

Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative

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**MISSISSIPPI RIVER MAYORS PRESENT INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN
TO WHITE HOUSE AND CONGRESS TO MITIGATE FOR
DISASTER IMPACTS**

***Mayors Call On Lawmakers to Restore Nation's Largest Waterway,
Build Up the Heartland Economy & Protect Critical Federal Programs
that Generate Return on Investment***

***Infrastructure Failures that close the Mississippi River Cost Nation
\$300 Million A Day In Preventable Losses***

March 2, 2017 – Washington, DC – Mayors from 18 cities along the Mississippi River gathered in Washington, DC this week for a series of meetings with Members of Congress and White House officials to press the need to maintain and restore the infrastructure that manages America’s largest waterway. It was the fifth annual Capitol Meeting of the **Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative (MRCTI)**, an association of 75 Mississippi River Mayors from cities and towns in all 10 states bordering the Mississippi River.

MRCTI’s infrastructure plan released at a Thursday press conference, recommends supporting and strengthening federal programs and funds administered by the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Transportation, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Department of the Interior, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which work together to manage and protect the critical water resource and have the ability to return as much as five times the investment back to heartland taxpayers. The platform also calls for investments to restore the river’s floodplains and ecosystems and modernize its lock-system. The plan--calling for a total investment of \$7.93 billion --has the support of several businesses operating along the Mississippi River.

“President Trump won America’s heartland by promising to rebuild our communities and infrastructure, and now he’s in a position to deliver on that promise,” said **Mayor Belinda C. Constant of Gretna, Louisiana and co-chair of MRCTI**. “We look forward to working with the administration to protect our nation’s most critical waterway, build up our communities and bolster the economy of cities and towns throughout the River Basin.”

The platform calls for a total investment of \$7.93 billion--most of which could be covered simply by funding existing federal programs at near-current levels. For example, the mayors are calling for the Pre-Disaster Mitigation Grant Program to be fully funded at \$100 million. The program, administered through the Federal Emergency Management Agency, supports pre-disaster planning in 39 states. Every federal dollar spent on disaster mitigation [yielded four dollars in benefits](#) (five dollars for floods) and saves money in post-disaster recovery funds. The Fiscal Year 2017 budget cut the program by nearly 50 percent, leaving the region's residents and economy at risk at a time when climate change is causing damaging extreme weather to occur with greater frequency and severity.

"The cities and towns along the Mississippi River are geographically vast, and politically and demographically diverse, but we all rely on the river for our drinking water, farmland irrigation and economies," said **Mayor Chris Coleman of Saint Paul, Minnesota, and co-chair of MRCTI**. "But the incredible economic benefits of the Mississippi River extend far beyond the basin. The federal government must invest in protecting and bolstering the river to ensure that we are securing this priceless resource for future generations and maximizing its economic potential.

The mayors also proposed mechanisms to supplement taxpayer-funded infrastructure with revenue-neutral financing proposals such as repatriating overseas holdings into tax-exempt municipal bonds. The plan, which is based on decades of data on the river's ecology and economy, highlights the importance of preserving federal data collection capabilities. Federal data collection informs infrastructure-building programs such as the U.S. Geological Survey's Water Resources Program to monitor water quality.

THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER IS AN ECONOMIC LIFELINE

The Mississippi River is the economic lifeline for the center of the country. The river basin and its tributaries span 31 states and cover nearly one third of the nation.

The river is the linchpin of the nation's domestic freight and water infrastructure, transporting 40 percent of the nation's total agricultural output. The Mississippi's main stem provides drinking water to 20 million people in 50 cities, and 80 billion gallons of fresh water to industries every day, which rely on a clean and healthy watershed. It is America's most essential inland waterway, creating the world's most agriculturally productive zone, the largest navigable water system, and the largest global trade footprint of any inland US waterway. The river generates more than \$496.7 billion in annual revenue and directly supports 1.5 million jobs, mostly in manufacturing, tourism and agriculture. Nationally, the river makes possible the nation's only trade surplus.

Yet, all these economic benefits are at risk due to both natural and man-made infrastructure decay. Much of the infrastructure along the Mississippi--and across the country--has decayed beyond its design-life, and in many cases is nearing a state of compromise. The American Society of Civil Engineers grades the nation's infrastructure a "D." The cost of this decay continues to increase. Infrastructure failures on the Mississippi River alone cost the nation more than \$300 million per day in losses.

BUSINESSES SUPPORT THE PLAN

The \$7.93 billion policy platform would support eight sectors of US industry, sustain critical ecological assets, generate \$24 billion in economic activity, create nearly 100,000 new jobs, and mitigate hundreds of millions of dollars in disaster impacts.

In 2016, Carbon Disclosure Project collected data from 47 companies that reported exposure to water risks in the Mississippi River Basin, either current and/or future, that could generate a substantive change in their business, operations, revenue or expenditure. These risks--including flooding, water scarcity, and regulatory uncertainty--have clear commercial implications, highlighting the need for investment in infrastructure that prevents disruptive events.

SMART INFRASTRUCTURE REDUCES IMPACTS OF EXTREME WEATHER

Since the turn of the millennium, natural disasters have become more severe and more frequent in the United States, creating unprecedented costs for local governments. Since 2005, the Mississippi River Valley has sustained successive 100-, 200- and 500-year flood events, a 50-year drought, Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Isaac. Disasters along the Mississippi River have become persistent and systemic, incurring more than \$50 billion in costs since 2011. In the last decade, 30 states in the US have issued 10 or more disaster declarations; six states have issues 20 or more.

“The last decade has brought costly drought and devastating floods to the Mississippi River corridor,” said **Frank Klipsch, Mayor of Davenport, Iowa**. “Davenport has adapted by creating a riverfront park that gives the River room to move, adds to our natural infrastructure, and reduces the cost of protecting our city from the damage floods can cause. But we also need to know that the federal government has our backs when it comes to managing America’s largest waterway--which happens to be in our backyard.”

In 2012, disasters cut into the total revenue of the Mississippi River economy by 8.75 percent in actual losses, and more in follow on losses. On average over the last five years, disasters are costing the Mississippi River economy close to 3 percent annually, with damages that carry over into successive years. In 2015-2016 alone, the Mississippi River Valley incurred over \$10 billion in impact costs, including an estimated \$1 billion in damage from flooding that stretched from Grafton, IL to New Orleans, LA in the span of two months (December 2015 and most of January 2016). In August 2016, as much water fell on the Baton Rouge area over an 18 day period as is carried by the entire Mississippi River, causing massive flooding exceeding [\\$10 billion](#) in damages around just the Baton Rouge area of Louisiana.

“Infrastructure doesn’t necessarily mean putting down more concrete,” said **Francis Slay, Mayor of St. Louis, MO**. “Some of our most reliable infrastructure comes from restoring naturally-occurring ecosystems like wetlands and reconnected floodplains. This kind of investment has a huge rate of return, and protects our communities and economy while supporting a healthy environment.”

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The Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative is comprised of 75 mayors and the association represents cities on the mainstem Mississippi from Minnesota to Louisiana. More information can be found on at www.MRCTI.org