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River infrastructure critical to economy, environment

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Tennessee Voices

Some things in life are out of sight, out of mind. But Tennessee has something critically important to our state's economic viability that is IN sight but still out of mind: our navigable river system.

Nashville exists because of its proximity to the Cumberland River, but Tennessee also benefits from its proximity to other important navigable rivers, including the Mississippi and Tennessee rivers and the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway. Tennessee contains more than 600 miles of navigable waterways in the Ohio River basin and more than 165 miles in the Mississippi River basin. These are vital segments of the inland waterway system, providing an economic transportation link from the Upper Midwest and upper Ohio River basins to the lower Mississippi Valley and Gulf of Mexico.

Tennesseans are familiar with our rivers and their boats and barges but may not be aware of the critical value of the cargo moving. Barges transport 20 percent of our nation's coal burned to generate electricity and around 22 percent of our petroleum products. The system is the primary artery for more than half of our country's corn and soybean exports. More than 625 million tons of commodities valued at over \$70 billion move on America's inland navigation system annually. In simple terms, our waterways afford Americans a better quality of life because they allow low-cost movement of these building block commodities.

The waterways offer economic prosperity, too, with more than 135 manufacturing facilities, terminals and docks employing workers just on Tennessee's waterways alone. Nearly all of the electricity used in Middle Tennessee comes from TVA's barge-served power plants near Clarksville and Gallatin.

And there is tremendous environmental value to the rivers. A National Waterways Foundation study underscores the congestion relief waterways provide on our overcrowded highways and railways. Just one barge has the same capacity as 70 trucks or 16 rail cars, and a typical 15-barge flotilla carries the same amount of cargo as 1,050 trucks! Think about that as you transit I-40 at rush hour.

Moving products by water also produces fewer carbon dioxide emissions for each ton of cargo compared with transporting that same cargo by truck or rail.

Locks, dam outlive design life

To sustain these benefits and provide future economic growth, investment in our nation's system of locks and dams is critical. Many locks and dams are more than 50 years beyond their design life and are deteriorating rapidly, impacting efficiency, safety and our world competitiveness. Modernizing locks and dams means that our farmers, coal miners, oil producers and stone/aggregate suppliers can transport products cost-effectively and efficiently, allowing them to remain competitive in the world market.

America's — and Tennessee's — river transportation system helps keep our country and our region competitive. It relieves congested highways, makes our air cleaner and allows us recreational opportunities, hydro-power, drinking water sources, flood protection and ecosystem restoration. But if we don't make necessary investments now, our nation's and state's future is in jeopardy. Keep our waterways in mind and let decision-makers in Washington know that Tennesseans value and support

investment in our nation's river transportation infrastructure.
