

WATERWAY SYSTEMS

GULF INTRACOASTAL WATERWAY

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- The Gulf Intracoastal Waterway crosses three COE Districts. The Galveston, New Orleans and Mobil districts.
- Historically tonnage and traffic on GIWW has been relatively constant.
- The barge sizes are 298x400 ft. The 1,200 ft long locks limit the length of the barges; barges cannot be wider than 70'.
- Tows are made of 3-4 barges.
- Tonnage trends show very low average annual growth rates. The GIWW Canal Association has asked the question “where is the tonnage going?”
 - One possible answer could be an increase in rail movements or other modes, but not on the GIWW.
- Types of commodities include mostly petroleum products, comprising approximately 38% of tonnage. Chemicals, non-metallic minerals, and crude also move along the waterway.
- Projections from IWR for inland waterway traffic indicate more growth than was seen in the past.
- The Galveston District is looking at GIWW improvements including realignments, widening, and mooring structures to improve transits.
- On-going Galveston district studies include the Brazos River Floodgates and Colorado River Locks.
- Barges are touted as a low cost transportation method so it is a strange result that tonnage has remained relatively constant. The expectation is that the efficient transportation methods would experience growth. Something to consider in the future is a comparative growth rate study comparing the traffic on the water to other modes. We should try to answer the question “where is the tonnage going?”
- The waterway is primarily used to move petroleum products. With the growing national dependence on foreign oil and the large percentage of national imports that flow through this area (into the Sabine-Neches waterway and Houston), this only compounds the oddity in lack of GIWW growth.
- Environmental constraints limit what can be built in some areas to increase capacity.
- The GIWW goes along the gulf coast and is a man made canal. Some portions of the water way go through natural bays.
- The last several decades have seen several pipelines built in different locations throughout the US, which may have siphoned off some of the potential growth.