

Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative

Capitol Meeting
Washington, DC
March 8-10, 2016

2016 Policy Platform of
the Mayors along the
Mississippi River

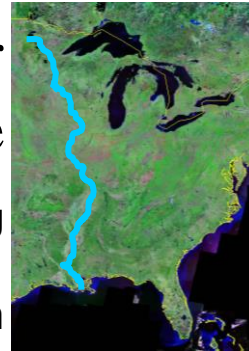
300 YEARS OF AMERICA'S
MANIFEST DESTINY



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Capitol Meeting

2016 Policy Platform



- **Include a Lower Mississippi River Habitat Restoration Feasibility Study in WRDA 2016**
- **Provide ample support for trails, byways and bridges in the FAST Act;**
- **Fund key economic and environmental service priorities underlying a sustainable River economy:**
 - ≈ **America's Marine Highway Grant Program, through MARAD - \$5 million**
 - ≈ **Upper Mississippi River Restoration Program - \$33.17 million**
 - ≈ **Section 319 Non-Point Source Water Pollution Control Grants - \$330 million**
 - ≈ **Drinking Water and Clean Water State Revolving Funds - \$2.35 billion**
 - ≈ **Pre-Disaster Mitigation Program - \$100 million**
 - ≈ **USGS Water Resources Program - \$238 million**

Executive Summary

The Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative (MRCTI) is an association of 70 United States Mayors on the Mississippi River – America’s most essential inland waterway because it is the world’s most agriculturally productive zone, the largest navigable system, and has the largest global trade footprint of any U.S. inland waterway. The Mississippi River generates over \$405 billion in annual revenue, directly supports 1.3 million jobs mostly in manufacturing, tourism, and agriculture. Because of the Mississippi’s status as an essential resource to our nation and the world, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has designated the Mississippi River Valley the largest “critical conversation area” in the country. Forty percent of the agricultural output and 60% of the grain output move on the Mississippi making possible America’s only trade surplus in agricultural goods. The cities along its banks also benefit directly from this great resource as the collective gross municipal product of the Mississippi River cities reaches almost a half-trillion dollars. But, though we may be many cities, 31 congressional districts, and ten states, we as mayors treat 5,000 kilometers of waterway as one river.

Over the last several years, the Mississippi River Valley has sustained successive 100, 200, and 500-year flood events, a 50-year drought, Hurricane Katrina, and Hurricane Isaac. The drought of 2012 alone cost our nation \$35 billion in losses. The MRCTI federal policy platform for 2016 reflects the major challenges facing the sustainable management of the Mississippi River as one of the world’s most important ecological resources and the lifeblood of the cities that call its banks home.

The 2016 platform augments the priorities set by the Mayors that comprise MRCTI’s programmatic areas. Five out of the seven policy recommendations above directly address MRCTI’s most important effort – improving the water quality of the Mississippi River.

We have learned through our work within MRCTI, that we can tie all aspects of a better life in our cities to clean water. Truly, this was an eye-opening experience for us. If we have clean water in the River then we have food security because clean water means sustainable agriculture is being practiced on the landscape. If we have clean water, then we are better protected from droughts and floods because we have a healthy ecological system. If we have clean water, then our economy has a competitive edge in that it too is sustainable. Most importantly, if we have clean water, then the 50 cities (20 million people) drinking the water can be assured of a sustainable water future.

Lower Mississippi River Habitat Restoration Feasibility Study, WRDA 2016

Background:

Congress authorized the Lower Mississippi River Resource Assessment to examine river management information, habitat, and recreation; identify needs for each of these; and make recommendations for meeting those needs. Upon completion of the assessment, three programs were recommended to address the needs on the river. Each of these programs includes multiple studies and projects. The Lower Mississippi River Habitat Restoration Feasibility Study will provide a blueprint through which programs recommended by the assessment may be implemented. The recommendations leverage existing programs and encourage both public and private investment in the river. All recommendations are compatible with navigation and flood risk management.

The recommended Habitat Restoration and Management Program would support restoration of river reaches, numerous individual aquatic habitat restoration projects, terrestrial habitat restoration, and invasive species management. This program would primarily rely on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Lower Mississippi River Conservation Committee with their cooperating agencies, partners and states – Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri, Tennessee, Arkansas, Mississippi, and Louisiana. The program would benefit a variety of habitats and the species that rely on them, recreational users, local economies, and other river resources.

The Issue:

The ecology of the Mississippi River supports the recreation, tourism, water supply, navigation, agricultural, and manufacturing economies of the waterway. Clean water and healthy environmental systems throughout the River's corridor are the keys to creating a sustainable and resilient economy. A thriving ecology holds water in the system creating reliability for navigation; it buffers and protects critical infrastructure from storm events; it improves water quality thus reducing the cost of manufacturing; it provides irrigation for agriculture; and most importantly, it secures drinking water for fifty cities comprised of over 20 million people. The combined revenue of these economies on the southern stem is \$136.5 billion employing more than 527,000 people.

Therefore, the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative mayors call upon Congress and the Administration to pass an updated WRDA in 2016 that includes a Lower Mississippi River Habitat Restoration Feasibility Study.

Provide Ample Support for Trails, Byways and Bridges in Funding the FAST Act

Background:

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) provides expertise, resources and information to improve the nation's highway system and its intermodal connections. The FHWA Federal-Aid Highway Program provides financial assistance to the states to construct and improve the National Highway System, and other roads, bridges and trails, including pedestrian and bicycle projects, which are eligible for every major Federal-aid funding category. The Federal Surface Transportation Program is the largest single funding source for shared use paths and trails, providing about \$200 to \$300 million each year for trails, including \$70 to \$90 million a year for recreational trails.

These trail-funding programs benefit local economies. The many trail offerings in the Mississippi River's urban and rural areas help communities retain jobs, attract visitors and improve the quality of life for residents and tourists alike. Trails provide transportation choices for people, while promoting healthy, active lifestyles. They connect people to recreation venues such as the River, and to shopping and employment destinations. Trails help reduce air pollution by shifting motorists off congested roads.

The health of the Mississippi River region's bridges is directly tied to the region's ability to compete in a national and global marketplace. The region's bridges create assemblages of vibrant activity and trade, while promoting clustering of people and businesses along the River. Conversely, closed and dilapidated bridges isolate portions of communities. Despite their importance, in 2012, nearly 11% of the nation's bridges were structurally deficient, and over 30% of existing bridges exceeded their 50-year design life. Current funding levels are not sufficient to repair or replace the nation's large-scale, urban bridges. Maintaining or replacing deficient bridges is a significant challenge for cash-strapped state and local governments to manage. The estimated cost to repair or replace deficient highway bridges in the ten Mississippi River states, alone, was estimated in 2013 to be \$12.54 billion.

The Issue:

A reliable Federal funding source that supports the nation's transportation system, including its trails, byways and bridges, has been absent since 2005; the last time that Congress passed a long-term transportation bill before the FAST Act. The FAST Act authorized provisions to provide consistent, reliable and sustainable funding for the trail, byway and bridge projects that the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative mayors seek to construct and maintain.

Therefore, the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative mayors call upon Congress and the Administration to:

Fund FAST Act programs at levels necessary to address the maintenance and restoration of the nation's structurally deficient and aging bridges; and concurrently increase annual investment levels for bridge repair, reconstruction and renovation.

Support FHWA programs that fund construction and maintenance of trails, byways and bridges, including the:

- Surface Transportation Program, which provides funding for "non-motorized transportation," such as transportation alternative type projects, recreational trail projects, and research and planning (fund at the President's FY 2017 request level of \$11.4 billion);
- Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality program, which provides a flexible funding source to State and local governments for transportation projects and programs designed to help States meet the requirements of the Clean Air Act (fund at the President's FY 2017 request level of \$2.4 billion);
- Highway Safety Improvement Program, which provides funding for states to develop and regularly update a State Strategic Highway Safety Plan that lays out strategies to address key safety problems, including bike and pedestrian safety (fund at the President's FY 2017 request level of \$2.5 billion);
- Metropolitan Transportation Planning Program, which supports planning for safe, multimodal transportation networks within communities, including safe routes to school, trail and other projects that improve overall safety and access, preserve historic transportation infrastructure, preserve water quality, and reduce wildlife collision (fund at the President's FY 2017 request level of \$336 million);
- Emergency Relief Program, which assists local governments with expenses of repairing serious damage to Federal-aid highways resulting from natural disasters or catastrophic failures (fund at the President's FY 2017 request of \$100 million);
- Federal Lands Transportation Program, which funds projects that improve public access on high-priority roads, trails, and transit systems within the Federal estate (national forests, national parks, national wildlife refuges, national recreation areas and other Federal public lands) on infrastructure owned by the Federal government (fund at the President's FY 2017 request level of \$1.1 billion);
- National Scenic Byways Program - at one time, a key provider of funds for designated byways. Although authorized, the 2012 MAP-21 legislation ended funding for the America's Byways Resource Center and suspended funding for the National Scenic Byways Program competitive grants program. Should Congress decide not to reinstate funding for National Scenic Byways Program grants in a new transportation bill, that legislation should contain clarifying language specifying that byway-related projects may be eligible for funding under the FHWA TAP (see above), which provides resources to expand transportation choices and enhance the transportation experiences (i.e., making clear that byways have access to that potential funding pool).

The Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative mayors realize that transportation legislation proposed in 2016 may entail program consolidation, including merging of some or all of the programs listed above. If that consolidation occurs, the Mayors suggest that it be done in a manner preserving the intent and funding eligibilities of the programs being consolidated, and that the programs reflect an appropriate level of funding flexibility (i.e., allowing a suitable level of state and local discretion on how funds are expended and providing an opportunity to increase funding in areas that have been previously capped by existing program eligibilities).

Economic Development Funding Priorities for a Sustainable River Economy

Background:

The Mississippi River Valley economic development appropriations priorities of the Mayors reflect a compelling human need around growing the essential economy of the Mississippi River in a sustainable manner. These Federal accounts are critical to building economic prosperity and ecological integrity throughout the region and are valuable due to their performance and return history. These accounts, in essence, pay for themselves and create growth through much-needed leveraging within the public and private sectors.

Fund America's Marine Highway Program Grant Account at the FY 2016 level of \$5 million

The Issue:

Consisting of over 29,000 nautical miles of navigable waterways, America's Marine Highway System serves as an extension of the surface transportation system and promotes short sea transportation. Two Marine Highway System routes (the M-55 and M-70 Corridors) incorporate the Mississippi River. Those two corridors are vital components of the nation's inland waterway system and central to maintaining vibrant local, regional, and national economies, particularly as a result of the waterway navigation industry's ability to efficiently transport a significant portion of the region's agricultural and other commodity exports to the Gulf of Mexico.

America's Marine Highway Program is a Department of Transportation-led program to expand the use of our Nation's navigable waterways and to relieve landside congestion by increasing the efficiency of the surface transportation system. The Program is administered by the Maritime Administration (MARAD), which collaborates with stakeholders from all transportation sectors to improve and strengthen the U.S. marine transportation system, including building a U.S. maritime system for the 21st Century.

Therefore, the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative mayors call upon Congress to support the Marine Highway Program by funding the grant account at \$5 million.

Fund the Upper Mississippi River Restoration Program at the authorized level of \$33.17 million

Background:

Congress authorized the Upper Mississippi River Restoration (UMRR) Program in the 1986 Water Resources Development Act to help address ecological needs on the Upper Mississippi River System (UMRS). Subsequent amendments have helped shape the two major elements of UMRR- the Habitat Rehabilitation and Enhancement Projects (HREPs) and the Long Term Resource Monitoring (LTRM). Together, HREPs and LTRM are designed to improve the environmental health of the UMRS and increase our understanding of its natural resources. The UMRR Program was formerly known as the Environmental Management Program (EMP).

The UMRR helps the entire waterway by improving water quality through ecological restoration in the upper Mississippi River so that the lower stem receives cleaner water. This creates a benefit for the entire river. The UMRR has restored more than 100,000 acres of habitat building the River's climate resilience to devastating storms and droughts.

The Issue:

The UMRR is essential to improving water quality and reducing climate risks throughout the Mississippi River corridor. Ecological restoration is critical to sustaining the economy of the waterway. The top three economies on the Mississippi are manufacturing, tourism, and agriculture. All of these depend on environmental services to thrive. Clean water is a cost reduced for manufacturing; a healthy ecosystem is the driver of recreation and tourism on the River; agriculture depends on an environmentally sound landscape and aquatic ecology for production – the UMRR adds to all these returns.

Therefore, the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative mayors urge Congress to fund the UMRR at the full authorized level for FY 2017.

Fund Section 319 Non-Point Source Water Pollution Control Grants at \$330 million

The Issue:

EPA's Clean Water Act Section 319 Categorical State Grant Program provides grants (known as "Water Pollution Control Grants") to states for prevention and control measures that improve water quality. \$164.92 million was enacted for FY 2016 for Clean Water Act Nonpoint Source (Section 319) Grant Program (\$5.66 million over the FY 2015 enacted level). This spending is directed at state and tribal efforts designed to implement water pollution controls and strengthen nutrient management efforts consistent with the EPA's state nutrient reduction framework.

Section 319 Water Pollution Control Grants are the only grant within the EPA portfolio specifically intended to reduce non-point pollutants and toxins from entering waters of the U.S. The Mayors see nutrient loading as one of the most significant threats facing the water quality of the Mississippi River and all its aquatic systems that support cities' economies.

MRCTI has held discussions with stakeholders throughout the corridor to determine how mayors can play a valuable role in reducing nutrient loading into the Mississippi River. Out of the ten Mississippi River states, only Minnesota has set both nutrient reduction goals and timelines. Three states have set reduction goals, but no timelines, and seven states have neither. States have explained to us that budget constraints are one of the main causes for not pursuing nutrient reduction more directly. Funding is needed to deploy robust monitoring as well as conduct the research needed to set credible goals. Thus, mayors are working to see how they can help states secure more funding resources through the only non-point source grant program – 319. MRCTI’s proposal pends on the approach that more revenue generated by our resources can be placed back into those resources to sustain the valuable environmental services they provide such as drinking water.

The proposed funding level for FY 2017 doubles the spending for 319 grants as compared to the FY 2016 enacted level in order to begin meeting the needs of states for controlling the massive nutrient-intensive landscapes they are faced with managing.

Therefore, the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative mayors ask Congress to fund the Section 319 Categorical State Grant Program’s Water Pollution Control Grants at \$330 million for FY 2017.

Fund Drinking Water and Clean Water State Revolving Funds at the FY 2015 level of \$2.35 billion

The Issue:

The President’s FY 2017 request proposes an increase to the Drinking Water SRF by almost twenty percent above the FY 2016 enacted level while at the same time reducing the Clean Water SRF by nearly 30 percent. The SRFs were funded at a combined level of \$2.35 billion in FY 2015. The President’s request represents a \$350 million cut to the FY 2015 enacted level of spending.

A persistent criticism of the clean and drinking water state revolving load funds is the lack of baseline comparisons available to measure the actual effectiveness of expenditures. States have begun to address this and other issues related to performance measuring including requiring estimates of pollutants removed before a project is approved as well as insist projects come with monitoring and evaluation components. Regardless, the drinking water loan funds have consistently scored a positive return on investment. According to a 2009 report, for every dollar spent by Congress on DWSRF, a \$1.82 was realized on the local end. For every dollar spent by states, a return of \$5.50 was realized.

Therefore, the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative mayors ask Congress to make no cuts to the Drinking Water and Clean Water State Revolving Funds, and provide \$2.35 billion to the Funds, as it did in FY 2015 with \$1.393 billion allocated to drinking water and \$957 million allocated to clean water.

Fund the Pre-Disaster Mitigation Program at the FY 2016 level of \$100 million

The Issue:

The Federal Emergency Management Agency's Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM) program effectively reduces threats to Mississippi River Valley populations and structures at risk by funding preparation in advance of natural disasters, while also reducing the River region's reliance upon Federal post-disaster recovery funds. PDM provided over \$70 million in pre-disaster planning and mitigation to 39 states and territories in 2011, saving money by investing in disaster preparation, when every dollar spent on disaster mitigation yielded four dollars in benefits. We applaud the Administration's renewed support for the value of PDM as a program that protects our communities and makes our economies more resilient.

The President's FY 2017 budget requests \$54.48 million for PDM. This level represents nearly a fifty percent cut to the program's FY 2016 level. The Mississippi River Valley sustained an estimated \$3 billion in damage from flooding that stretched from Grafton, IL to New Orleans, LA in later December 2015 and most of January 2016. Thus, with such devastating weather events on-going, cutting PDM in half at this point will have the basin effect of canceling critical mitigation work before it even begins.

Therefore, the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative mayors call upon Congress and the Administration to preserve and fully fund the Federal Pre-Disaster Mitigation Program at \$100 million for FY 2017.

Add \$11 million to the President's Request for the USGS Water Resources Program

Background:

Nutrient enrichment and sediment transport and deposition are two critical water-quality issues in the Mississippi River Basin (MRB). These issues can affect drinking water supplies, aquatic ecosystem health, and navigation on the main-stem Mississippi River. The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) operates the National Water Quality Network (NWQN) for Rivers and Streams to assess the status of – and changes in – water-quality conditions. New sensor technologies can continuously measure concentrations of nitrate and phosphate, and estimate suspended-sediment concentrations. These technologies – along with sensors for water temperature, dissolved oxygen, and other parameters – provide a better understanding of the timing, magnitude and changes in nutrient and sediment loads on a near real-time basis.

The USGS already operates a small number of continuous nutrient and sediment water-quality sensors in the Mississippi River Basin (MRB), and the USGS NWQN provides an ideal foundation for building an expanded continuous monitoring network. The NWQN already collects periodic (usually monthly) discrete water-quality samples at 34 large river and several small watershed sites in the MRB, and has been the primary source of data for estimating nutrient loads delivered to the Gulf of Mexico for decades.

Adding continuous and real-time water-quality sensor technology to the existing large river network, as well as twenty additional small stream sites to address the goals of the Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watershed Initiative, would greatly increase our understanding of nutrient and sediment transport in the MRB. A total of 54 sites are proposed for the network.

The proposed monitoring network will deliver near real-time estimates of nutrient and sediment concentrations and loads at key locations across the MRB at daily, weekly, monthly, and annual time steps. The data would be delivered using a state-of-the-art mapping and visualization website that would enable water managers, key stakeholders, and the public to track how nutrients and sediment move throughout the MRB, evaluate how effective agricultural management practices are at reducing nutrient and sediment contributions to large inland watersheds and the main-stem Mississippi River, and provide a significant ability to track the impacts of floods or contaminant spills on a near real-time basis. The network will also provide data that can enhance the accuracy of forecasts of the size of the Gulf of Mexico hypoxia zone each spring and improve the accuracy of water-quality models like SPARROW.

The one-time cost to purchase and install the necessary sensors and infrastructure at the 54 monitoring sites is approximately \$5M. Funds to operate and maintain the continuous sensors, add discrete water-quality sampling at selected sites to verify sensor data, and to analyze, quality-assure, and deliver information on a dashboard-style website would be about \$6M per year. Funding for the MRB continuous water-quality monitoring network would be allocated to USGS National Water Quality Program.

The Issue:

Nutrient loading is one of the greatest threats to our business lines on the river because it compromises water quality, impedes manufacturing, and depresses the tourism and recreation industries that account for the second largest economy on the waterway. States are working to reduce nutrient loading into the watershed, but require robust monitoring to help them determine if their reduction practices are working at a regional scale. Hundreds of millions of dollars is being spent across the landscape on this issue blindly if there is not systemic monitoring in place to measure the effectiveness of nutrient reduction projects.

The President's FY 2017 budget calls for \$227 million for the USGS Water Resources Program. Adding \$11 million to that figure will allow for deployment of a nutrient monitoring net as well as one year of sensor operation funding. \$6 million being added to the USGS baseline budget will allow for ongoing operation of the sensors in outlying years. This support will allow for the measurement of nutrient reduction activity across at least ten states.

Therefore, the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative mayors urge Congress to fund the USGS Water Resources Program at \$238 million for FY 2017.

Further, the Mayors support the President's FY 2017 budget proposal of \$3 million for "WaterSMART: Ecological Flows" as part of the USGS Ecosystems Fisheries Program. These funds can support ecosystem service work in the Mississippi River system and compliment the Mayors' WRDA 2016 priority detailed above.