



May 8, 2020

Honorable Roger Wicker  
United States Senate  
555 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Wicker,

Thank you for your request for information on the COVID-19 impact to transportation on the inland river system. I am sure you are very aware of the importance of the inland river system to the nation's economy and environment, to which you can find more information below, and your office has been instrumental in keeping the conversation moving forward on its importance.

**Inland Marine Highways** move commerce to/from 38 states throughout our nation's heartland, serve as transport ramps to industrial and agricultural centers and facilitate imports/exports at gateway ports to the Coasts. Our nation's rivers deliver vital goods between major gateway ports, establish new trade networks with significant public benefits and create a foundation for future trade growth.

Inland Rivers Ports & Terminals, Inc. (IRPT), is a non-profit trade association with over 300 members nationwide. IRPT advocates for the inland waterways, industries and companies that serve and utilize our inland rivers, ports and terminals. IRPT promotes the use of our nation's rivers as the most cost effective, and environmentally-friendly form of transportation. Our Members consist of public ports, private terminals, barge and rail operators, waterway associations, shippers and firms.

In the early stages of the pandemic, IRPT held biweekly conference calls with port and terminal transload facilities to monitor the impact, offer resources and allow our Members to share best practices. In response to your request for information, IRPT kindly shares the following observations:

Observation #1: **Reduction in volume demand for river transportation -based commodities.**

Observation #2: **Determination and clarity of essential employees.**

Observation #3: **Protecting Inland Shores against COVID-19.**

Observation #4: **Impact of COVID-19 on public ports and private terminal operators.**

Observation #5: **Personal protective equipment.**

**Reduction in volume demand for river-based commodities:**

1. Due to a variety of manufacturing plants at idle, commodities typically transported on the inland river system, such as ferro alloy, aluminum, steel and scrap metals have experienced a downturn in volume. This appears to be a ripple effect due to the auto industry manufacturers at idle. Inputs used in the manufacturing process that typically traverse the inland rivers for transportation have decreased. IRPT would like to offer insight however, that when the pandemic subsides and the stay-

at-home orders are lifted, it may appear the economy is in recovery, but river transportation will continue to see the impact for several months following.

2. The drop in oil production has caused a ripple effect to the transportation industries that serve the oil and gas industry. An unprecedented decline in the demand for oil caused by COVID-19 travel restrictions, along with the increased supply due to the Saudi and Russian price war has created the Perfect Storm in the oil and gas sector. The current economic situation is not sustainable for producers and the service and supply sector, and many companies will not survive. Four in every five exploration and production companies have already begun shutting in wells, and the oil-related workforce is experiencing massive layoffs. The end result will be far reaching as many tow and tug boat companies are forced to shut down and necessary suppliers may no longer be in existence as businesses begin to ramp up.

Alternative energy industries were also affected, in that corn movement that typically would have gone to ethanol plants was reduced and coal plant operations were reduced.

#### Determination and clarity of essential employees:

IRPT applauds the Administration for its clear determination of essential employees. The guidance issued by the Department of Homeland Security was essential to the nation's transportation workforce, across all modes, to ensure against supply chain disruptions. What was unclear to employers and employees alike, in different areas of the country, was the documentation required to avoid violation of stay-at-home orders in some states. The Transportation Worker Identification Credential (TWIC) issued by the Transportation Security Administration was identified as an avenue to meet the documentation need, and whereas the TWIC would be an excellent solution to this documentation, this has not been widely enforced since its inception and therefore inland port and terminals do not require this identification.

#### Protecting Inland Shores against COVID-19:

IRPT Members nationally implemented modifications to their daily routines, facility operations and personnel guidance during COVID-19 to protect each individual facility, their families and inland shores against the spread of the virus. Screening and monitoring procedures were put in place at physical facilities and at transfer locations and docks, work from home was implemented and on-site meetings were reduced.

IRPT and our Members also produced a best practices document to reduce exposure to personnel, to facilitate safe crew changes and to ensure safe operations. The document also provides guidance on how (and to whom) to report illness, identifies best course of action on disinfection based on appropriate timelines and different surfaces. It is thanks to clear direction and guidance through the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the Department of Homeland Security's U.S. Coast Guard that we were able to produce best practices for COVID-19 and any future infectious disease.

#### Impact of COVID-19 on public ports and private terminal operators:

The **long-term impact** of COVID-19 on the maritime transportation industry is unknown but it is expected that with the decline in river-related commodities transported, overall tonnages will decline as well. Overall tonnages are the main metric used by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to determine operation, maintenance and construction funding levels. A sharp decline of total tonnage for fiscal year 2020

(published in 2021) may result in a decline in funding availability to maintain the river transportation system. IRPT recommends that the impact of COVID-19 on overall tonnages be considered when evaluating the funding levels of the U.S. Army Corps' operation and maintenance budget.

The **immediate, or short-term**, monetary impact of COVID-19 is clear. Public ports, private terminals and vessel operators have all purchased large quantities of personal protective equipment, including masks, gowns, gloves, sanitizer, thermometers, etc. It should be noted that many private terminals and vessel operators are located outside of public port properties. Should consideration be given to alleviating the monetary burden of purchasing such equipment to keep America's supply chain moving, to keep employees working and to stop the spread of the virus, IRPT recommends that such consideration be given to private and public entities alike.

#### **Personal protective equipment.**

Many ports and terminals struggled to acquire personal protective equipment at the onset of the crisis. With the majority of PPE being reserved for healthcare workers and first responders, the supply of masks, gowns, gloves, sanitizers, etc. was unavailable to inland port and terminals and the businesses that serve them. IRPT was directed through multiple federal, state and local agencies to convey the need, to no avail. The constant message delivered through the Department of Homeland Security was that transportation workers are deemed essential and those who can work, should work. The determination by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to reserve PPE to front line workers did not take into consideration the other essential-deemed industries.

Fabrication companies and shipyards are identified as essential businesses. And, for communities seeing jobs disappear from every sector around them, it is critical these essential businesses continue to operate. At the onset of this pandemic the supply chain was not able to meet global demand, leaving many essential businesses in need of various masks, gloves, sanitizers and disinfectants concerned that without protection for their employees, they would have to shut down.

IRPT commends you on your focused attention on America's freight transportation system. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of any assistance.

Sincerely,



Cindy Cutrera  
2018-2020 President  
Inland Rivers, Ports & Terminals, Inc.