



## St. Louis Regional Freightway

# Region delivers an abundance of supply chain talent

The St. Louis region has long been recognized for the strength of its freight network and the inherent logistical advantages of its central U.S. location. As those advantages continue to fuel job growth in the region's supply chain sector, the region is proving it can deliver the talent needed.

Interestingly, the St. Louis region's location in the middle of America is also a factor attracting and sourcing inbound talent with a range of skills and experiences both locally and regionally from surrounding Midwestern states.

Bunge North America operates its own training program in its North American sites, and Vice President Brett Caplice notes that, while it previously recruited nearly exclusively from Ivy League schools, that has changed.

"More recently, we have begun pulling talent not only from our great locally based universities in St. Louis, such as UMSL, Saint Louis University, and Southern Illinois Edwardsville, but also from regional institutions four to five hours' drive from St. Louis," said Caplice. "Schools like Illinois, Purdue, and others with individuals who grew up in small towns with an agriculture connection, and who are excited about all the great things St. Louis has to offer from a lifestyle and career point of view, have translated into higher value-added recruitment outcomes for the company."

In addition to having 55 universities and colleges located within a 250-mile radius, the St. Louis region is within 50 miles of 18 trade schools and seven universities offering certificates and degrees in supply chain management, manufacturing, transportation and logistics fields.

Tim Giddens, chief operating officer of equipment manufacturer Progressive Recovery based in Dupon, noted how local universities and trade schools provide much of their talent, but they also successfully recruit people into the St. Louis region from University of Missouri in Columbia and Missouri Science & Technology in Rolla.

"Students in regional schools who have spent their childhood visiting St. Louis or who are from Missouri or Illinois generally are a great target for us," said Giddens.

The bi-state region's lower cost of living, rich quality of life, entrepreneurial culture, and diversity of



job options help draw a more regional talent base, creating a valuable pool of human capital from which employers can recruit. The region actually boasts more skilled workers employed in manufacturing and supply chain industries than all peer cities in the Midwest.

**Expanding the pipeline:** While the talent pipeline is robust, a collaborative effort is underway to help ensure it continues to expand and that employers can find the workers with the supply chain skill sets needed.

Workforce development leaders in Madison and St. Clair counties in Illinois represent those two counties and seven others across Southwestern Illinois, and they are taking a truly regional approach. Tony Fuhrmann, director of the Madison County Employment & Training Department, noted they are working with SIUE, Southwestern Illinois College, Kaskaskia Community College and Lewis and Clark Community College to develop a coordinated training effort centered around the growing supply chain logistics industry.

He estimates Gateway Commerce Center, Lakeview Commerce Center and Gateway TradePort account for 9,000 to 10,000 jobs in the supply chain sector

within a five-mile radius of their facilities. Fuhrmann added that a third building is now under construction at Gateway TradePort, and the ultimate plan is for a total of 11 different facilities there, and another 1 million square foot facility is coming to Gateway Commerce Center. Meanwhile, Jerseyville, should break ground on a new industrial park in 2022, which could create another 1,500 jobs.

"The goal of the coordinated training effort is that everyone from the case picker to someone with a master's degree will have educational opportunities in our region," said Fuhrmann. "We will determine the gaps and overlaps of what's available and figure out what's missing, then identify unique opportunities for each institution."

Lee Reese, regional apprenticeship navigator with the St. Clair County Intergovernmental Grants Department, highlighted the group's efforts to also reach high school students at 41 schools in the nine counties served.

"We're talking to the career and technical education directors, looking at dual credit options and mobile skills labs, one of which will specifically focus on

supply chain and logistics," Reese said.

Beyond classroom learning, there is collaboration with area employers to provide opportunities to gain hands-on experience and offer training opportunities geared toward improving skills of existing manufacturing/distribution workers.

"Our charge here really is to make sure our employers have a skilled workforce available and ready for them, and this supply chain workforce is what needs to be prepared for the work we're doing in this region now," said Rick Stubblefield, executive director of the St. Clair County Intergovernmental Grants Department.

To that end, they are working with businesses to develop incumbent worker training – identifying front line staff they want to move up the career ladder and creating short-term training opportunities to give those workers the skills to advance. Reese notes several companies are interested in participating, including Geodis, World Wide Technology, BJC, Arizon, Amazon, Lowe's and Gilster-Mary Lee.

Similar programs previously coordinated by the group have seen proven success. Madison County's Fuhrmann points to approximately 155 participants in training across 12 companies in their four-county local workforce area during 2019. The St. Clair County Apprenticeship Program provided training for 52 individuals over the past year or so, 24 of them in the supply chain sector.

The group is currently working with the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity and anticipating an 18-month grant for up to \$500,000 to support the ongoing efforts, which would open new opportunities for 200 individuals.

"Having a robust supply chain goes a long way in making the St. Louis region worthy of consideration for industrial site selection," said Mary Lamie, who heads the St. Louis Regional Freightway. "Just as no supply chain can function well without high quality and accessible modes of transportation as found in the St. Louis region, neither can it without a skilled workforce with the know-how to source, produce, and ship products globally."

For more information, visit <http://www.mawib.org/> or go to [https://www.co.madison.il.us/departments/employment\\_and\\_training/](https://www.co.madison.il.us/departments/employment_and_training/).

## GLOBAL

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The region's intermodal capabilities and services are also supported by the CN Railway, the Kansas City Southern and the Terminal Railroad Association of St. Louis allowing rail car movements to be picked up on schedule, resulting in dependable and higher velocity rail car movement to the Gulf of Mexico, Savannah, Ga., Canada, the Pacific Northwest and Mexico.

Multiple railroads may be able to provide service to some of these ports, and having options like that creates additional opportunities to identify the most cost-effective alternatives and best scheduled service from the St. Louis region.

**A global marine highway:** While rail also serves the agriculture industry, one might suspect that waterways are a key driver of success in a region known as the Ag Coast of America. The region

garnered the title due to a 15-mile stretch of the Mississippi River featuring 15 barge-transfer facilities that, at total capacity, could handle 150 barges a day – the highest level of capacity anywhere along the Mississippi River. The Ag Coast recently added a new terminal in Cahokia, Illinois, that expands the existing capacity with the ability to handle at least a thousand truckloads of grain daily.

Currently, 50 percent of U.S. crops and livestock are produced within a 500-mile radius of the St. Louis region, including approximately 80 percent of corn and soybean acreage. The St. Louis region's strategic location on the river, associated infrastructure assets and multimodal connectivity enable it to play a crucial role in moving those commodities.

The added capacity will come in handy, according to David Jump, Presi-

dent and CEO of Cahokia-based American Milling, which built the newest facility and sold it to north Arkansas-based Bruce Oakley, Inc. in December.

"It will be a record year for corn exports from the United States, and it will also be a record for soybean exports from the U.S. In terms of the river and bringing grain to the river, it just doesn't get any better than that, and the St. Louis portion of those exports continues, on a percentage basis, to be very strong," Jump said.

Looking at the integration of rail with the inland port system in the St. Louis region, Jump noted the unit size of the rail cars really began to grow about eight years ago. Over time, they grew from just 15 cars to 75 car units and then up to 110 cars and occasionally as much as 125 cars connected in what were termed shuttle trains or train sets. He said it was

when they hit 75 cars that the railroads really started moving more grain to St. Louis. The railcars currently stay hooked up to the same locomotives and go back and forth, loading and unloading at facilities that could efficiently handle the volume, enabling the railroads to provide a very attractive, more aggressive rate schedule for the movement of that grain in return for rapid cycle times.

"That really made a difference, and there are now several facilities in the St. Louis market that can unload these train sets quickly. Cahokia is one of them and others along the Ag Coast are too," said Jump. "When you combine the economics and the efficiencies of river transportation from St. Louis to New Orleans and add in the capacity to efficiently handle these large trains in the St. Louis region, that's where the magic happens."