



# Illinois Business Journal

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## Railroad jobs target of regional campaign

By DENNIS GRUBAUGH

Union Pacific Railroad and a Metro East economic development group are pursuing efforts to fill railroad jobs open now and in coming years. Leadership Council of Southwestern Illinois has been awarded a grant to send that message to students from the middle school on up in Madison and St. Clair counties. Significantly, the effort is also aimed at parents, who could climb aboard a train career even before their children graduate. “We have been working with UP Railroad Foundation on grants for about three or four years, to really focus on STEM-related career fields,” said Dr.

Ronda Sauget, executive director and CEO of the Leadership Council. “The railroad industry, like others, is in high need of people to go into careers.” Among jobs are those such as crew members, conductors, yard masters, dispatchers, electricians, welders, diesel mechanics and management. “They need STEM people desperately,” said Sauget, referring to people with exposure to science, technology, engineering and math. The effort is crucial to a key industry in Metro East, where railroads pass through while moving commerce all directions in the country.

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Union Pacific Railroad's “Big Boy,” an old steam locomotive, visited the region during a recent stop.

## Merchants Bridge passes key construction milestone

Special to the IBJ

Viewed from above, the reconstruction of the Merchants Bridge is an awesome spectacle of steel and concrete construction. Seen from the Mississippi River, it’s a riveting reminder of just how significant the rail project is to American commerce. This past month, dignitaries got a peek at the project. The first truss of the three-span bridge was moved into position and floated into place — witnessed by approximately 200 invited guests and members of the media aboard a riverboat cruise hosted by the St. Louis Regional Freight-

way. The other two trusses will be installed in the winter and summer of 2022. “It is extremely rewarding to see the progress on the region’s top priority project and several of the others on our list. It affirms that we are on the right path with our approach and that our region’s freight network will be stronger as a result,” said Mary Lamie, executive vice president of Multi Modal Enterprises at Bi-State Development. The \$222 million project to replace the Merchants Bridge that links Venice, Ill., with downtown St. Louis in Missouri

reached a major milestone starting Friday, Sept. 17, with the movement and installation of the first of three new trusses. Erected originally in 1890, the Merchants Bridge serves six Class I railroads and Amtrak and is one of the nation’s primary east-west rail corridors serving the nation’s second-largest rail hub by car interchange volume. It is also third largest by gross tonnage. The replacement of the rail artery has been identified at least since 2016 as the bi-state region’s top freight infrastructure priority.

Owned by Terminal Railroad Association of St. Louis, the Merchants Bridge required reconstruction due to the speed, clearance and load restrictions. The project includes the removal and replacement of the three river-span trusses, seismically retrofitting the existing river piers, and improving the east approach. Work began in July 2018 and, when completed in early 2023, the new double-track bridge will provide reliable, resilient and expanded freight and passenger rail capacity.

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## T1 and counting: Boeing project bolsters future of MidAmerica

IBJ staff report

A Mascoutah field is quickly giving way to ground-level clearance for one of the U.S. Navy’s newest ventures. All eyes will be on in the skies in three years when The Boeing Company completes a \$200 million investment to build a state-of-the-art facility to produce the MQ-25 Stingray, the Navy’s first carrier-based unmanned aircraft, an aerial refueling drone nicknamed the T1. The new, 291,000-square-foot building at MidAmerica St. Louis Airport will help support nearly 300 jobs. The facility, scheduled to begin construction on the south end of the

grounds later this year, initially will employ approximately 150 mechanics, engineers and support staff who will build the aircraft. Employment could reach up to 300 with additional orders. The site is on 34 acres that the company will lease from the airport. The new building is expected to be completed in early 2024, and aircraft production is projected to begin in the start of Fiscal Year 2024. The complex is being located at the south end of the airport property. The formal announcement on Sept. 17 finalizes a chapter in which discussions had gone on years, mostly behind the scenes. The notable, vis-

ible exceptions came when authorities tested flights of the unit. In late April 2019, the first MQ-25 test aircraft was taken by highway from Boeing’s technical plant at St. Louis’ Lambert International Airport to MidAmerica. Following taxi tests, the Federal Aviation Administration certified the aircraft and granted airspace for flight testing. The MQ-25 took its first flight on Sept. 19, 2019. For two years, Boeing and the Navy continued flight testing from MidAmerica. The unit has refueled an F/A-18 Super Hornet, an E-2D Hawkeye and an F-35C Lightning II. “Every test flight with another type/

model/series aircraft gets us one step closer to rapidly delivering a fully mission-capable MQ-25 to the fleet,” said Capt. Chad Reed, the Navy’s Unmanned Carrier Aviation program manager. “Stingray’s unmatched refueling capability is going to increase the Navy’s power projection and provide operational flexibility to the Carrier Strike Group commanders.” During the two years of test flights, the program logged more than 120 flight hours — gathering data on everything from aircraft performance to propulsion dynamics to structural loads and flutter testing for strength and stability.

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