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Port of Muscatine study to be presented to City Council

Multi-modal transportation interchange is feasible; would be economic catalyst

MUSCATINE, Iowa – All the right ingredients are available for the development of an intermodal container terminal and port district on the Mississippi River according to the Port of Muscatine Planning and Feasibility Study that will be presented to the Muscatine City Council Thursday (June 8). The study was prepared by HDR, Inc., out of Kansas City, Kansas.

“Muscatine is in a very unique position in regards to the development of a port,” Dave Gobin, Community Development Director, said. “Since there are no other ports of this kind north of St. Louis, there is a need for this type of terminal port and the infrastructure is in place here in Muscatine to develop this project.”

The City of Muscatine, along with matching funds from Kent Corporation, applied to the Iowa Department of Transportation for a Linking Iowa’s Freight Transportation Systems (LIFTS) grant for the Port of Muscatine Planning and Feasibility Study in October 2015. The basis of the study was to establish whether the vision of a multi-modal container terminal port facility located on the Mississippi River in Muscatine was feasible. The facility would allow the sending, receiving, and trans-loading of intermodal container freight and smaller bulk items utilizing the river, highway, warehousing, or rail. The grant was awarded to the City in early 2016.

“When you think about it, you have ports on the west coast that unload containers and ship them east,” Gobin said. “Then you have ports on the east coast that unload containers and ship them west. With the expansion of the Panama Canal, it makes sense to have a port in the middle of the country that allows sending containers south, using the river, and send shipments toward both coasts or to other foreign markets.”



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Moving containers on the Mississippi River makes good economic sense according to Gobin.

“Shippers and residents will both benefit economically from the development of this terminal,” Gobin said. “Shippers will see reduced costs associated with moving their commodities from one market to another while residents will see benefits from increased employment opportunities, housing options, more businesses, and more money spent in the community.”

Most commodities move down river with farm and food products accounting for 16.08 million short tons in 2016 according to data gathered at Lock and Dam 17 by the US Army Corps of Engineers. Other commodities moving through the Muscatine area include coal (1.70 short tons in 2016), petro and petroleum products (0.20), chemicals (4.37), crude materials (1.79), and manufactured goods (1.49). Total tonnage moving through Lock and Dam 17 has remained steady to slightly increasing each year with 25.77 million short tons recorded in 2016.

The study also says that these commodities are most cost effectively shipped by water due to their lower value per ton, they are not time sensitive, and they can be handled with lower labor requirements and cost. Commodities moving north and south along the system are either destined for domestic use near river ports or for international ship movements where these cargoes are transloaded to ocean going ships or coastal barges.

Inland river ports and terminals must have several key characteristics to be functional according to the HDR report. These include: access for the intended vessels, unencumbered road access (not near residential communities) that connect to main thoroughfares such as large connector roads or highways, rail access, and sufficient land for expansion

The proposed site of the terminal is located on property owned by Kent Corporation on a bend of the Mississippi River south of Muscatine on a large flat area separated from the river by a levee. Kent Corporation intends for the 100 acre site to be a public access terminal port facility.



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The site studied has easy access to rail and major highways along with access for the intended vessels.

“One of the other things that a river port must do is be flexible,” Gobin said. “There will be times during the winter months when the river is shut down by ice and you need to have the ability to transport by rail or by truck as needed during this time period without traffic congestion within the community. This port will be able to do that and have little down time during the year.”

The HDR team approached the feasibility study by looking at current and future business operations and opportunities, the competitive port landscape, and business investment in the region, along with what new infrastructure requirements there would be and what governance models for ownership and operation of a port would work for this project. Not included in the study was any engineering design or environmental analysis.

Among the recommendations that will be presented to the Council from the study are:

- Develop a structure for a public association that incorporates public-private partnerships;
- Develop strategic goals and master planning objectives for the proposed port development;
- Quantify potential funding opportunities;
- Adjust municipal zoning to create a specific and inclusive “port zone”;
- Agree on an acceptable site plan for the proposed Muscatine port site;
- Develop site engineering with phased timeline and specified costing;
- Undertake the required federal and state permitting processes including USACE processes;
- Develop a business development process including shipper, consignee, broker, and carrier database;
- Develop an initial construction plan to meet basic requirements of a new marine facility, taking into account plausible short term opportunities;



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- Once permits are approved, initiate construction; and
- Develop a terminal tariff, regulations, and pricing schedule for terminal users.

To download a copy of the study, click [this link](#).

-30-

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