

March 23, 2009 - One Positive 'pork-barrel' Project

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It was encouraging to hear that another \$16.9 million has been earmarked for the Lower Monongahela River Locks and Dams project that includes facilities in Elizabeth and North Charleroi.

U.S. Rep. John P. Murtha no doubt had something to do with the appropriation. The Johnstown Democrat has been directing federal dollars to the project since his district was expanded to include a portion of the Mon Valley.

These will not be wasted tax dollars for the not-always-necessary "pet projects" better known as "pork barrel" initiatives. These federal dollars will improve infrastructure. Such projects are of utmost importance, the type upon which federal lawmakers should concentrate.

Unfortunately, the most important projects often are the least visible to taxpayers. Otherwise - hopefully - they would be out in the streets shouting for more of them.

A casual look at the Mon, and the locks and dams that allow for navigation along the waterway, reveals little. Pleasure-boaters mosey along the river and, it seems, an occasional tug pushes a few barges up or down stream.

In truth, though, there is plenty going on in the Monongahela River, a source of reasonably-priced freight traffic to the Port of Pittsburgh and elsewhere. Without river transportation, common folks would pay more for electricity and many other consumer goods.

Despite the vital need for locks and dams, the facilities have been allowed to grow old, insufficient and, in the case of Elizabeth, in danger of failure.

The Lower Mon project began in 1992 and was supposed to be completed in 2004. That never happened, though, and money, or the absence of it, is the reason completion remains years away.

Murtha has mined the federal coffers for money over the years, but it is time for others in the capital to realize that what goes on in North Charleroi and Elizabeth, in terms of transportation, affects everything else along the inland waterway system.

Instead of bolstering privately held companies that are suffering from bad management, the federal government should improve infrastructure to benefit all Americans.