

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 21, 2012

The Honorable Barbara Boxer
Chairman
EPW Committee
456 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable James M. Inhofe
Ranking Member
EPW Committee
410 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Boxer and Ranking Member Inhofe:

America's inland waterways system is vital to our economy and serves as a major component of the nation's intermodal transportation network. Unfortunately, a troubling lack of upkeep within this system has crippled our ability to move goods in a safe and efficient manner. Of particular concern is our deteriorating lock and dam infrastructure along the Mississippi River, which cannot meet the demands of a 21st century economy.

The most recent and current example of this failure is the shutdown of traffic on the Upper Mississippi due to the failure of a protecting wall at Chain of Rocks lock near Granite City, Illinois. This shut down comes during one of the most important periods of the year as Midwestern agriculture, one of the primary users of the waterways system, is the midst of harvest. Continued shutdowns will impact the not just current shipments on the river, but the overall reliability and timeliness of using the inland waterways system.

The Mississippi River is the backbone of our waterway transportation system and transports \$12 billion worth of products each year, including over 1 billion bushels of grain to ports around the world. This efficient river transportation is of utmost importance to the nation. Shipping via barge keeps exports competitive and reduces transportation costs. That is good for producers and consumers.

But the system of locks and dams along the Upper Mississippi are in desperate need of modernization. The current system was built 70 years ago and updates are needed to fit the requirements of modern barge technology. Many of the older locks are only 600 feet in length, while most current barge tows using the waterway are twice as long. That means these goods take twice as long to get down river and into the marketplace.

More than two years ago, the Inland Waterways User Board in coordination with the Army Corp of Engineers studied the long term funding issues in the Inland Waterways Trust Fund and submitted a unanimously-approved proposal to the Corps, which provided options for fully-funding the needs of the waterway system and prioritizing projects so that they are completed in a timely and cost-efficient manner. While the proposal presents many good specific ideas and approaches – the main point is to establish long term strategies to ensure projects that are started, are completed in a timely and efficient manner.

As the Environment and Public Works Committee considers a new Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) bill, we encourage you to work with all stakeholders to find a way to expedite the construction and operation of these critical projects.

Addressing the infrastructure needs of our inland waterways system is of significant national interest. Improving our ability to use this system will help relieve traffic on our highways and railroads, improve the environment, and put Americans back to work.

We appreciate your consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,

Din Dubin

Came McCasill

Clara Kim

Chuck Grassley

Ray Hunt

Tom Harkin