Washington, DC—Mississippi River Mayors, U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and the American Society of Civil Engineers celebrated new year’s day with enactment of the Resilience Revolving Loan Fund Act. A critical new tool for local resilience was offered on the eve of the 2021 flood season.

On New Year’s Day President Trump signed into law the first and one of the most valuable resilience tools in the federal government—a Resilience Revolving Loan Fund (RRF) for states and local governments. The U.S. Senate and House of Representatives unanimously passed the bipartisan bill as S. 3418, STORM Act in December. The legislation authorizes $200 million for the RRF and allows states to offer low-interest loans to counties and cities for disaster mitigation projects.

“We congratulate Representative Angie Craig (MN), Representative Rodney Davis (IL), Senator Ron Johnson (WI), and Senator Gary Peters (MI) for their championship of this cause. Mayors Sean Dowse of Red Wing, MN; Melvin Carter of St. Paul, MN; Tim Kabat of La Crosse, WI; Bob Gallagher of Bettendorf, IA; Rick Eberlin of Grafton, IL; and Belinda Constant of Gretna, LA all played a tremendous role in leading this important legislation at the local level. We are hopeful the Biden Administration takes notice of this work and moves to create the position of White House Chief Resilience in response,” said MRCTI Co-Chair, Sharon Weston Broome, Mayor of Baton Rouge, LA.

“The Chamber is so pleased that the STORM Act has been enacted and will continue to work with MRCTI, ASCE, and our members and partners to urge Congress to fully fund these important predisaster mitigation programs,” said Chuck Chaitovitz, vice president, environmental affairs and sustainability at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

“Congress has prioritized resilient communities by passing the bipartisan STORM Act,” said Tom Smith, Executive Director, American Society of Civil Engineers. “ASCE has been proud to partner with Senators Johnson and Peters as well as Representatives Craig and Davis to support this legislation, which is an important step towards improving resilience and planning for communities across the country. As civil engineers, we’re thinking about building infrastructure that will last for 50 to 100 years or more. The opportunity to build strategically is now.

Continued on pages 6, 7

President Joe Biden appointed Louisiana Congressman Cedric Richmond director of the White House Office of Public Engagement on November 17. Mr. Richmond has served as the Representative of Louisiana’s 2nd Congressional District since 2011 and was Chair of the Congressional Black Caucus from 2017 to 2019.

Mr. Richmond joined the Mississippi River Caucus in 2015 and has worked closely with MRCTI to pass the Resilience Revolving Loan Fund. Mr. Richmond has been instrumental in partnering with MRCTI Mayors to move national investment away from expensive recovery activities to a much more efficient and cost effective resilience and mitigation agenda of spending by supporting the Pre-Disaster Mitigation Grant Program, and the new FEMA BRIC Program.

Will there be an Infrastructure Bill this year? Secretary of Transportation weighs-in with MRCTI

New Secretary of Transportation, Pete Buttigieg, spoke to MRCTI Mayors on September 16 during the Association’s virtual annual meeting during which he presented his thoughts and views on the passage of a comprehensive infrastructure package at some point during the first 200 days of the Biden Administration.
Mayors Rely on MRCTI to help Re-Open Schools, Manage the Election, Address Surge, and Distribute Vaccine Safely

After addressing contagion throughout 2020 at various levels, a new and more dangerous surge gripped the Mississippi River Corridor beginning in August just as schools began recalling students to class. Then, in November, cases began accelerating at the fastest rate since the pandemic began culminating in their highest levels during the second week of January. Portions of the Mississippi River Valley were testing at a positivity rate of nearly 40 percent (40%) in early 2021.

MRCTI Steppes-In With Supplies Through the Worst of the Pandemic

Just as new cases in seven out of ten Mississippi River states began multiplying at unprecedented rates, the general election took place potentially compounding problems and turning voting into a super-spreader event. To reduce risk, MRCTI cities like Dubuque, IA and Greenville, MS began distributing PPE supplies obtained from MRCTI to the general public, especially in low income areas where residents are less able to afford their own.

Thermometers, goggles, N95 masks, surgical masks, and isolation gowns have been provided to MRCTI cities in reoccurring rounds of supply since April. The PPE stockpile, however, is beginning to dwindle. MRCTI staff estimate that all PPE will be distributed by late March. Thus, Mayors are urged to submit requests for assistance before spring.

New COVID-19 Variants Threaten Progress

By the end of January, all Mississippi River states were showing dramatic signs of improvement in the spread of COVID-19 with only Arkansas exhibiting a continuous increase in cases. But now, new and more contagious variants of the virus are becoming more numerous and spreading. So far, approved vaccines are showing to be effective against the leading variant known as B.1.1.7 which is becoming the dominant form of the coronavirus in other parts of the world. MRCTI will activate its International Covid-19 Coalition to keep-up with these developments and respond. Mayors can contact MRCTI for more information on what the Coalition can provide any member city including PPE and links to resources as well as capacity for enhancing containment.

MRCTI Distributes 150,000 units of PPE to more than 80 Cities in ten States

Pictured this page below: A) MRCTI Operations Manager Tiara Lumas readies yet another PPE shipment for member cities to support vaccine distribution activities; B) Mayor Sue Grantham of Caruthersville, MO holds a sample of N95 masks her city received from MRCTI; C) Our postal workers are our heroes in this effort; D) MRCTI Executive Director Colin Wellenkamp prepares over 600 isolation gowns for shipment to more than a dozen cities to re-open schools. E) Mayor Jim Strickland of Memphis, TN shows some of the several thousand units of PPE his city received to assist with distributing vaccine safely; F) Mayor Mike Thoms of Rock Island, IL exhibits PPE from MRCTI his city is also using toward vaccine role-out; G) Mayor Tim Kabat poses with non-touch thermometers he is deploying to public buildings.
Mayors Ask ‘What Must Cities Provide for Effort?’

Mayors of MRCTI like Mike Bawden of Riverdale, IA (pictured above left) lead coordination calls with states on how Mississippi River cities can assist in the distribution of vaccines. Mayor Kevin Smith of Helena-West Helena, AR (pictured in grid below, upper left corner) presided over a call with state officials with the Mayors of Blytheville, West Memphis, and others to determine what cities would be asked or obligated to support in the effort including providing security, facilities, volunteers, PPE, equipment, and if these expenses would be reimbursed.

FEMA announced in their January 25 Advisory that local governments can be reimbursed for costs incurred for vaccine distribution and administration. MRCTI Operations Manager, Tiara Lumas, distributed this advisory to all member cities on January 26. Links within the Advisory provide further information on the reimbursement procedure and how cities can confirm assistance.

State activities around the vaccine can be complex and include critical timelines cities should be aware. States like Minnesota shared their process in a call with MRCTI MN Mayors as shown below. Provided right is a list of state contacts Mayors can use to address any issues they may have going forward.

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Dr. Sundee’ Winder
Deputy Director
Bureau of Community Prep.
Depart of Public Health
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Virtual Conference  
SEPT 16 2020  
COURAGE. STRENGTH. UNITY  
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Largest Foundation on the Mississippi Supports Mayors’ Vision of Progress

MRCTI Co-Chairs, Mayor Sharon Weston Broome of Baton Rouge, LA and Mayor Bob Gallagher of Bettendorf, IA (both pictured above) presided over the MRCTI Virtual Annual Meeting on September 16. The Co-Chairs welcomed new Executive Director of the Walton Family Foundation Caryl Stern (pictured below right), to speak on what the foundation recognized as a priority in spending over $441 million a year on environmental activities.

Moderated by St. Louis Mayor Lyda Krewson (pictured below left inset), Ms. Stern presented on the future direction of the Walton Family Foundation explaining that the Foundation agreed with Mayors’ priorities around natural infrastructure as a key part of the solution to many of the issues facing River communities including exposure to disasters and long-term economic stagnation. The Walton Family Foundation sees that nature-based solutions as suitable for communities, businesses, and the River’s environment. “We will need to work collaboratively to champion the natural infrastructure solutions that are going to benefit us all,” explained Ms. Stern in her presentation to MRCTI Mayors. Ms. Stern further outlined that coalitions of farmers, agriculture leaders, urban planners, foundation directors, business executives, and government officials will need to be built to carry out this work. The Foundation has released their most recent five-year strategy of giving and is available at https://www.waltonfamilyfoundation.org/strategy2025.

The Walton Family Foundation is MRCTI’s largest philanthropic funder and provided the grant that formed the Association.

In July of 2020, Ms. McCollum launched her effort to lead the development of a Mississippi River Program much like what exists for other natural assets of the nation such as the Chesapeake Bay, Great Lakes, Everglades, Missouri River, and the Columbia River just to name a few.

Ms. McCollum introduced the Mississippi River Restoration and Resiliency Strategy as part of the FY 2021 Interior and Environment Appropriations Bill. The strategy urges the Department of the Interior, including the National Park Service, United States Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, to participate and coordinate as an essential federal stakeholder with the Environmental Protection Agency as it leads efforts to develop a federal government-wide Mississippi River restoration and resiliency strategy focused on improving water quality, restoring habitat and natural systems, improved navigation, eliminating aquatic invasive species, and building local resilience to natural disasters. $2 million has been appropriated for this work within EPA.

The two-million-dollar strategy development effort is intended to be a first step in a long process toward a more comprehensive plan of restoring and sustaining the Mississippi River. MRCTI sees the strategy as necessary but only a part of what needs to be a much larger cohesive federal approach involving states, cities, and the eight economies that depend on the waterway and bring jobs to MRCTI member communities.

At the 2021 Capitol Meeting in Washington, DC MRCTI Mayoral leadership plans to unveil their proposal for a Missis-issippi River Program that would build on Ms. McCollum’s initial endeavor and create a multi-lateral bill that assists city infrastructure needs.
Corps of Engineers Presents Upper Mississippi River Watershed Plan

Col. Karl D. Jansen, Commander of the St. Paul District, Mississippi Valley Division (MVD), U.S. Army Corps of Engineers presented to the Mayors on the Corps’ new upper watershed management plan for the Upper Mississippi River (UMR) like there is for the lower Mississippi River. Lack of a systemic flood risk management plan for the UMR results in levee districts, communities and others, taking actions in an uncoordinated manner in response to flood concerns. This uncoordinated flood response ultimately transfers risk to other cities. The watershed assessment will collaboratively develop a flood mitigation and resiliency strategy for UMR basin with an interagency team. This collaborative interagency team will work to lower the risk and consequences of flood and drought related damages through identification of potential structural and non-structural measures. The team will also work to identify management techniques for erosion and sediment processes occurring in the watershed which will improve water quality for cities to use to support drinking water operations and manufacturing that is fresh water dependent.

American Queen Steamboat Company becomes chair of MRCTI Corp Advisory Board, Sciens Water Becomes Vice Chair

Shelly Hartfield (pictured above), director of product development for American Queen, ascended to Chair of the MRCTI Corporate Advisory Board (CAB) on September 16 during the Annual Meeting. Taking over for Federal Express, Ms. Hartfield reflected on the severe impact to the tourism industry from both the 2019 flood and the pandemic. Shelly assured Mayors that American Queen will be back. Mississippi River cruises are back on the water. Shelly also reaffirmed American Queen’s commitment to MRCTI member cities by sending volunteers in the wake of disasters, donating PPE, and pursuing cleaner water. American Queen requires a COVID-19 test now for all guests boarding their vessels and will require all guests be vaccinated starting July 1.

Joining American Queen as CAB Vice Chair is Sciens Water, a water capital firm in New York with assets along the Mississippi River Corridor. Alexander Loucopoulos, senior partner at Sciens, discussed the mobilizing of global capital at a global scale to renew and restore American Infrastructure, adding that such work begins and ends locally with projects in cities bringing real solutions. Sciens wants to fill the infrastructure funding gap for American cities and sees the Mississippi River Corridor as an inflection point for that work.

Biden Administration proposes $1.2 trillion infrastructure plan

digital platforms, power grids, rural development, and surface transportation. Mr. Buttigieg elaborated on the importance of keeping the Administration just as accountable as Mayors are in their own cities. MRCTI has worked to include the Mississippi River Corridor in the several infrastructure packages that Congress has considered including most recently H.R. 2. Unfortunately all previous attempts at a ‘grand deal’ have disintegrated due to political corroboration. Moving forward, the new Administration faces a mounting $7 trillion deficit and more needed spending to contain the pandemic. Will there be room for a big-ticket item on infrastructure? The need for MRCTI member cities is certainly there. Likely to garner more, if not the same attention are the regular order infrastructure vehicles such as the highway bill and the Water Resources Development Act which may carry the torch for infrastructure for now.
The Resilience Revolving Loan Fund Act gives MRCTI cities new tool

“...The Resilience Revolving Loan Fund would help communities take proactive measures in the wake of the record-breaking flooding our country has experienced, and it would facilitate innovative solutions that allow cities to reduce federal disaster spending in the future,” said Tom Smith, Executive Director, American Society of Civil Engineers (pictured right, 2nd from top). “Prioritizing resilient infrastructure, including energy and water systems, is critical to a thriving economy and healthy communities.

The Resilience Revolving Loan Fund or STORM Act passed both the House and Senate unanimously as a separate stand-alone bill. Mayor Rick Eberlin of Grafton, IL (pictured right, top) and Mayor Melvin Carter of St. Paul, MN (pictured right, 3rd from top) conducted a press on-line press conference with ASCE and the US Chamber thanking their members of Congress for moving the RRF to the President’s desk.

The Act represents the largest new infrastructure protection tool since passage of the Pre-Disaster Mitigation Grant Program in 2001.

How the RRF Works
The RRF works like this...1) States will compile local government resilience projects into a package they send to FEMA; 2) FEMA then evaluates the projects for their ability to mitigate disasters and reduce repetitive loss; 3) If successful, FEMA awards a state a capitalization grant through which the State can set-up a revolving loan fund for localities to carry out their projects; 4) No single project can use more than $5 million in loan funds toward one project; 5) the loan must be repaid by the locality back to the state at an interest rate of no more than 1.25%; 6) repayment periods varies depending on the terms of the state’s RRF; 7) RRF loans are intended to be very flexible allowing local governments to place funds toward many different impacts from floods, to droughts, to even wildfires and chemical spills; 8) all repayments of loans go back into the RRF to fund another project in the state.

MRCTI originally wrote and proposed the RRF Act in March 2019. Congressman Davis of Illinois (pictured bottom, center) and Congresswoman Craig of Minnesota (pictured far right) had the vision and leadership to push it toward passage with the help of 2019 ASCE President Robin Kemper (pictured right, 4th from top).

The Resilience Revolving Loan Fund will help cities better live with the River rather than trying to make the River live with cities. Since 1993, towns have been moving residents out of flood plain and exposed areas.

This Resilience Revolving Loan Fund will be a game-changer enabling Mayors to bring new and innovative resilience projects online. MRCTI sees a lot of those projects involving the deployment and restoration of natural infrastructure as well as built.

Wetlands, marshes, reconnected flood plain and backwater areas can help near-water communities move and store flood water at corridor scale. The priority is not to erect levees or flood walls but instead pulling levees back to give the River room.

One of the most valuable aspects of the RRF Act is it is designed to be flexible and be easier for local governments to apply. It currently can cost a city over $200,000 to credibly apply for a FEMA grant. That’s two-hundred thousand in data gathering, staff time, and red tape cities certainly can’t afford.
Mayors Call on President Biden to Create Position of White House ‘Chief Resilience Officer’

The US Chamber of Commerce and MRCTI are also calling on President Biden to create the position of White House Chief Resilience Officer in order to coordinate, organize, and elevate resilience activities across the federal portfolio as Congress takes overt action through-out 2020 and into 2021 to emphasize mitigation and adaptation over recovery.

"Here in Minnesota and specifically St. Paul, we have been leading on resilience. Not only through the work Representative Nancy Craig has been leading, but at the local level too we are moving more of our spending and resources to resilience; that is why I created the position of chief resilience officer for my city and we have developed a comprehensive resilience and climate change action plan," asserted Mayor Carter of St. Paul, MN. "Natural infrastructure is a major part of our strategy throughout the Mississippi River Corridor and we are doing that in St. Paul as well through the creation of a new waterfront park and natural flood storage areas."

Mayors have successfully worked with the U.S. Chamber, ASCE, and the Mississippi River Caucus in the House and Senate to increase investment in the pre-disaster mitigation culminating with the development of the BRIC program within FEMA which now allows for multi-state resilience projects. But, new programs, increased investment, and congressional action all need management and leadership supported by the full support of the White House if progress is to continue.

Pictured above from left to right: MRCTI Co-Chair, Mayor Bob Gallagher of Bettendorf, IA; MRCTI Mississippi State Chair Mayor George Flaggs of Vicksburg, MS; Thomas Donohue, CEO of US Chamber of Commerce; Chuck Chaitovitz, Director of Sustainability for the US Chamber.

Mayors Achieve near-perfect score on FY 2021 Appropriation Priorities for Corridor

As can be seen in the chart to the right, the majority of MRCTI FY 2021 federal appropriation priorities were funded at or above requested levels. Major infrastructure items like the Marine Highway Grant Program and the Emergency Watershed Protection Program were funded for this year beyond the level requested in order to account for set-backs incurred by the flood of 2019, drought of 2020, and the pandemic.

Programs that continue to see year-after-year increases include the Water Pollution Control Grants, disaster resilience and mitigation funding, the Marine Highway Program, watershed management programs. Accounts for the Corps of Engineers have seen modest increases over the past several cycles, but not nearly to the level congruent to losses incurred during recent disasters such as the $6.2 billion price tag for actual losses incurred directly adjacent to the Main Stem Mississippi River. FY 2022 may include critical new accounts such as the RRF, NFIP mapping, and major infrastructure.

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<th>Program</th>
<th>MRCTI Request</th>
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<td>Emergency Watershed Protection Program</td>
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<td>Corps of Engineers Mississippi River &amp; Tributaries Program</td>
<td>400 Million</td>
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<td>America’s Marine Highway Grant Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>U.S. DOT BUILD Grant Program</td>
<td>1.5 Billion</td>
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What are the Costs of Nutrient Loading to Mississippi River Cities?

MRCTI and Earth Economics are partnering to answer critical questions regarding the actual costs of nutrient loading on city economies. In January 2021, Earth Economics kicked-off a study with MRCTI funded by the Walton Family Foundation to determine the dollar value of errant nutrients for cities in terms of actual municipal budget impact as well as lost economic opportunities. Lead by Project Director Erin Mackey (pictured above, bottom right square) the study will be divided into two phases. The first phase will consist of a survey of cities along the Mississippi River through all ten states to zero-in on which regions seem to be experiencing the most effects in terms of having to address significant discharge and persistently high sedimentation. Phase two will then involve selecting up to three MRCTI member cities with which to conduct a deeper-dive into analyzing cost and tracing those costs through the city economy. It is within the scope of the inquiry to pose possible solutions and extrapolate on changes both within and without city jurisdiction to reduce or avoid diagnosed costs. Cities throughout the watershed have been experimenting with their state governments to incentivize upstream and on-field techniques that reduce costs to water treatment as well as establish nutrient trading markets such as the one being built in Dubuque, IA. This study will compliment that work and provide valuable data to a suite of errant nutrient solutions being considered and deployed around the Mississippi River Basin.

Pictured: Excess nutrients meander and mix at the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers.

MRCTI Cities Top River Travel Magazine’s List of Best Holiday River Towns 2020

Over seventy-five cities from ten states were nominated across seven categories based on population with an eighth ‘overall’ category rounding-out the competition. Here are the top MRCTI winners for each category.

Below 500—#1 Kimmswick, MO; #3 Clarksville, MO

501-1,000—#1 Prairie du Rocher, IL; #3 Grafton, IL

1,001-5,000—#3 Ste. Genevieve, MO

5001-15,000—#1 Chester, IL; #2 Lake City, MN; #3 Prairie Du Chein, WI

15,001-30,000—#1 Alton, IL; #2 Natchez, MS; #3 Red Wing, MN and Winona, MN

30,001-60,000—#1 Cape Girardeau, MO; #2 La Crosse, WI; #3 Bettendorf, IA

70,000+- #1 St. Louis, MO; #2 St. Paul, MN; #3 New Orleans, LA

Overall—#1 Chester, IL

MRCTI Virtual Capitol Meeting 2021
March 2-4, Washington, DC

March 2
Meeting Kick-Off, 4:00pm CST

March 3
Session I, 10:00am;
Session II, 2:00pm

March 4
Press Conference, 10:00am CST;
Session 10:30am to 12:00pm

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