



Ag Transportation Summit highlights infrastructure challenges, solutions

On August 4-5, the National Grain and Feed Association (NGFA) and the Soy Transportation Coalition (STC) hosted the second Ag Transportation Summit: “Transportation Capacity - Overcoming the Challenges.” Approximately 200 participants attended the event in Chicago. The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Agricultural Marketing Service once again served as a summit sponsor. The inaugural summit occurred in July 2013.

“It’s really important to shed light on the transportation challenges confronting agriculture to farmers and grain handlers,” explains Mike Steenhoek, executive director of the Soy Transportation Coalition. “Transportation has traditionally been a source of competitive advantage. However, if we fail to maintain and improve the system, it could be a vulnerability. It is therefore important to convene thought leaders and stakeholders to discuss and explore opportunities to enhance the transportation infrastructure farmers and the entire agricultural industry rely upon.”

The goals of the summit remained: 1.) To raise the awareness of the importance of transportation to the success and profitability of U.S. agriculture; 2.) To precipitate and motivate further action to promote a transportation infrastructure that better serves the interests of U.S. agriculture; 3.) To provide a venue for advocates of U.S. agriculture to network and develop collaborations for the purpose of promoting the transportation needs of U.S. agriculture; and 4.) To build bridges between government and agricultural interests that will result in more effective promotion of agricultural transportation issues.

Specific topics and issues addressed during the summit included:

- **Inland Waterways:** The status of funding to upgrade locks and dams, and the potential timing of lock rehabilitation projects, as well as the significance of inland waterways to agriculture.
- **Rail Transportation:** Efforts underway by rail carriers to enhance capacity to serve growing freight demand from agriculture and other sectors. Performance of rail in transporting agricultural products, Trends in rail infrastructure investment.
- **Surface Transportation:** Challenges inherent in the current structure for funding improvements and maintenance of the highway system. The status of potential changes to increase semi-truck weight limits, strategies for addressing the shortage of commercial truck drivers and hours-of-service restrictions.
- **Ports:** Productivity and reliability concerns confronting the nation’s ports, needed investments and innovations at foreign ports.
- **Panama Canal Expansion:** An update on the status of the expansion project and its implications for agricultural trade and U.S. ports.
- **Private Investment in Infrastructure:** A discussion on the ingredients that must be in place in order for private investment to be a viable solution to our transportation challenges.

The day and a half event began at 8 am on Tuesday, August 4, and concluded at noon on Wednesday, August 5.

Presentations provided during the summit can be accessed at: www.soytransportation.org or www.ngfa.org.