



Reliable Navigation for a Competitive Nation

— October 2025

Deepening the J. Bennett Johnston Waterway to a 12-Foot Channel

A Balanced Federal and Regional Economic Case

Executive Summary

The J. Bennett Johnston Waterway (JBJW) is a critical inland navigation system connecting Louisiana's heartland to global markets through the Mississippi River. Today, industries using the Red River face costly light-loading due to a 9-foot navigation depth. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) is evaluating solutions **to provide a reliable 12-foot navigation channel**—reducing transportation costs, strengthening supply chain resilience, and improving economic competitiveness for both local communities and the nation's export economy.

USACE feasibility documents confirm the proposed improvement would enhance operational reliability, reduce shipping costs, and increase economic benefits while protecting important environmental and community values.

Why now: With competitive pressures growing across global agricultural and industrial sectors, this investment delivers outsized returns for rural Louisiana and the national freight network.

Project Purpose & Federal Authority

USACE is conducting a feasibility study to deepen the JBJWW from 9 feet to 12 feet and address sedimentation through enhanced training works, dredging, and operational improvements. The authorized project includes five navigation locks, 84 ft × 705 ft × 14 ft dimensions, and a 200-foot-wide channel.

The study evaluates multiple alternatives, including draft restrictions and dike improvements, to achieve a reliable channel depth.

Key Economic Justification

The USACE economic analysis demonstrates that improving the channel depth can create measurable and nationally significant economic returns. Rather than simply reducing individual transportation costs, the 12-foot channel would reshape how freight moves across Louisiana and into the global marketplace. Today, shippers must lighten barges to ensure safe passage in shoaling reaches along the Red River. When fully loaded vessels are forced to leave cargo behind, agricultural producers, manufacturers, and energy suppliers bear the cost — and jobs and revenue opportunities shift away from river-reliant regions.

By improving navigation reliability and reducing the frequency and cost of light-loading, the project strengthens the competitiveness of U.S. grain exports and industrial products, especially those sourced from inland Louisiana and surrounding states. In addition, improved draft and reliability can shift freight away from less efficient and more congested roadways to the river, where emissions per ton-mile are significantly lower and safety outcomes are substantially better.

Preliminary USACE economic indicators show the project would deliver a positive return on federal investment, validating its eligibility under National Economic Development criteria.

Regional Economic Growth

Advancing this project supports:

- **Industrial expansion** at existing Red River ports and terminals
- **Job creation** across inland Louisiana
- **Reduced truck traffic** and associated roadway costs
- Lower delivered costs for regional shipping

The project area includes major highway and rail connections, with expanding industrial facilities already positioned to use the improved waterway.

Engineering & System Reliability

Maintaining a reliable channel requires:

- **Targeted dredging** in shoaling reaches
- **Training structure improvements** including dikes & revetments
- Lock operations that ensure **safe transit at deeper draft**

The Tentatively Selected Plan includes measures that balance performance, cost, and environmental considerations.

Environmental Stewardship

USACE's feasibility process ensures:

- NEPA compliance
- Avoidance and minimization of impacts
- Mitigation where necessary

Environmental and social considerations are fully integrated into the Tentatively Selected Plan.

Policy Impact & Why Congress Matters

This investment ensures that a previously authorized federal waterway **remains competitive and useful in a modern logistics landscape**. The project supports:

- U.S. export competitiveness
- Domestic manufacturing, fuel supply and agriculture
- Regional economic resilience
- Military use

Congressional support is needed to:

- Advance the study to completion
- Authorize the final recommendation
- Secure federal construction funding

What Success Delivers

- **Lower transportation costs for U.S. shippers**
- **More freight moved on the safest, cleanest mode**
- **Economic expansion in parishes along the Red River**
- **Reduced congestion and emissions region-wide**
- **A more reliable waterway**

Call to Action

Federal leadership—working with Louisiana ports, industries, and local sponsors—can ensure the JBJ Waterway fulfills its intended purpose:

A reliable, efficient, and competitive navigation system connecting America's interior economy to world markets.

We respectfully request continued **Congressional investment and support** to deliver this economically justified infrastructure for Louisiana and the Nation.

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Sources:

USACE Appendix B – Cost Engineering (June 2025)

USACE Appendix E – Economic and Social Considerations (August 2025)