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## Locking In Gains

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The president's recently passed economic stimulus bill may not have contained as much funding for national infrastructure as initially thought, but for inland waterways infrastructure modernization, the stimulus funds could go a long way toward improving locks and dams in great need.

Stimulus funds were aimed at providing funds for projects already under way, which could expedite job creation and be a jolt to the ailing economy. There is no better return to the U.S. economy than investment in our nation's critically important lock-and-dam infrastructure. Funding for inland waterways infrastructure will stimulate economic growth, create jobs and modernize this essential transportation mode that moves 625 million tons of "building block" commodities and provides a crucial link to national and international supply chains.

Our waterways system transports about 20 percent of the nation's coal burned to generate electricity in utility plants and around 22 percent of domestic petroleum products. The inland waterways system is the primary artery for more than half of grain and oilseed exports, feedstocks to chemical plants, and aggregate materials for construction use.

In its fiscal 2009 budget request, the administration asked Congress to partially fund 14 inland waterways system lock-and-dam modernization projects, including major rehabilitation projects, throughout the nation. These projects include major points on the Mississippi, Ohio and Tennessee rivers, the Illinois Waterway and the Inner Harbor Navigation Canal Lock near New Orleans. They could receive some of the \$4.6 billion allocated for the Army Corps of Engineers in stimulus funding.

Of that money, \$2 billion was set aside for construction. Any stimulus funding used for lock-and-dam modernization project construction will be provided at full federal expense to expedite this important inland navigation system job-creating work that will benefit the entire nation. In addition, \$2.075 billion was appropriated in the stimulus bill for productive, high-priority, employment-enhancing operation and maintenance work. The Corps of Engineers was given broad discretion on how to allocate stimulus funds, and a large percentage could be allocated to navigation infrastructure.

Using stimulus funding for such infrastructure improvement would do more for the national economy than simply putting thousands of Americans to work on these unfinished lock-and-dam projects. The National Waterways Foundation released a study last year comparing the societal, economic and environmental impact of inland river barge transportation to that of highway and rail transportation. "A Modal Comparison of Freight Transportation Effects on the General Public" was conducted by the Texas Transportation Institute's Center for Port and Waterways at Texas A&M University and was cost-shared with the U.S. Maritime Administration.

In terms of traffic congestion relief, fuel consumption and environmental benefits, the inland waterways mode of transport beats all other modes hands down. The study notes one common 15-barge river tow has the same capacity as 1,050 trucks and 216 railcars pulled by six locomotives. Barges can move a ton of cargo 576 miles with a single gallon of fuel, while trains get 413 miles and trucks 155 ton-miles per gallon.

And inland waterways transport generates fewer emissions of particulate matter, hydrocarbons, carbon monoxide and nitrous oxide than rail or truck on a per-ton-mile-moved basis.

While we are truly an intermodal logistics society, this comparison of rail, truck and inland waterways transport modes offers an important new perspective on the real benefits of moving cargo by water. It underscores the value of this economy-driving transportation artery that attracts significant private and public investment in plant and equipment.

In good and bad economic times, investment in lock-and-dam modernization creates economic activity and sustains family wage jobs. The river system is a critical energy supply line and facilitator of exports, and provides an environmentally superior mode of transport.

The inland rivers are the lynchpins that allow America's industries to be competitive and to move products across the supply chain domestically and for export. The NWF study also examined the effects of a hypothetical river closure on the St. Louis metropolitan area — i.e., if all area river cargo was diverted to trucks on the St. Louis interstates — and found that delays would increase 500 percent, accidents would rise 35 to 45 percent and maintenance costs would skyrocket.

Especially in today's economy, these are risks we simply cannot afford.

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