



Great Lakes St. Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation (GLS)

Advisory Board Meeting Minutes

March 26, 2026

Meeting Held Virtually from GLS Operations Office, Massena, NY

PRESENT

David McMillan (Chair, GLS Advisory Board), William Mielke (Advisory Board Member), Arthur Sulzer (Advisory Board Member), Sylvonica Madlock (DFO, Executive Officer), Mike McCoshen (Administrator), Jeffrey Scharf (Associate Administrator), Tony Curley (Director of Engineering and Maintenance), Paul Braden (Director of Lock Operations and Marine Services), Carrie Rogers (Director of Administrative Services), Peter Hirthe (Director of Trade and Economic Development), LaToya James (Public Affairs Specialist), Erin McCartney (Acting Chief Financial Officer), Donna O’Berry (Chief Counsel), and Craig Freeman (Administrative Officer).

I. CALL TO ORDER

GLS Advisory Board Chair, David McMillan, called the meeting to order at 10:02 a.m. EDT, noting that the board was properly noticed and held a quorum. This marked the first board meeting convened since March 2025.

II. ADMINISTRATOR’S REPORT

GLS Administrator Mike McCoshen provided an update on transitions and strategic initiatives. He introduced Erin McCartney as the Acting Chief Financial Officer and noted that recruitment is active for the Deputy Administrator position alongside seven other vacancies. He reported that current staffing stands at 118, with a goal of 125. Under the Maritime Action Plan, GLS is launching a training and competency framework to address skill gaps, as well as a formal strategic succession plan.

Administrator McCoshen noted that construction of the new administration building is progressing on track, and an appraisal is underway for the old building since final disposition plans are not yet set. He reported a record-breaking 297-day season for 2025; while shipping traffic officially cut off on January 2, it took until January 12 to clear all vessels from the system. GLS also maintained a 99.7% reliability rate.

The Administrator reported that GLS is continuing to work with the U.S. Department of Transportation’s Maritime Administration and the Offices of Multimodal Freight and International Affairs to further national supply chain resilience. He also noted the importance of maintaining a continuous dialogue with union partners for the strength of the Seaway. He concluded by sharing that GLS launched a market analysis study, in partnership with American Great Lakes Ports and regional port districts, to expand cargo movements between the Great Lakes and the U.S. Inland River system.

III. QUARTERLY UPDATES

- Jeffrey Scharf, Associate Administrator, highlighted technical projects and environmental conditions, reporting that the Voyage Information System (VIS) has moved into the final



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validation phase and cloud migration is on track for March 2027. He reported that the API framework is operational and GLS is sharing data with the Canadian Coast Guard and Great Lakes Pilotage Authority, and that there will be more agreements with commercial industry partners in the future. He noted that water levels have normalized compared to the previous year, with Lake Ontario slightly above the long-term average and Lake St. Lawrence approximately 70 centimeters above normal. Regarding the Seaway International Bridge, traffic continues to lag behind pre-COVID levels, with 80% of traffic being non-toll-paying under the Friendship Free Passage program. Due to fiscal deficit, non-critical hiring and maintenance were deferred; however, high-priority completions like south channel decking repavement and an NTSB bridge pier risk assessment were finished.

- Peter Hirthe, Director of Trade and Economic Development, outlined efforts to actively execute a strategic plan to elevate the global and regional visibility of the Great Lakes St. Lawrence Seaway system. A primary focus is diversifying trade lanes via a major container network expansion; while Duluth and Cleveland are currently CBP-certified, the office is actively supporting Burns Harbor and Monroe as they develop the necessary infrastructure to become active container ports by the 2027 navigation season. Internationally, the team is strengthening vital transatlantic supply chain partnerships, including maintaining critical relationships with the Port of Antwerp-Bruges—a key origin point for inbound break cargo—and developing a robust export trade corridor with the UK's Humber port ecosystem. These strategic initiatives are yielding tangible economic dividends, most notably a nearly 10% increase in U.S. agricultural exports last season, which, along with strong dry bulk performance, successfully offset declines in the general cargo and steel sectors. Furthermore, the office is capitalizing on a record-breaking Great Lakes cruise season that anticipates 23,000 passengers, while continuing to ensure Seaway interests are represented in broader federal policy discussions, such as the Department of Transportation's National Multimodal Freight Network and National Freight Strategic Plan.
- Tony Curley, Director of Engineering and Maintenance, reported the successful completion of critical winter maintenance despite a shortened season, highlighting major concrete repairs and pavement improvements at the Eisenhower and Snell locks, alongside preliminary design progress on the Grasse River crane barge. Over the next 90 days, the team's primary focus will be finalizing the design and awarding the construction contract for the new administration building—a 15-month project expected to break ground this fiscal year and be completed by late 2027—along with securing contracts for Snell Lock stop log refurbishments and vital electrical upgrades at the maintenance and marine base facility.
- Paul Braden, Director of Lock Operations and Marine Services, reported a highly successful 2025 navigation season for Lock Operations, highlighted by a record 297 operating days alongside exceptional system reliability and lock availability rates of 99.7%. Environmental and safety compliance remained a strong focus, with staff



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conducting 181 ship safety inspections and 152 ballast water exams, ensuring that 100% of inbound vessels from outside the Exclusive Economic Zone were both examined and equipped with ballast water treatment systems. Marine services also performed efficiently, maintaining over 95% vessel reliability while managing navigational aid outages. Looking ahead to the next 90 days, Braden outlined several key priorities: ensuring a safe 2026 season, executing the spring buoy run, advancing the Voyage Information System project, evaluating heavy-lift capabilities for the Grasse River gate lifter, and prioritizing the recruitment of specialized personnel. Additionally, the transition to all-season buoys is currently 65% complete and remains on track to be fully finalized by the fall of 2026.

- Carrie Rogers, Director of Administrative Services, reported that the GLS recently achieved its 62nd consecutive unmodified financial audit opinion for Fiscal Year 2025 (FY25), demonstrating steadfast fiscal oversight even as the department adapted to new executive orders and successfully transitioned to DOT-aligned integrated financial and contract writing systems. Financially, as of February 28, total obligations stood at \$11.7 million, with capital infrastructure (SIP) investments projected to increase significantly in the latter half of the fiscal year, while key performance targets for system reliability and administrative expenses remained firmly on track. Echoing these points, Erin McCartney praised the finance team's resilience in operating effectively with limited resources and confirmed his interim support role. Furthermore, while the upcoming FY27 budget is currently embargoed, McCartney previewed that it will introduce some adjustments and is anticipated to be a highly positive budget for the agency once released to Congress.
- LaToya James, Public Affairs Specialist, reported that since October 2024, the Office of Congressional and Public Relations (OCPR) has driven a comprehensive communication strategy that significantly enhanced leadership visibility, stakeholder engagement, and operational transparency across the Great Lakes St. Lawrence Seaway system. Major accomplishments include managing the national rollout of Administrator Mike McCoshen's appointment, delivering disciplined joint messaging around critical operational milestones, and elevating the agency's profile through initiatives like the Pacesetter awards, the *Robinson Bay* Vessel Transfer, and the FY24 Annual Report. In early 2026, the team successfully launched communications for the 68th navigation season while restoring internal outreach following the 2025 government shutdown. Looking ahead to the next 90 days, OCPR will focus on a unified speechwriting partnership with the Office of Trade and Economic Development to ensure seamless executive messaging, while continuing to align with broader DOT objectives, finalizing the FY25 Annual Report, collaborating with the Office of Trade and Economic Development in preparation for the 2025 Pacesetter Awards, and actively monitoring congressional activity concerning transportation funding and infrastructure.

V. OLD AND NEW BUSINESS

The board chair praised the Administrator for a successful first year and commended the team's



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newly refined briefing documents for striking the perfect balance between necessary detail and readability. He also expressed satisfaction that the agency continues to meet its operational goals despite ongoing staffing challenges. Finally, noting that board member Mr. Sulzer was experiencing audio difficulties, the chair relayed that Mr. Sulzer would follow up with the Administrator offline to discuss his ongoing interests in workforce development and training.

The Board tentatively agreed to the following virtual quarterly meeting dates for 2026:

- **Q2 Meeting:** June 3, 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM EDT.
- **Q3 Meeting:** September 9, 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM EDT.
- **Q4 Meeting:** December 9 or 15 (TBD), 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM EST.

CLOSING DISCUSSION AND ADJOURNMENT The meeting was adjourned following a motion by Mr. Mielke.

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