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Washington, DC – Twenty mayors representing cities along the Mississippi River gathered for the sixth Capitol meeting of the Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative (MRCTI) March 6-8. Mayors unveiled an investment strategy to renew the Mississippi River’s natural and built infrastructure through major vehicles such as direct spending from appropriations, the Farm Bill, the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA), and the White House Infrastructure Plan.

The mayors’ strategy of ten appropriation priorities and ten authorization priorities addresses the acute shocks and chronic stresses from persistent disasters the region has sustained over the last several years, totaling more than $200 billion in losses since 2005, $50 billion since 2011, and $10 billion since 2016.

In Midst of Flooding, Mississippi River Mayors Push Infrastructure, Resilience

The mayors recommend a $7.5 billion infrastructure investment plan that supports eight major U.S. industry sectors, creates over 140,000 jobs, continues 1.5 million jobs, sustains our ecological assets to power our economy, mitigates for hundreds of millions of dollars in disaster impacts, and generates $22.5 billion in economic activity. Mayors presented encompassing recommendations for support of federal programs administered by EPA, DOT, FEMA, DOI, USDA and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers as essential to the nation’s economy.

“The River was almost ten feet above flood stage in my city of Greenville, MS just a few days ago. I’m here with my fellow mayors who are experiencing flooding from Missouri to Baton Rouge, LA to urge investment in resilience and mitigation,” said Errick Simmons, Mayor of Greenville, MS.

“The River is responsible for making our nation’s only trade surplus possible. We all have an interest in protecting this economic lifeline,” said Frank Klipsch, Mayor of Davenport, IA and Co-Chair of MRCTI.

“We’ve got a real opportunity here. With sequestration caps removed and the $200 billion infrastructure plan making its way into legislation, this is our shot at restoring our economy. But, we have to do it right, we have to include resilience and sustainability capacities – we have to include natural infrastructure lest all our investment be washed away by the next flood,” said Lionel Johnson, Mayor of St. Gabriel, LA and Co-Chair of MRCTI.

“Our city of St. Louis relies on that River. We have the third largest inland port in the nation by tonnage, we depend on the Mississippi River for our drinking water supply, and our beverage industry uses millions of gallons per day to manufacture their products. All that infrastructure needs a broad plan that includes conservation, port infrastructure, and water quality improvement,” said Lyda Krewson, Mayor of St. Louis.

Though the Infrastructure bill was placed on hold until 2019, Mayors still realized two-thirds of their appropriations priorities in the omnibus bill. Much of funding included will become available this Summer.

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MRCTI Mayors Partner on High-Profile Convenings in DC, Baton Rouge, and New Orleans

Mayors from Davenport, IA; St. Gabriel, LA; Baton Rouge, LA; New Orleans, LA; and Gretna, LA came together to lead MRCTI’s involvement in Infrastructure Week in three cities this year. Mayors wanted to make a strong statement regarding the importance of natural infrastructure and profile the partnerships forged across the ten-state corridor that have created opportunities for states and cities to increase resilience and make the global supply chain more sustainable from our Basin across the world.

MRCTI Co-Hosts Roundtable with DRA, ASCE, Pew Charitable Trusts, and FEMA

The Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative (MRCTI), Delta Regional Authority, the American Society of Civil Engineers, The Pew Charitable Trusts, and FEMA co-hosted a roundtable to bring together critical stakeholders to discuss state coordination around achieving resilience of critical built and natural infrastructure in the ten-state Mississippi River Corridor.

This roundtable focused on the new multi-state option of the Pre-Disaster Mitigation Grant Program, the proposed Flooding Revolving Loan Fund, new innovations around funding infrastructure, opportunities from the omnibus spending bill passed in March, and plans to restore the built and natural infrastructure of the Mississippi River Corridor.

Organizers came together with states and the National Governors Association (NGA) around innovative funding solutions and approaches to infrastructure resilience. State federal affairs directors and NGA had an opportunity to discuss with FEMA the new multi-state option contained in the Pre-Disaster Mitigation Grant and how it could be used for resilience projects that cross state boundaries. This option is the first of its kind for a FEMA mitigation grant program and was included in response to an MRCTI proposal. An outcome of the roundtable was a formula for better state engagement around innovative mitigation options.

Bottom left to right: Tom Smith, Executive Director, American Society of Civil Engineers; Brian Henson, Chief of Staff, Delta Regional Authority; Mayor Frank Klipsch of Davenport, IA; Kayed Lakhia, Director, Hazard Mitigation Assistance (FIMA); Matthew Fuchs, Flood-Prepared Communities, The Pew Charitable Trusts.

Top left to right: Christine Wormuth, Adrienne Arsht Center for Resilience, Atlantic Council; Mayor Frank Klipsch of Davenport, IA; Hon. Rodney E. Slater, Former US Secretary of Transportation; David Crane, Autodesk; Kevin Bush, Government of the District of Columbia.

Above left to right: Mayor Frank Klipsch of Davenport, IA; Radhika Fox, U.S. Water Alliance; George Hawkins, DC Water.

Far left: Hon. Rodney Slater, Former Secretary of Transportation meets with MRCTI Co-Chair, Mayor Frank Klipsch of Davenport, IA.
MRCTI Speaks at U.S. Chamber of Commerce Global Supply Summit

The Chamber’s annual Global Supply Chain Summit brings industry and government leaders together to address the current challenges and opportunities facing global supply chains. This year’s Summit discussed many topics and initiatives aimed at connecting supply networks around the world and enhancing the speed and security of global logistics.

Representing MRCTI was Immediate Past Co-Chair, Mayor Belinda Constant of Gretna, LA. Mayor Constant outlined a number of initiatives MRCTI is heading including returning container movement to the Mississippi River, making our global supply chain more sustainable and resilient to disasters and impacts.

Mayor Constant also shared that technology advancements in natural solution engineering, ecosystem restoration, and risk data analytics can all help attract infrastructure investment because it decreases liabilities for investors.

Mayor Broome of Baton Rouge Hosts Ten Across Water Summit

Balanced between the two extreme conditions of the desert southwest and the Gulf coast, the 10X Water Summit explores not only the complexities of water—whether too much or too little—but the greater questions of our capacity to respond to matters of such great magnitude. The Summit follows the challenges found along Interstate 10.

As explained by Summit organizers, Louisiana’s coast is a precious natural, economic, and cultural resource. Climate change, sea level rise, subsidence, hurricanes and the disconnection of the Mississippi River from coastal marshes has contributed to the loss of over 1,800 square miles of this fragile ecosystem. The Water Institute of the Gulf is collaborating with scientists from around the world to respond to this existential land loss crisis using the best available science to maintain land and reduce risk to communities.

Newly Inaugurated Mayor of New Orleans Joins MRCTI

New Orleans Mayor Latoya Cantrell was sworn-in as the City’s first woman mayor since its founding 300 years ago. Mayor Constant of Gretna, LA introduced Mayor Cantrell and welcomed her on behalf of MRCTI at the Southeast Port Summit in New Orleans in May during Infrastructure Week. MRCTI Co-Chair, Mayor Lionel Johnson of St. Gabriel, LA was also on-hand to congratulate Mayor Cantrell and extend a further welcome at Summit’s closing lunch. In her welcome, Mayor Constant said: “In 2016, Mayor Cantrell was given a lifetime achievement award by the presidents of Tulane, Loyola and Xavier universities and the University of New Orleans for her service to the community. Her steadfast commitment to helping and protecting the most vulnerable of our communities will serve her well as Mayor and I look forward to joining her in this work. Ascending to the position of Mayor with 60% of the Vote, gives Mayor Cantrell a clear mandate to continue her call to service for all of us.”
Mayors Propose Ways to Improve White House Infrastructure Plan

Mayors laid out recommendations to improve on the White House Infrastructure Plan urging that legislation drafted from the plan include resilience, mitigation, and principles of sustainable development.

“If the point here is to save the taxpayer money and create infrastructure projects that perform better, then we must include resilience and sustainability as criteria for awarding funds out of the proposed infrastructure incentive grant,” said Jay Hollowell, Mayor of Helena-West Helena, AR.

“We had a $10 billion disaster in Baton Rouge in 2016. I’m happy to report that two-thirds of the infrastructure plan we proposed last year was achieved through Congress in 2017. Now we have a greater opportunity with the larger infrastructure bill, the Farm Bill, and WRDA. Farm Bill conservation programs make our water cleaner and ensure sustainable agriculture products keep flowing through my port,” said Sharon Weston Broome, Mayor of Baton Rouge.

Mayors Caution Against Circumventing Critical Environmental Reviews

Mayors explained to key authorizers and appropriators that environmental services such as clean water are not inhibitors of industry; they are crucial resources for manufacturing. Further, the River is a primary drinking source for 20 million people in 50 cities.

“‘The Clean Water Act, the Safe Drinking Water Act, EPA permitting, and NEPA all protect our economy because they prioritize the health and safety of our communities. Efficiency is important, and so is healthy workforce,’ said Sarah Strommen, Mayor of Ramsey, MN.

“We are fighting for these changes to the infrastructure plan because protecting the waterway is critical to our safety, and key to America’s prosperity,” said Frank Klipsch, Mayor of Davenport, IA and Co-Chair of MRCTI.

WRDA Priority Makes Progress Towards Passage

MRCTI Mayors worked with TNC to propose a Lower Mississippi River Habitat Restoration Feasibility Study be included in the Water Resources Development Act. The study would support restoration of river reaches, numerous individual aquatic habitat restoration projects, terrestrial habitat restoration, invasive species management and most of all determine the best areas to restore for maximum disaster resilience and water quality improvement to better sustain the Corridor’s $300+ billion freshwater economy. The MRCTI priority has been included in both the House and Senate version of the legislation.
Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative
Washington, DC

MRCTI, NCEL Partner on Farm Bill Priorities to Secure Source Water

Mayors of the Mississippi River and the National Caucus of Environmental Legislators joined forces in DC to push for robust conservation programs. With increased pressures on working lands to produce food, fuel and fiber for our nation and the world, a comprehensive, long-term Farm Bill and its conservation programs are needed now more than ever.

The Farm Bill’s conservation programs are crucial to the health and viability of the Mississippi River Valley’s agriculture and rural landscape. They help farmers, ranchers and foresters to voluntarily address their key resource concerns, and deliver demonstrated environmental benefits, including clean air and water, and abundant habitat for wildlife.

MRCTI, United Nations Env Host Roundtable with Insurance Industry

Mayors joined with leaders from the global and North American insurance industry to discuss how to reduce vulnerability and build resilience to climate related disasters within the Corridor. This was the first time these stakeholders have held a structured dialogue with each other to jointly consider approaches to disaster resilience.

An immediate aim of the roundtable is to identify effective measures to reduce disaster risk, and explore insurance solutions and investments that help build resilience. Participating companies will return for the MRCTI Annual Meeting.
Mayors of the MRCTI have been afforded a tremendous opportunity to work directly with one of America’s most influential and storied leaders—Ambassador Andrew Young. Originally from New Orleans and having grown-up along the Mississippi River, Ambassador has shared with MRCTI that the Waterway and its people have always been near and dear to him. As former Mayor of Atlanta, GA Congressman, and U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Mr. Young is in a unique position to assist the River Valley in bringing global investment to critical natural and built infrastructure.

MRCTI and the Foundation will work to establish a conduit by which global investment can flow into Mississippi River Cities as well as develop a framework by which natural infrastructure restoration along the River can be increased and supported systemically to protect vulnerable communities.

Mayor Johnson, joined other leaders in discussing how investors, companies, and local and state leaders can scale up sustainability solutions to accelerate the transition to a resilient economy.

Since 2012, the MRCTI has been promoting economic and environmental security and stability along the Mississippi River Corridor as the River impacts the world’s food security. As MRCTI’s co-chairman, Mayor Johnson brought an experienced and unique perspective on sustainability issues to the nearly 600 Ceres Conference attendees and discussed how America cannot be left out of critical trade agreements that will come out of the Paris Accord.

Mayor Johnson met with representatives from Bank of America, Morgan Stanley, J.P. Morgan, PNC, and Moody’s Investors Service.
MRCTI Mayors Caution Administration on Impacts to Jobs, Economy from High-Stakes Tariff Contest

The on-again/off-again trade war is having ripple effects into the economy that Mayors consider important to recognize potentially hurting jobs and industries the entire length of the River.

Comparing the countries weighing a tariff response, U.S. agricultural exports to China are critical to the Mississippi River economy. U.S. exports of agricultural products to China totaled $19.6 billion in 2017. China is the 2nd largest Ag export market for the United States behind Canada with Mexico being third and the European Union being fifth. China is the largest international destination for U.S. Soybeans importing more than 27 million tons of U.S. soybeans in 2017.

The European Union is important to the Mississippi River. U.S. exports of agricultural products to EU countries totaled $11.9 billion in 2013. The EU countries together would rank 5th as an Ag Export Market for the United States. Top Ag exports include; soybeans ($1.5 billion), soybean meal ($860 million), alcoholic beverages ($649 million).

Elaborating on Soybeans as an example, half of the top ten soy-producing states in the US are along the Mississippi River with Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, and Arkansas raking as 1, 2, 3, 6, and 10. Agriculture is the third largest economy on the Mississippi River generating $33 billion in annual revenue directly supporting 192,000 jobs just in the Mississippi River Valley alone. All the major commodities of soy, rice, corn, and others go through the the Mississippi River Valley.

“My state ranks second in U.S. soybean production. If China implements a tariff on soybeans, then the over $14 billion in soybean exports enjoyed by the U.S. will take a hit and my state may feel that pain acutely,” said Frank Klipsch, Mayor of Davenport, IA and Co-Chair of the Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative.

Small family farms account for 90 percent of all U.S. farms and the U.S. is the largest producer and exporter of soybeans in the world accounting for a significant share of farm revenue making the implementation of tariffs from the nation’s top soybean purchaser particularly worrisome.

“Arkansas is the largest soybean producing state in the Lower Mississippi River Valley with the most production adjacent to the waterway. Over 20,000 jobs in my region are dependent on the soybean industry. Some of our farms export 100 percent of their soybeans. I think we need to be extremely careful in implementing these tariffs and take a hard look at how this could potentially hurt people,” cautioned Jay Hollowell, Mayor of Helena-West Helena, AR.

“In terms of production value, soybeans are the top row crop in my state of Mississippi and our region along the River had some of the highest concentrations of production. Soybeans brought-in over $1 billion in revenue to Mississippi in 2017,” stated Errick Simmons, Mayor of Greenville, MS.

Not only would a tariff on soybeans from China potentially impact production, but it would also impact the nation’s freight industry as 50 percent of all US soybean production is exported to China.

“My city resides just south of Baton Rouge where the port of southern Louisiana begins. 20 percent of all US imports and exports pass through Louisiana ports. 32 percent of the cargo transported on the Lower Mississippi River is agricultural product. These tariffs can have ripple effects into the economy that we need to recognize potentially hurting ports from St. Louis to Memphis, to New Orleans,” asserted Lionel Johnson, Mayor of St. Gabriel, LA and Co-Chair of the Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative.

The tariffs up to this point had been a mixed-bag for the Mississippi with some being helpful, some causing concern. Mayors are watching these tariffs very closely as the steel and aluminum tariffs had varying impacts. Now the contest is in a territory directly implicating the bread and butter of the region.

Mississippi River Parkway Commission’s Critical Role Goes Beyond Tourism

Mayor Jo Anne Smiley of Clarksville, MO spoke at the MRPC Annual Meeting in Quincy, IL urging the body to consider their role beyond tourism. The essential service the River Road provides to the commodity supply chain can be presented to Congress and the States as critical national infrastructure for our economy, according to Mayor Smiley.

Left to right: Parkway Commission Pilot, Terri McCullough (AR); Mayor Jo Anne Smiley of Clarksville, MO; MRPC Executive Director, Susanne Thiede-Barnet
National Drought Council Sets Agenda with MRCTI

This April, the National Drought Council held its second meeting in Washington, DC. Mayor Bob Gallagher of Bettendorf, IA represented MRCTI and urged the Council examine the vulnerabilities of communities along the Mississippi River to drought conditions.

In response, the Council has decided to pursue a comprehensive drought economic impact study using the Mississippi River Valley as a pilot. Council leadership have informed MRCTI they will present their plan and study deliverables to Mayors at the MRCTI Annual Meeting in the Quad Cities, September 18-20.

Drought continues to creep into the Mississippi River Valley with some areas experiencing moderate to severe drought in Iowa, Missouri, Illinois, and Louisiana.

MRCTI, UN Env, NCEL Partner on Plastic Pollution

MRCTI, United Nations Environment, and the National Caucus of Environmental Legislators all came together for World Environment Day in New Orleans to make a joint commitment to address plastic pollution in the Mississippi River. Like many water bodies, the Mississippi is plagued by plastic pollution collecting and draining from a vast 31-state basin area that spans from Pennsylvania to Idaho.

Up to 80 percent of the plastic in the oceans comes from land-based sources and since the Mississippi River drains such an expansive landscape, it becomes clear how as much as possibly 40 percent of plastic pollution in the Gulf originates from the Mississippi River.

Plastics are referred to as a persistent pollutant. Plastics don’t break down, they simply become smaller and eventually turn into a dangerous confetti that absorbs toxins and accumulates in the food chain eventually harming all of us through the food we eat and the water we drink.

Rita Albrecht, Mayor of Bemidji, MN, the first city on the Mississippi River joined Mayors from Louisiana in New Orleans for the event and to make the joint announcement. The first and last city of the River were on-hand to show full-river commitment from the cities and states.

Mayors of the MRCTI are committed to looking at how they can attain zero plastic waste in lakes and rivers and have partnered with NCEL to begin establishing a method by which plastic waste can be reduced at scale. At the State level, NCEL has joined by committing to convene a commission to examine the issue while MRCTI translates the effort to the local level.

Mayor Krewson Joins Bill Nye, Carl Pope at St. Louis Climate Summit

St. Louis Mayor Lyda Krewson represented MRCTI at the St. Louis Climate Summit along with such names as Bill Nye the Science Guy (pictured above) and Carl Pope. Mayor Krewson spoke on how the corridor-scale approach is needed to address climate risk where impacts are felt the most.


Five Cities where the Mississippi River flows east to west are coming together to host the MRCTI 7th Annual Meeting this September 18-20. The U.S. Army, Corps of Engineers, Department of Commerce, multiple state agencies, corporations, and public interest groups are all part of lifting this moment to an incandescent level. Join forty mayors from across the Corridor at the Hotel Blackhawk and points around the Quad Cities for what promises to be a new level of pageantry, agenda setting, and overt action to elevate the Mississippi River Valley to international prominence.