



State of the barge industry highlighted as Freightweek STL gets underway

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ST. LOUIS - The state of the barge industry was among the first educational sessions offered to attendees of FreightWeek STL, a four-day conference hosted by Inland Marine Expo (IMX), Institute for Trade and Transportation Studies (ITTS) and St. Louis Regional Freightway. Representatives of Informa Economics IEG, which is part of Agribusiness Intelligence and the world's leading comprehensive agricultural, commodity and transportation market research, analysis and consulting firm headquartered in Memphis, Tenn., provided attendees with insight into the Barge Fleet Profile Report before Columbia, Ill.-based Heartland Companies gave a barge industry update.

Ken Eriksen, senior vice-president of Informa Economics IEG; Alan Barrett, Senior Consultant of Informa Economics IEG; and Chaz Jones, Transportation Analyst of Informa Economics IEG, discussed the Barge Fleet Profile Report, which is an annual survey of all the operators on the system that has been conducted for the last 31 years. Areas of focus during the presentation were tied to fleet expansion, covered and dry barge fleet dynamics, U.S. shallow draft towboats fleet halts and U.S. inland shallow draft towboat engine manufacturer by power, just to name a few.

“We are starting to emerge out of overcapacity,” said Eriksen in summarizing the state of the barge industry. “There is a lot of fleet to try to get to before we can do some mass retirement, so we’ve got a big fleet out there, but its shrunk. We’ve removed some ability to expand and now there is a governor on the system. We may be, in a sense, making a U-turn right now in the industry, and if we start throwing some more volume at it, we could see a lot of growth here. As we talk about the commodities – we are seeing very solid grain movements and stability on the coal. Though we saw some big exports this year, going forward we may face some headwinds on coal. Meanwhile, some other commodities want to start moving down the river and we are seeing opportunity.”

Andrew Holthaus, vice president of finance for Heartland Companies, shared key industry updates during the session. He touched on barge earnings, changes sparked by political actions, fleet sizes and the impact of weather on rates and utilization. Attendees also learned that Jeffboat, one of the three manufacturers of barges, will close permanently in May 2018. Jeffboat equipment has been purchased by Trinity Marine and the 80-plus acres of land in Jeffersonville, Ind., will be sold.

The hour-long discussion on the barge industry also reinforced that while it is making a great impact and moving a lot of volume, people aren't aware of it because it can't be seen.

"How many people have sat and waited for a train," stated Eriksen. "The average person in St. Louis and Memphis has never been held up by a barge. A train you can see, just like a 26-ton vessel driving down the street in the form of a truck. The barge industry is very efficient, the story is phenomenal, but its hard to relate it to the average audience."

To learn more about the state of the barge industry, individuals can access Barge Fleet and Commodity Profile Reports at www.bargefleet.com and the Inland River Record at www.inlandriverrecord.com.

The inaugural FreightWeek STL is bringing together freight and transportation experts as well as exhibitors from around the country to share ideas and collaborate on the forward movement of America's growing freight industry. FreightWeek STL is taking place **May 21-24, 2018**, at the America's Center Convention Complex and the Marriott St. Louis Grand, just blocks of the Mississippi River, where participants can gain firsthand exposure to the St. Louis region's enviable location as the epicenter of American Logistics. To see a full schedule, click [here](#). For detailed descriptions of each of the Education Sessions, click [here](#). To learn more about FreightWeek STL, or register to attend, visit <http://freightweekstl.thefreightway.com/>.

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The Institute for Trade and Transportation Studies (ITTS) is a multistate research institution formed to assist member states on understanding the relationship of transportation needs to international and commercial traffic. ITTS is incorporated as a 501(c)(3) in the State of Louisiana. Current membership consists of the State Departments of Transportation from the following States: Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Virginia and West Virginia. ITTS's mission

focuses on providing research data and expert opinions to its Members concerning the effects of commercial freight movements on domestic and international activities, with reference to infrastructure and transportation needs and safety implications.

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