Adequately Fund the Waterborne Commerce Statistics Center

Overview

Tonnage is currently the only metric used by the Army Corps of Engineers to determine the use of maritime transportation for cargo traffic. This is collected by the Waterborne Commerce Statistics Center (WCSC) and published by the Institute of Water Resources (IWR), both divisions of the Army Corps of Engineers.

IWR was created to analyze and anticipate changing water resources management conditions, and to develop planning methods and analytical tools to address economic, social, institutional, and environmental needs in water resources planning and policy.

WCSC is responsible for capturing information on vessels, tonnage, commodity, origin, and destination from vessel operating companies.

Facts

By law, operators must report waterborne traffic is to WCSC monthly.

WCSC uses a 1990's-era MS DOS computer system to manually input the data.

IWR publishes data 3 years later

Issues

Investment decisions are being made using inadequate data.

Federal agencies (DOT, USACE, and USCG) make operational decisions based on this outdated and insufficient data.

Call to Action

Adequately fund Waterborne Commerce Statistics Center.

Require annual report of modernizing the system to Congress.

Inland Rivers, Ports & Terminals

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By law, waterborne traffic is to be reported to WCSC monthly. Those reports are being entered at WCSC using a 1990's-era MS DOS computer system, which has not been modernized and is subject to significant down time.

The result is that the tonnage data published by IWR is currently three years old. Trillions of infrastructure dollars are being invested in our country's marine transportation system using out-of-date information.

Whereas the 1990's-era MS DOS computer system experienced a three-month meltdown in 2022, a modernization project is underway and is currently in Phase III, the final phase of the modernization. The modernization project can only be completed if the basic functions of the IWR and WCSC are funded, keeping the lights on.

Waterborne Commerce Statistics was only budged for $5.2 million in the FY 2024 President's Budget.

- Appropriation Title: Operation and Maintenance – Remaining Items
- Project Name: Waterborne Commerce Statistics – Navigation

$6.7 million is needed just to operate at a minimal level.

Dredging Data and Lock Performance Monitoring System was only budgeted $500,000 in the FY 2024 President's Budget.

- Appropriation Title: Operation and Maintenance – Remaining Items
- Project Name: Dredging Data and Lock Performance Monitoring System – Navigation

$1.5 million is needed just to operate at a minimal level.

Tonnage is the only metric system used in river transportation. If a certain threshold is not met, the river is classified as "low use". A low use classification allows Federal Agencies, such as USACE and USCG to not extend their limited resources to those rivers.

Recently, the USCG threatened to remove aids to navigation on specified rivers.

The Department of Transportation priorities the national freight network based on tonnage thresholds and priorities discretionary funding based on these levels.

Accurate and up-to date data is crucial for healthy investment decisions.