

Upper Mississippi River-Illinois Waterway System Restructured Navigation Study
Public Meeting Minutes
March 12, 2002
Holiday Inn, Peoria, Illinois

1. Attendance

141 members of the public attended the meeting. Officials and staff of the Corps of Engineers, state and local governments, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) also attended. Organizations in attendance included the American Farm Bureau Federation, American River Transportation Society, Audubon Society, Great River Economic Development Foundation, Illinois Corn Growers Association, Illinois Corn Marketing Board, Illinois Farm Bureau, LaFarge North America, MARC2000, Mississippi River Basin Alliance, and National Corn Growers Association.

2. Welcome

At 6:30 Bill Wiedman introduced the meeting structure, procedures and basic information. He then introduced the project manager, Denny Lundberg.

3. Formal Presentation

Denny Lundberg from the Corps of Engineers gave a formal presentation describing the Upper Mississippi River-Illinois Waterway System Restructured Navigation Study. He then introduced the following people:

Rich Manguno – Corps of Engineers, New Orleans District, Economics Team Leader
Rich Fristik – Corps of Engineers, Rock Island District, Environmental Work Group
Rick Nelson – US Fish and Wildlife Service
Bob Goodwin – Maritime Administration
Gary Clark – State of Illinois, Department of Natural Resources
Chris Brescia – MARC2000

4. Question and Answer Period

The public submitted written questions which were answered as follows:

Question: Will the text of this presentation be available on the web?

Denny Lundberg, Corps of Engineers: Yes, we will make both the text and the slideshow available to the public.

Question: In the presentation, on the slide showing Mississippi River traffic, what is the earliest date of data shown?

Denny Lundberg, Corps of Engineers: The traffic figures start in the 1960's.

Question: How long will the process take to start construction?

Denny Lundberg, Corps of Engineers: Construction will not start for at least 7-8 years if Congress approves the construction and has money available.

Question: What is the safety aspect of having to decouple barges to make the two trips through the 600 ft. locks? It seems it would increase the likelihood of accidents, spills, etc...

Denny Lundberg, Corps of Engineers : We have looked at the safety aspects. There have been accidents, however, the safety aspects are hard to quantify. Coupling and decoupling certainly increases the possibility of an accident.

Bob Goodwin, Maritime Administration: The Coast Guard has statistics on the safety aspects of decoupling barges.

Question: Please elaborate on what the interim report will include.

Denny Lundberg, Corps of Engineers : As I indicated in the presentation, the Interim Report is a status report for completing the Feasibility Study. The Interim Report will include an update on the scenario analysis, development measures for the navigation and ecosystem improvement sides, but it will not include specific recommendations.

Question: Is the restructured study going to be monitored by the NRC in all phases? That is will the study be more concerned with the health of the river than with the speed of barge traffic?

Denny Lundberg, Corps of Engineers : I am not sure if the NRC (National Research Council) will monitor all phases of the study. The NRC provided an Interim report and whether or not they will be engaged on the final aspects of this report, I am not sure. In terms of whether or not this study will be more concerned with navigation or the environment, we are trying to find a balance and do the smart thing and not hurt one side or the other.

Question: Has there been a significant increase, or what has been the pattern in barge traffic?

Rich Manguno, Corps of Engineers : If you refer to the graph in the PowerPoint presentation, there has been a large increase in traffic starting in the 1960's. However in the last twenty years, the traffic has been more or less flat.

Question: What was the purpose of the spatial model?

Rich Manguno, Corps of Engineers : The spatial model is an economic benefit-testing model that was developed specifically for this study. It was an attempt to improve the benefit calculating procedure. The model captured alternative uses of some commodities, specifically grain. Transportation costs and the pricing that the commodity would receive were measured along various modes. It presents a more complete picture of the economic system.

Question: What is going to happen to the transportation system if the river is not a feasible means of transporting goods, ag. and other? A "good" transportation system will bring business. A poor transportation system will discourage business.

Rich Manguno, Corps of Engineers : If the river is not available to transport the goods, some other mode of transportation will be needed. This will have significant implications. The complete closure of the river wasn't examined in the study. The consequences of closing the river would be significant.

Question: Please expand on your statement that there was a 5:1 benefit/cost ratio for navigation improvements. I thought it was much closer than that.

Rich Manguno, Corps of Engineers : I think that this is in reference to the 5:1 benefits ratio for maintenance of the existing system, and doesn't refer to the question that will be answered by the study. The study will answer the benefit/cost ratio of *changes* to the existing system.

Question: What can be done to speed up the process? i.e., building new locks/expanded locks/refined progress?

Rich Manguno, Corps of Engineers : In terms of efficiency, a number of options were considered, including nonstructural and structural measures. (After clarification of the question) Let's turn that over to our project Manager, Denny Lundberg.

Question: What are the environmental costs of the decoupling process? And is this being considered?

Rich Fristik, Corps of Engineers: We haven't taken a close look at the environmental costs. There is a potential for fish to be trapped in the locks.

Question: Looking at the effects of the 9ft channel. What types of "effects" are you looking for? What would be the "zero base" against which you would compare? What data would be used to establish that base?

Rich Fristik, Corps of Engineers: We are considering such things as sedimentation, sediments moving towards back and side channels. Sedimentation would also decrease the amount of light available for plant growth. The "zero base" conditions are established according to the data used in the studies of what is out there today. The "zero base" conditions are all existing data compiled today, including the data from the turn of the century.

Question: Will you be doing an EIS for the navigation study? Will it include the impacts of the effects of the 150 years of dams, dredging, and dikes?

Rich Fristik, Corps of Engineers: Yes, an EIS (Environmental Impact Statement) will be included in the final Feasibility Report. The EIS will include direct, indirect and cumulative effects.

Question: How is the nation addressing the uncontrollable farmland runoff? i.e., unregulated tilling of fields.

Mark Beorkrem, MRBA: There are conservation programs working with farmers to decrease soil erosion. Currently, there are no regulations that address this issue. The Department of Agriculture and the Illinois Department of Conservation are working to increase the participation of farmers in its voluntary programs. The Illinois Dept. of Ag is meeting quarterly to create programs and funds for farmers. They are trying to figure out how farmers can minimize the load effects on the watershed.

Question: Why would making locks 1200 ft. change the ecosystem of the river?

Rich Fristik, Corps of Engineers: When we did the study, we looked at site-specific and systematic effects. The ecosystem will change due to systematic effects. Building a 1200 foot lock will increase traffic. This increase in traffic will result in changes to the ecosystem.

Question: Caterpillar is developing river dredging equipment. Will they be included in the study and work? Will dredging the Illinois River be part of the study?

Brad Thompson, Corps of Engineers: Most likely the study will conclude that dredging of the back water will be necessary. The Corps of Engineers' real charge is to figure out what needs to be done. We are interested in innovative technology such as the Caterpillar dredging equipment, but we are not funded to develop technology.

Question: Have we considered limiting the number of barges to today's level? The rivers seem more than full right now.

Rick Nelson, US Fish and Wildlife Service: There is no attempt to limit the number of barges on the system. We will use the current traffic levels to establish the environmental goals.

Question: Can the existing lock system be maintained in the long term?

Denny Lundberg, Corps of Engineers: Yes, we can maintain the current system for another 50 years with proper maintenance and proper rehabilitation, but I would like to emphasize that it will require money.

Question: Is river infrastructure necessary for national defense?

Denny Lundberg, Corps of Engineers: The river is certainly an important part of the nation's inter-modal system, but we are not considering it as a vital part of the nation's defense.

Question: Refit or rebuild locks or new locks. What is cheaper? The increase of barge traffic in 60's due to building of bigger boats.

Denny Lundberg, Corps of Engineers : Extending the 600 ft lock to a 1200 ft lock is the cheapest option. The next cheapest option would be to build a new 1200 ft lock alongside the existing lock. Extending the lock is doable, but there is a risk associated with that.

Question: Build island heads up for dredge soil: is this working to reestablish islands?

Denny Lundberg, Corps of Engineers : We are trying to protect the islands that are out there now. We have gone out there to dredge soil to reestablish the islands.

Question: I understand the entire Mississippi Illinois River Lock and Dam system was built in 6 years. How much longer do we have to study before larger locks are built?

Denny Lundberg, Corps of Engineers : Currently, we have many more environmental, economic, etc. regulations to worry about.

Question: Where is the funding coming from for all these studies? How much is being spent on the studies and how much more will be spent to get to the construction phase?

Denny Lundberg, Corps of Engineers : The Navigation Study is funded by Congress's General Investigation and Appropriation Fund. The study is 100% federally funded.

Question: Will there be enough information in the interim report to allow Congress to make a funding authorization? In WRDA 2002 if they choose to do so?

Denny Lundberg, Corps of Engineers : We don't know whether or not Congress will make a decision. We won't be in a position to have any of the NEPA documents completed, but there will be enough information to provide some sort of contingency.

Question: Will you be doing an Environmental Impact Statement for the recommended improvements? Will it include the cumulative effects of dams or just the additional traffic?

Rich Fristik, Corps of Engineers : We will be doing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that will include a cumulative effects analysis.

Question: Do some of the scenarios assume that segregated transportation streams will be needed for genetically modified crops?

Rich Manguno, Corps of Engineers : Although scenarios will address in some fashion genetically modified crops, we specifically don't know if we'll get to this level of detail in respect to transportation of crops. I don't know the final answer to that, but can speculate that probably not.

Question: Who really benefits from improved navigation? How much of this is towards the company who manages this? How much to the farmer?

Rich Manguno, Corps of Engineers : When we measure transportation efficiency, we don't identify the direct beneficiary. We are measuring net gains from efficiency that occur on an overall national perspective.

Question: Why would increased lock length increase barge traffic?

Rich Manguno, Corps of Engineers : The general notion here is that by increasing the length you decrease the time for double locking and you create more locking cycles. So, if the demand exists and you can function more efficiently, you can move more traffic.

Question: Improvements to locks have already taken place on the Ohio River. What environmental ramifications to the ecosystem have been documented if any?

Rich Fristik, Corps of Engineers : Based on historic data you can see the changes in the ecosystem. Illustrated over time, a number of effects were documented including sedimentation.

Mark Beorkrem, MRBA: There is a big difference between the Ohio River and the Upper Mississippi and Illinois Rivers. The Ohio River changed a lot more than the Upper Mississippi and Illinois Rivers. Back in the 1940s and 1950s they actually raised the pool level on the Ohio River. They only looked at site-specific environmental impacts. They will have to do the rehabilitation work retroactively. We are ahead. They will have to deal with it retroactively, we are dealing with it proactively.

Question: How much would the big locks change the barge rates per bushel?

Rich Manguno, Corps of Engineers: Currently, the congestion rate is about 3 cents per bushel. In the future the charge will be dependent on traffic, and whatever scenario is implemented will affect the price.

Question: What is the baseline environmental condition used to determine desired future conditions: River before impoundment or after?

Rich Fristik, Corps of Engineers: Essentially it is the river after impoundment.

Rick Nelson, US FWS: We are not looking back, we are only looking forward.

Question: How do you account for environmental benefits achieved with impoundment?

Rich Fristik, Corps of Engineers: Immediately after the impoundment there were positive environmental benefits. Certain habitats were flooded that hadn't been flooded before, and they were initially very productive in terms of fish and other life forms. However, those benefits were short-lived. We are not currently looking at any specific benefits of impoundments.

Rick Nelson, US Fish and Wildlife Service: There were some benefits for some species and some detrimental impacts for other species.

Question: How are county governments involved?

Denny Lundberg, Corps of Engineers: It's a very good question. Let me expand this question to include drainage, district, cities and other interest groups. Everybody who lives near the river has a stake in it. In the interim report we are looking at institutional arrangements for how we manage the river and how the public and private entities play into this. We are not exactly sure yet how we are going to collaborate. We started working with the NRCS already. How the public and private entities will fit into our collaborative interest process I am not sure.

Question: The lower Mississippi River has improved. The stretch from St. Louis to Cairo has improved. The stretch from Grafton north has got worse. How come?

Mark Beorkrem, MRBA: The open river stretch from St. Louis south is probably the least studied part of the Upper Mississippi River. And I think it would be very hard to claim that it has improved. The Corps of Engineers has initiated work with various agencies to improve this stretch. They are working toward restoring some old side channels and installing some wing dams, but I don't think we can really say at this point that it has improved, we just don't know. The amount of traffic north of Grafton is comparable to the amount of traffic on the open river. Barge sizes are much larger south of St. Louis. Missouri and Illinois are trying to figure out how to do more studies in this area.

Question: If we assume barge traffic will increase because of lock improvements, can we then also assume that barge traffic has remained flat or decreased because of the lack of improvements? Lack of improvements has made it more costly to move goods!

Rich Manguno, Corps of Engineers: Yes, lack of improvements has made it more costly to move goods. If you lower the congestion, you will lower the cost and increase the profits. Whether or not that will trigger higher or lower traffic rates, I don't know.

Question: If certain aspects of our knowledge base are at different stages, how do we proceed with what we know while learning more in coming years?

Denny Lundberg, Corps of Engineers : We are trying to get a point where a reasonable decision can be made. Are we going to know everything? Remember the slide where we talk about adoptive management. We are trying to get to a point where we make an informed decision and then we are going to use adaptive management for continuing monitoring.

Question (John Raslow, Illinois Sierra Club): Siltation is the largest negative problem to the Illinois river. How will we quantify the siltation?

Rich Fristik, Corps of Engineers : We identified 30 specific areas on the Mississippi River and Illinois River that will be at risk because of increased barge traffic. In some areas there will be a positive correlation between siltation and barge traffic.

Question (John Raslow, Illinois Sierra Club): Will this be incorporated into a scenario?

Rich Fristik, Corps of Engineers : Yes, they will.

Question (John Raslow, Illinois Sierra Club): Will the reduction of traffic be considered in a scenario?

Rich Fristik, Corps of Engineers : Possibly in a certain portion. The economic impacts will be considered.

5. Statements

Royce Wilken, American River Transportation Company: Supports the modernization of two locks on the Illinois River and five locks on the Mississippi River. Modernization of the locks will relieve congestion and provide economic and environmental benefits to the nation. It is time to start upgrading the system now.

Dan Dawson, Mayor of Princeton, IA: Suggests a “cap” on the number of tow boats and barges at today’s level, with the current lock and dam system. Suggests a 5-10 year moratorium on any commercial growth to the river system, while the environment is further studied.

Gary Niemeyer, Illinois Corn Growers Association: The Interim Report should come to a conclusion after spending 60 million to date and taking over 10 years. The longer the delay in building the locks means more cost to farmers. Supports five new 1,200 ft locks on the Mississippi River and two on the Illinois River. The new locks will provide jobs and return benefits to the region for decades.

Tracy Paxton, Audubon Society: Cautiously optimistic about looking at the ecosystem impacts considered by the Corps. Hopes the Corps will stand behind its commitment to ecosystem restoration. Wants to have a botanist, ornithologist, etc. on staff getting information for the baseline. The biological side is as important as the economic or hydrological.

J. Skorborg, American Farm Bureau Federation: Supports upgrades on the Mississippi and Illinois waterways. Public policy should encourage inland water transportation since it is the most energy-efficient mode. Supports education to the general public in regards to the economic importance of the Mississippi River. Supports Corps of Engineers effort to update locks and dams to allow for larger barges. Supports lengthening of locks. Encourages members of Congress to become involved.

Roger Scuncst, Citizen: The locks are outdated and need to be improved. The locks are very important to farmers and the region’s economy, such as the carpenter’s union. As a City Alder, he intends to pass a resolution endorsing the Navigational Study and work with the local politicians to gather support. It is time to move forward.

Tom Martin, Farmer/Ill Corn Marketing Board, National Corn Growers Assoc.: Has traveled to South America to evaluate agriculture. South America has outpaced the US in agricultural exports because of the

great influx of foreign capital. Foreign capital has built processing plants, grain terminals, roads, rail, and seed facilities. The time has come to complete the Navigational Study and commit the necessary funds. To not do so will be devastating to the agricultural industry.

Ed VanderMeulen, Lafarge North America: River transportation is good for the environment and contributes to responsible use of our resources. It is good business, and it is good for our quality of life. Lafarge North America strongly supports upgrading and modernizing the lock system on the Upper Mississippi and Illinois waterways. The upgrade is long overdue and will provide benefits to the environment, safety, business, agriculture, the consumer, and our future.

Kent Schleich, Illinois Farm Bureau: River terminals close to farms are a big asset. The river keeps the costs down and reduces further stress on highways. Farmers will greatly benefit. The price farmers receive for grain depends on efficient river transportation. Supports a multiple-use strategy that includes navigation, economic development, flood control, recreation, and the environment.

Joyce Blumenshine, Citizen: The rivers need healthy ecosystems for the many life-support needs that they serve. Does not see the main use of the rivers as transportation, because there are numerous other options for transportation. Does not wish to see larger locks and dams and more barge traffic. Encourages the Corps of Engineers to treat all users of the river system with equal concern, and invest the same amount of money in the environment that the Corps is investing in the navigation upgrades.

Chris Brescia, MARC2000: Wants to applaud the Corps and other federal agencies for their new alliance and work in trying to find the right solution that doesn't have the environment vs. economic approach. MARC2000 supports the lock improvements on the Mississippi and Illinois Rivers.

Eleonor Zimmerleine, Illinois Agri-Women: Siltation is not only from barges but also from pleasure boats, wind, and erosion. There would be less siltation if the locks didn't break and the barges don't have to decouple. Doesn't believe that the traffic will increase.

David Jamison, Riverboat Captain: The Illinois and Upper Miss is filling in at an alarming rate. Sees islands disappearing. Supports the 1200 ft. locks. It will reduce the number of boats because there will be quicker turn around times. Industry is going to the Ohio because of faster turn around times.

Jim Benley, Grain Business: Rail loading cannot compete with barges in efficiency. South America has a cost advantage over the US. The US's only advantage is its transportation system. The US balances the trade deficit with agriculture.