Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 26, 2013

The Honorable Bill Shuster
Chairman
House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
2165 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nick J. Rahall II
Ranking Member
House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
2165 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Barbara Boxer
Chairman
Senate Committee on Environment & Public Works
410 Dirksen Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable David Vitter
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Environment & Public Works
456 Dirksen Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairmen Shuster and Boxer and Ranking Members Rahall and Vitter:

Thank you for your efforts on the Water Resources Reform and Development Act (WRRDA), and in particular for advancing provisions that will improve our nation's navigation infrastructure.

Both the Senate and House versions of the water resources legislation make important advances to better fund harbor maintenance throughout our nation. We urge you to retain language that would direct harbor maintenance funding to be more in line with the revenues collected for this purpose in the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund (HMTF). Only about half of the collections for harbor maintenance are currently expended for that purpose, and we urge you to retain and strengthen language in the final conference report so that funds collected to improve our navigation infrastructure are fully used for that purpose. Many of us cosponsored the RAMP Act (H.R.335) as a way to achieve this goal and we thank you for advancing the objectives of that legislation. We ask that the final conference report include a funding target of 100% of HMTF revenues that is not tied to other civil works funding levels.

As Great Lakes Representatives, we write to call particular attention to the Great Lakes Navigation System, which is the backbone of our nation's manufacturing, industrial, building, and agricultural economies.

Each year, about 145 million tons of commodities are carried through the Great Lakes Navigation System. The materials transported include fuel that powers homes and businesses, limestone and cement to construct roads and bridges, iron ore to produce steel, chemicals and other raw materials for manufacturers, and agricultural products to feed our nation and the world. This mode of transport has both economic and environmental advantages compared to alternative transportation options, and supports about 130,000 jobs in the U.S. and generates over $18 billion in revenues.

Despite the benefits the Great Lakes Navigation System provides, inadequate funding and maintenance has resulted in a tremendous backlog of dredging projects that have forced vessels to light load, grounded vessels, impeded safe navigation, and closed harbors and threatened other harbors with closure. To further exacerbate the problem, the water levels of a number of the Great Lakes have reached

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record lows in the last few years. The impacts of the lack of dredging and other required maintenance, including lock improvements, breakwater repairs, and construction of dredged material disposal facilities, have economic consequences that hinder economic growth.

In order to restore the functionality of the Great Lakes Navigation System, we urge conferees to include our priorities listed below in the final conference report. We list our requests in order of importance:

1. Dedicated harbor maintenance funding for the Great Lakes Navigation System (GLNS): The Senate bill prioritizes 20 percent of harbor maintenance funding in excess of FY2012 levels for the GLNS. However, the House bill sets funding aside for certain purposes using total harbor maintenance funding, and not spending above a threshold figure. Because it is not yet clear how these different approaches will be resolved, we request the conference agreement include bill language requiring that at least 15 percent of all annual HMTF appropriations be provided for GLNS operations and maintenance to address the numerous needs we outlined above.

2. Authorization of the GLNS: Both the Senate and House bills recognize the Great Lakes harbors, ports and other navigation features as being part of a single navigation system. In the House bill, Section 202(b) explicitly authorizes the GLNS as a single system, and we ask that this language be retained in the conference report.

3. Expanded Uses of the HMTF: Both the Senate and House bills expand the use of the HMTF for a variety of uses, including dredging berths, disposal of contaminated sediments, and rebates for certain types of ports. As you work towards a conference agreement, it is important that other already-authorized components of our waterway system are not unintentionally neglected, including the Great Lakes. The GLNS has a backlog of $200 million in dredging projects, seriously aging breakwaters and locks in need of repair, and a lack of dredged material disposal facilities. In prioritizing uses of the HMTF, it is critical that funding first be provided for currently authorized uses, such as maintaining navigation projects at their constructed depths and widths, especially in the Great Lakes.

Thank you for your consideration of these requests. We look forward to working with you to advance a final water resources conference report that improves the nation's water resources, including the Great Lakes.

Sincerely,

Bill Huizenga
Member of Congress

Louise M. Slaughter
Member of Congress

Sean P. Duffy
Member of Congress

John D. Dingell
Member of Congress

Fred Upton
Member of Congress

John Conyers, Jr.
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