NATIONAL WATERWAYS FOUNDATION

A Strong Inland Waterways System Delivers a Stronger American Economy
Put the Brakes on Truck Traffic

Waterways-transported cargo is equivalent to more than 49 million truck trips annually that would have to travel on our nation’s roadways. Diverting current waterways freight traffic to typical rural interstates would add more than 1,000 trucks to the current 875 trucks per day, per lane.
Our Inland Waterways System Delivers Cargoes and American Jobs

Our inland waterways system transports cargoes that support our daily lives. As a result of the transportation option the waterways offer, hundreds of thousands of American jobs are created and sustained across a variety of industries.

- Agriculture
- Chemical
- Construction
- Energy
- Petroleum
- Steel

The inland waterways system provides vast opportunities for shippers to move their products from the farm, quarry, oil field or industrial plant to the world’s markets in the safest, most fuel-efficient, environmentally responsible, and economically viable manner.

Inland Waterways System

12,000 miles of commercially navigable waterways move commerce to and from 38 states, serve industrial and agricultural centers, and facilitate imports and exports at gateway ports on the Gulf Coast.

Supporting Agriculture, Growing Communities

Farmers rely on inland waterways barge transportation to move their crops to shipping ports and the global market. Family farmers thrive from the transportation advantage our waterways provide. America’s agriculture exports boost the economy, benefitting all of us.
Cleaner Air Today is the Foundation for a Brighter Future

One of the many ways that the waterways keep Americans healthy is by reducing emissions of carbon dioxide and other pollutants.

- Railway transport generates 30% more carbon dioxide than barge transport
- Highway transport generates 1000% more emissions than barge transport

Tons of CO₂ per Million Ton-miles

New Jobs in a Healthy Economy

The economic impact of expediting construction to complete a group of congressionally authorized lock modernization projects in 10 years versus the current estimate of over 20 years would be the creation of 15,000 new jobs with an annual economic return of $800 million.

Half-million Jobs Made Possible

A significant share of the country’s population works along our inland water routes in more than 541,000 inland waterways system-related jobs worth $29 billion. These jobs power the economy across the nation. The inland waterways impact busy ports receiving barge shipments, manufacturers processing raw materials, refineries preparing chemicals and petroleum products, conservation managers and planners, and a myriad of other companies, services, and suppliers.

KEEPING OTHER MODES MOVING

Barges on our inland waterways carry salt and sand that treat icy roads, providing safer driving for everyone. Airplanes and airport runways depend on de-icer formula supplied by tank barge. Ample capacity on the waterways means that barges can carry more of America’s cargo, even if other modes can’t.
Fuel-efficient Delivery That Benefits Our Environment and Relieves Traffic Congestion

As traffic congestion on highways worsens, waterways are more important than ever to facilitate freight transportation. They are reliable, less congested, and tout the smallest carbon footprint among transportation modes.

- Barges can move one ton of cargo 647 miles on a single gallon of fuel
- Barge transport alleviates highway traffic congestion and emits fewer pollutants to move the same cargo

Barge Transportation on Our Waterways is the Most Fuel Efficient Form of Surface Transportation

Ton-miles Traveled per Gallon of Fuel

Essential to Economic Strength and America’s Transportation Supply Chain

The journey for more than half of our nation’s grain exports, and nearly a quarter of its petroleum products and electric power generation relies on the inland waterways transportation system. The average cost savings over truck and rail shipment means waterways save the nation’s businesses over $12 billion annually in transportation costs.

In today’s economy, these supply chain efficiencies are critical as companies carefully optimize resources and strive to maintain economic competitiveness.

MOVING AMERICA’S COMMODITIES

Barges carry everyday products for families across the nation. One barge can carry wheat in amounts large enough to make millions of loaves of bread, or gasoline to satisfy a year’s worth of fuel for thousands of cars.
Carrying the Load

One Barge Tow Carries the Load of Hundreds of Rail Cars and More Than a Thousand Trucks

One 15-Barge Tow

216 Rail Cars + 6 Locomotives

1,050 Large Semi Tractor-Trailers
The Critical Ohio River System

Markland Lock and Dam, a key link of the Ohio River, quietly moves 60 million tons of freight through the river basin each year. Markland and the system it supports are vital commercial conduits within the basin.

- Essential to affordable energy production
- Efficiently connects the upper Midwest to the resource-rich Gulf
- Integrates the Midwest with wide-ranging domestic and global trade

Consequences of an Unplanned Markland Closure

- IMMEDIATELY AFFECT COMMERCE IN 14 STATES AND 175 COUNTIES
- COST AN ADDITIONAL $1.3 BILLION IN ANNUAL TRANSPORT CHARGES
- DISRUPT THE AFFORDABLE DELIVERY OF COMMERCIAL AND RESIDENTIAL ELECTRIC POWER THROUGHOUT THE EASTERN U.S.

40K ADDITIONAL RAIL CARS = 60K ADDITIONAL TRUCKS
The Waterways Have Many Beneficiaries

America’s inland waterways serve commercial navigation, but they also provide recreational opportunities, and water supply for agriculture irrigation, industrial, and municipal uses. Our waterways and their infrastructure also protect our national security, provide flood protection, hydropower generation, and encourage waterfront development.

The information provided in this brochure was extracted from the following reports:

“Toward a Full Accounting of the Beneficiaries of Navigable Waterways,” University of Tennessee, Center for Transportation Research, for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (January 2011).

“Inland Navigation in the United States: An Evaluation of Economic Impacts and the Potential Effects of Infrastructure Investment,” University of Tennessee and University of Kentucky (November 2014).


A study by the Texas Transportation Institute, Center for Ports and Waterways.

“The Impacts of Unscheduled Lock Outages,” Vanderbilt University and University of Tennessee (June 2017), in cooperation with the U.S. Maritime Administration.

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