

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 20, 2016

The Honorable Anthony R. Foxx
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Secretary Foxx:

We write you today to encourage the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) to take a leadership role and begin to implement the first-ever regional strategy for the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence maritime transportation system (MTS). The strategy was developed by the Conference of Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Governors and Premiers in collaboration with industry, environmental groups, representatives from U.S. and Canadian governments, and other regional partners. The goal is to double maritime trade while shrinking the environmental footprint of the region's transportation network and supporting the region's industrial core as the backbone of our regional and national economies.

The Great Lakes-St. Lawrence MTS is the longest deep-draft inland navigation system in the world. It includes the five Great Lakes, their connecting channels and the St. Lawrence River. The MTS extends 2,300 miles into the North American heartland and serves more than 100 ports in the eight Great Lakes States, Ontario and Québec. The region's maritime sector contributes more than \$30 billion to the US and Canadian economies and accounts for more than 220,000 jobs. While the Great Lakes MTS is a major regional and national transportation asset, it is significantly under-utilized and is operating at an estimated 50% of its full capacity.

To unlock the potential of the Great Lakes MTS, we urge the DOT to begin a system-wide analysis to identify maritime transportation bottlenecks and barriers across the Great Lakes. This analysis would lay the groundwork to help identify where future public and private investment would have broad, systemically significant impacts. One well documented bottleneck is at the Soo Locks, where nearly 70% of cargo vessels are forced to use the Poe Lock. A recent study found that closure of this Lock would have devastating economic consequences. However, there are also many lesser known bottlenecks in the region that reduce efficiency and increase the cost of maritime transportation. For example, the St. Mary's River is authorized to be maintained to a depth of 27 feet. If it is not maintained, ships must lighten their loads for their entire Great Lakes voyage to be able to traverse this shallower depth. A complete, system-wide analysis would identify all such constraints and help determine where future investment will yield the greatest benefit.

We have a tremendous opportunity to seize on past investments, take advantage of available capacity and infrastructure, and begin to unlock the economic potential of the Great Lakes MTS. The U.S. DOT is uniquely suited to support this mission and we urge you to begin a system-wide evaluation of bottlenecks and transportation constraints as an important first step. We thank you for considering this request and we stand ready to assist in working toward a strong and vibrant maritime transportation system in the Great Lakes.

Sincerely,



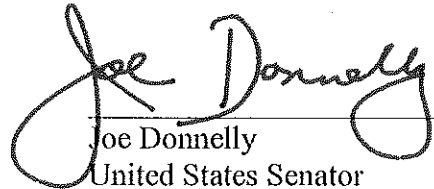
Gary C. Peters
United States Senator



Al Franken
United States Senator



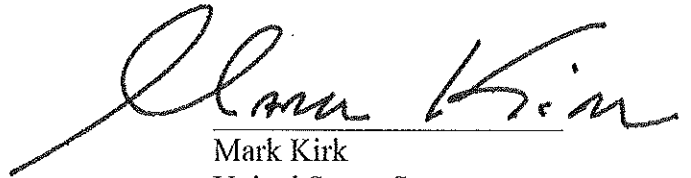
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United States Senator

cc: United States Army Corps of Engineers