

PITTSBURGH TRIBUNE-REVIEW

OPINION

Port gets its due

The federal government is beginning to appreciate the importance of the Port of Pittsburgh, an integral part of America's first interstate highway system.

After decades of deferred maintenance — a few million dollars here and there to patch up this and plug up that — the 17 locks and dams in the 12-county region finally are getting more than a Band-Aid or duct tape quick-fix to shore up the port's aging infrastructure.

President George W. Bush deserves credit for allocating \$113 million for the desperately needed repairs for this part of the National Inland Waterway System. Pittsburgh ships 43.6 million tons of river cargo annually, making it the second busiest inland port and the 19th busiest in the nation.

But another \$4.2 million is needed to study the port's three long-neglected locks and dams along the Ohio River.

The government also deserves credit for changing the way it prioritizes work. Instead of ranking projects based on political necessity, the criteria now are based on risk and reliability. So, projects most in need of help are the top priority, according to James R. McCarville, executive director of the Port of Pittsburgh Commission.

"We do have momentum and we don't want to lose it," Mr. McCarville says. Pennsylvania's congressional delegation must ensure that nothing is lost or even watered down.