



STATE LEADERSHIP WELCOME

Great Lakes Governors undertake a Maritime Initiative with specific recommendations

Later this year, Congress must reauthorize the federal highway program, which expires on September 30. A crush of lobbyists representing road builders, material suppliers, trucking companies, chambers of commerce and labor unions will descend on Washington this summer to ensure that the \$40 billion annual program continues. At the head of that pack will be state governors. Why? Because they own it.

The federal highway program is a partnership between the federal government and the states. The federal government taxes highway users, collects revenue and distributes those resources to the 50 states. State governments plan, construct, own and maintain the nation's highways. Equally important, states put skin in the game by matching federal funds with their own. This model—with states at the center—has resulted in a strong highway transportation system in the United States.

To the contrary, navigation infrastructure is a federal-local responsibility. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers plans, constructs and maintains channels, locks, breakwaters and jetties. Local governments or private companies own and operate ports and terminals. With a handful of exceptions, state governments play no role in the success of the navigation system. This is a problem.

The navigation infrastructure model is broken and unsuccessful. Often local governments lack the resources to properly develop their ports to serve local and regional economies. At the same time, Washington bureaucrats are indifferent to the local and regional economic importance of our harbors. The Corps' annual budget reflects that indifference with an underfunded harbor maintenance program.

Fortunately, change is on the horizon. Last summer on Mackinaw Island, Great Lakes Governors announced a new Maritime Initiative and named a task force to develop recommendations for state engagement. Those recommendations were un-

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veiled and adopted at the Governors' most recent meeting in Chicago on April 25. Governors want a role in the success of the Great Lakes/St. Lawrence Seaway maritime industry and we should welcome it.

To highlight just a handful of their recommendations, the Governors have agreed that each state will:

Build staff capacity: Today, some states lack maritime expertise. The Governors have agreed that each state will designate one or more state employees with responsibility for maritime transportation to help develop policies, plans and initiatives.

Define infrastructure needs: There is currently no comprehensive information on the condition of each state's maritime infrastructure. The Governors have agreed that each state will conduct an inventory of its marine-related assets and state inventories will be rolled into a regional, system inventory. This information will help guide future investment decisions and multimodal transportation planning efforts.

Integrate maritime into transportation plans: Under federal law, states are required to develop comprehensive transportation plans that include freight. Unfortunately, many states omit maritime infrastructure from those plans. The Governors have agreed that each state will now incorporate the maritime transportation system into state transportation policies and plans.

Engage in federal advocacy: Just as the

Governors push for adequate highway funding, their advocacy for harbor maintenance would make a critical difference. The Governors have agreed to raise their voices in support of federal investment in the Great Lakes Navigation System.

Support trade promotion: State governments already engage in their own trade promotion efforts, however, the Governors have agreed to coordinate those efforts with Highway H₂O and other maritime trade promotion.

Some have questioned whether this new attention from states will be beneficial. After all, isn't this just another layer of government to hassle with? Nonsense. We should welcome and encourage state activism. State governments have a vested interest in developing their ports, facilitating the flow of freight and stimulating local and regional economic development. At the federal level, Governors can add a significant voice to our advocacy on harbor maintenance funding and other issues.

The benefits of state engagement can be seen in those locations where states already play an active role in maritime. For example, the State of Indiana owns and manages three of the state's ports, including Burns Harbor on Lake Michigan. Similar state port agencies exist in Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina and Mississippi. Another model can be seen in Wisconsin and Minnesota, both of which maintain a harbor assistance grant program to help fund port infrastructure.

In each case, these states have taken steps to be engaged and supportive of the maritime transportation system. More can be done and the Governors have acknowledged that fact. While there may never be a day when states "own it," with regard to maritime transportation, engaging this critical layer of government will be to our benefit. ■

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