

## **Issue Brief** **WRDA - The Upper Ohio Navigation Improvements Project**

*Inland waterways and river navigation play an integral role in the nation's and in Pennsylvania's economy. Lengthy delays by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in approving a final feasibility study for improvements at Emsworth, Dashields, and Montgomery (EDM) Locks and Dams threaten to cause massive economic and environmental harm. Expediting this critical project is essential and should be one of our nation's top infrastructure priorities.*

### **Background**

Inland waterways and river navigation play an integral role in the nation's and in Pennsylvania's economy, in particular in the Pittsburgh region. The Port of Pittsburgh is the nation's third busiest inland port, processing over 35 million tons of freight each year.

The Emsworth, Dashields, and Montgomery (EDM) Locks and Dams form the head of the Ohio River Navigation System. Originally completed in 1922 to 1936, these facilities are the oldest remaining to be addressed in the post-1955 Ohio River modernization program. In addition providing navigable conditions on the upper portion of the Ohio River, the EDM project also benefits water supply and recreational needs.

Two major problems are associated with the upper Ohio River navigation system – structural condition and inadequate lock capacity for modern navigation tows. All three structures experience structural condition fatigue of the concrete causing unreliable structural capacity of the lock walls, and none of the structures meet modern design criteria.

### **Upper Ohio Navigation Study**

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Upper Ohio Navigation draft feasibility study recommends Congressional authorization for improvements at EDM to maintain safe, efficient, and reliable navigation. The study itself has taken over 13 years and cost more than \$17 million. In October 2014, following review and approval by the study's USACE Headquarters policy review team, the draft feasibility study was unanimously approved by the USACE Civil Works Review Board to enter into State and Agency review, the last step before what was an expected January 2015 Chief's Report. However, a final EDM feasibility study has yet to be issued, further delaying this critical project.

The long-anticipated economic update/justification was submitted to US Army Corps HQ, in which they addressed all of the comments from the independent review board. The report is now awaiting final sign off from the EPA, after which a release of a final Chief's report is anticipated. If EPA sign off occurs as expected, according to USACE, the Chief's Report could be ready as early as September, which would allow for its inclusion in WRDA 2016.

According to the USACE's analysis, "a critical structural failure of any of the EDM lock chambers would shut down navigation for years between the Ohio River System and the Monongahela and Allegheny River Navigation Systems. A multi-year closure would be ruinous to the navigation industry and users dependent on the river system, and rerouting of bulk commodities to road and rail would adversely affect that infrastructure. Significant environmental impacts to the highly populated and industrialized Southwest Pennsylvania region would result, including impacts to water quality, water supply, and recreation provided by the EDM pools."

If these locks were to close, it would cost the region \$430 million a year at each lock, and if all three locks close it would cost the region \$1.29 billion every year.

A failure at EDM would have national implication as well, disrupting coal, steel, and energy production with impacts that would ripple across the national economy. Disruption in coal supply and coke would create major impacts on electric power plans and our national automotive and construction industries.

## **Conclusion**

- The economy of not only southwest Pennsylvania, but all of Pennsylvania, depends on the timely completion of this project. Countless businesses and their employees, customers, and suppliers will be negatively impacted by any further delays in the Army Corps' review process.
- Expediting completion of the EDM final feasibility study and completion of the project should be one of our nation's top infrastructure priorities. We need continued support to get the EPA to expedite its review.
- Additionally, Congress should pass a full WRDA reauthorization bill before the end of 2016.