



Water is a precious resource that is not only important for drinking and irrigation, but also has significant value for commercial shipping. One of the important shipping routes in Canada is the St. Lawrence Seaway, which allows ships to travel from the Atlantic Ocean to as far as Lake Superior.

Earlier canals were constructed in the Seaway from as early as 1783. The modern St. Lawrence Seaway, also known as Highway H₂O, was officially open for navigation in 1959. Since then, more than 2.5 billion tonnes of cargo estimated at \$375 billion has moved to and from Canada, the United States and almost fifty other countries around the world.

Construction of the 306-kilometer stretch between Montreal and Lake Ontario was one of the most challenging engineering feats in history. Seven locks were constructed in order to gradually lift incoming ships to an elevation of 75 meters above sea level and travel through the Great Lakes.

The Welland Canal is another component of the Seaway that connects Lake Ontario to Lake Erie across the Niagara Escarpment. The eight locks in the Welland Canal lift ships to 100 meters above sea level and bypasses Niagara Falls.

Construction of the St. Lawrence Seaway was initially a Canadian proposal. However, the United States eventually agreed to share the cost of building the shipping route. The total construction cost is estimated at \$460 million, of which the Canadian Government paid \$330 million. Canada paid further \$300 million to improve the Welland Canal as part of the Seaway project.

The Seaway had major impacts on the Canadian and American economies since it facilitated shipping of bulk commodities. The seaway allowed exploitation of the vast iron ores in Quebec and Labrador and turned Canada from an importer to an exporter of iron ore.

Every year, approximately 44 million tonnes of goods cross the seaway. About 47% of cargo is iron ore, 27% is grain and agricultural products, and 26% is industrial products.

A Cargo-carrying Vessel traveling on the St. Lawrence Seaway near Montreal (Encyclopedia Britannica)

