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PRESS RELEASE

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Simple Steps Could Improve Mississippi River Barge Traffic, New Report

Corps Should Consider Cheaper Alternatives With Immediate Benefits

Minneapolis - By implementing small-scale, low cost measures, the efficiency of barge traffic on the Mississippi River could be significantly improved, according to a new report by the University of Missouri-St. Louis' Center for Transportation Studies. The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP) commissioned the report to explore low cost alternatives to improve barge traffic efficiency on the Upper Mississippi River and Illinois Waterways (UMR-IW).

The Army Corps of Engineers is considering alternatives to improve the navigation system on the UMR-IW, including a controversial \$2.1 billion lock expansion project that will take more than 20 years to complete.

"More immediate, cheaper alternatives to improve Mississippi River navigation should be utilized before a massive lock expansion project is considered," said IATP's Environment and Agriculture Program director Mark Muller. "There are several transportation sectors that effectively use advancements in global positioning systems and communications technology to reduce costs. The barge industry's reliance on federal subsidies reduces innovation while also distorting the agricultural transportation market."

The Corps collects and maintains operational data regarding the locks along the UMR-IW, and those data show significant waiting times at certain locks during certain times. There is no coordination with the arrival of barges at various locks. This first come, first serve system can create significant back ups.

The report, "Upper Mississippi River and Illinois Waterways: How to Reduce Waiting Times of Vessels While Using the Current Infrastructure" by David Ronen, Ph.D. and Robert Nauss, Ph.D., finds that regardless of whether the locks are expanded, transportation logistics management makes sense. The report makes a series of recommendations including:

- **Implementing an appointment system** where barges would be assigned appointed times to pass through the locks. This would work in congruence with Global Positioning System (GPS) technology and would enable tows to reduce fuel costs by adjusting their traveling speed;
- **Offering barge operators price incentives** (discounts) to use the system during low demand periods or penalizing (charging a premium price) operators for using the system during peak periods;
- **Re-evaluating small-scale measures** considered by the Corps in 1999, given recent technological advances.

IATP is simultaneously releasing its report, "Technology We Have vs. Money We Don't: How to Avoid Sinking \$2.1 Billion into the Mississippi River." The report argues that lock expansion could actually increase transportation costs and that there is little reason to believe barge traffic will rapidly expand on the UMR-IW system any time soon. The report uses Corps data to show a wide variance in the time it takes tows to pass through the locks - with some tow companies consistently fast and others consistently slow. This indicates that training, experience, and the use of technology within the barge industry could significantly improve traffic efficiency on the river.

Both reports can be found at: www.iatp.org/enviroag.

The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy promotes resilient family farms, rural communities and ecosystems around the world through research and education, science and technology, and advocacy.