



CO-CHAIRS

DOUG WHITLEY

MARGARET BLACKSHERE

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Contact Dick Adorjan
217-553-8189

**INVESTMENT NEEDED IN UPPER MISSISSIPPI-ILLINOIS WATERWAY SYSTEM
FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH AND JOBS**

ST. LOUIS, MO. - The Transportation For Illinois Coalition today called on Congress to reach agreement on a new Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) that is critical to providing funding for modernization of locks on the upper Mississippi and for improvements on the Illinois River.

In August, the U.S. Senate passed its version (SB 728) of WRDA. The U.S. House of Representatives earlier passed its own version (HR 2864), which requires that a conference committee be convened to work out the differences.

Coalition Co-Chair Douglas Whitley, president of the Illinois Chamber of Commerce, said, "It has been nearly six years since Congress has passed a comprehensive waterway bill.

"If Illinois businesses are to continue to compete in the global marketplace, we need to support improvement of the locks and dams on the upper Mississippi and Illinois rivers that are key element of our transportation infrastructure," Whitley said.

"Our inland waterway system is aging and requires funding for modernization and maintenance. All but three of the 37 locks on the upper Mississippi and Illinois waterway systems were constructed in the 1930s and 1950s. These locks are particularly important to Illinois, which is a major world grain producer. They need to be updated in order to cost effectively move large volumes of grain and coal."

Margaret Blackshere, president of the Illinois AFL-CIO, the coalition's other co-chair, said, "Expanded trade and commercial growth will sustain existing jobs and provide opportunities for new jobs. Just as importantly, the work on the improved locks is estimated to create 48 million man-hours of construction work.

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Ad 1 Waterways

“We are competing globally. South America has now surpassed the U.S. in soybean production. Brazil, its biggest soybean producer, is proposing significant improvements to key portions of its waterway system. This could reduce or eliminate our current transportation cost-advantage, ultimately costing us jobs.”

The coalition:

- Supports the concept that user fees, which are deposited into the Inland Waterway Trust Fund, should be spent for the purposes for which they were collected in the modernization and improvement of the inland waterway. The waterway capital program should be structured similarly to the federal highway program where there is a multi-year authorization to ensure the delivery of capital projects. The coalition also supports streamlining Corps of Engineers processes to increase predictability of the planning process and limiting the length of studies.
- Supports the construction of the 1,200-foot locks and accompanying improvements to keep the nation's breadbasket production and shipment of grains competitive in the global economy.
- Supports a holistic approach that recognizes both nature and navigation. The inland waterway is a valuable economic resource for the Midwest and the nation. A balance should be struck between the need for economic growth and for environmental sustainability.
- Supports increased funding for Operations and Maintenance of the upper Mississippi and Illinois waterways system since needed improvements have fallen behind due to a lack of funds in recent years. The long-term nature of making infrastructure improvements calls for the immediate preparation of plans and specifications for the rehabilitation of certain locks on the Illinois River.

With the dramatic increase in the cost of fuel, waterborne traffic has become increasingly more attractive, particularly with respect to keeping Illinois grains competitive in the world market. A ton of cargo can be moved 514 miles by barge on a gallon of fuel as compared to moving that same ton only 60 miles by truck or 202 miles by train.

The Transportation For Illinois Coalition is a broad-based organization composed of business, labor, engineering groups, construction companies and local government groups. The non-partisan group supports investment in the transportation infrastructure as a critical component of the state's economic well-being.