars and complete projects by American workers on time and on budget; seek standardization and design centers of expertise; and enable exports to increase.

Gov. Tom Corbett, who spoke to a waterways transportation symposium in Pittsburgh in October, well understands the need for efficient waterways infrastructure and its benefits to the state.

Rep. Tim Holden, a member of the House of Representatives Transportation & Infrastructure Committee, also is evaluating this plan in Washington as well. This is Pennsylvania and this is America: Let's reinvest here and in so doing unleash our ingenuity and our potential once again.

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