



Illinois Legislative News

\$1.8 million investment going to wet lab development at SIUE

SIUE Edwardsville will be a beneficiary of some of the \$15.4 million in grants for statewide wet lab development, announced by the governor's administration.

State Sen. Rachele Aud Crowe, D-Glen Carbon, cited vast implications for the university being named as a recipient of advance biotechnology resources in the Metro East.

"Wet labs allow students to experiment, test and review new technologies and products in a safe, controlled environment," Crowe said. "By expanding access to biotech education throughout the state, Illinois is supporting the industry's growth and looking toward the future in medical research."

Funded through the Rebuild Illinois capital program, the state has plans to develop eight new wet labs in an effort to improve in research and medicine, grow startups, and make Illinois more competitive in life sciences.

Wet labs are considered critical to research and development for companies in biotechnology, pharmaceuticals, medical devices, manufacturing organizations and more. Wet lab space is customized with ventilation to safely handle chemicals associated with biotech research.

The Wet Lab Capital Program advances support for the state's biotech industry — including expansion of the research and development tax credit for innovators and other tools to attract investment by early-stage companies.

Gov. JB Pritzker announced the investment in a joint press conference with the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity. The \$15.4 million in Rebuild Illinois money will support eight new wet lab spaces throughout Illinois.

The governor also announced a \$5 million capital grant to expand the Illinois Institute of Technology's microgrid to optimize energy at the Bronzeville campus. The expansion will yield \$200,000 a year in energy savings and on-campus renewable energy generation, as well as savings from reduced outages, damage, and lost experimental productivity.

Last year, the administration launched a Wet Lab Capital program to meet the technical needs of startups, incubators, and universities across the state," the governor said. Pritzker in a statement.

The state will leverage \$15.4 million in wet lab capital to generate nearly \$90 million total in new investment for modern research facilities. The

program was first launched last year by the governor as part of the state's five-year economic growth plan.

The state said that while Illinois remains a destination for biotech and research, additional investments are necessary to provide innovative companies access to lab space so they can continue to grow in Illinois. The Wet Lab Capital program is an initiative to boost public/private investments and to increase access to modern lab space.

"As we've seen over the past year, innovations to expand research in life sciences as well as technologies that strengthen grid resilience play a critical role in our communities — and it will play a crucial role in our economic recovery as well," said DCEO Acting Director Sylvia Garcia.

Wet Lab Capital grants will support the development of new public and private wet lab spaces, with projects at the state's top universities and at neighborhood incubators, expansions and improvements of existing space and the creation of new lab spaces in all parts of the state.

Funded projects include:

- Back of the Yards Algae Sciences LLC, \$250,000
- Illinois Institute of Tech-

nology, \$1,499,569

- Northwestern University, \$3 million
- NuMat Technologies, \$3.5 million
- Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science, \$2,007,000
- Southern Illinois University Carbondale, \$2,734,008
- Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, \$1,875,569
- University of Illinois Research Park LLC, \$550,000

While Illinois is home to the nation's second-largest biopharma concentration, a portfolio of universities putting Illinois at top five in the nation for chemistry R&D, and over 58,000 life sciences companies statewide — additional lab space is needed to support continued growth.

A recent report by CBRE finds that lab space is on the rise, with over 1 million square feet of Class A lab space delivered or under construction in Chicago alone. This increase in lab space has accompanied leading growth in venture capital funding of Illinois-based life sciences startups, including nearly half a billion dollars in new venture capital investment in Chicago area life sciences startups in the first quarter of this year alone.

State negotiates with unions over worker COVID-19 vaccinations

Gov. JB Pritzker's administration last month reached agreement with multiple trade unions requiring certain state workers to be vaccinated against COVID-19.

However, it extended the deadline for workers to get their first shot while negotiations continued with the state's largest public employees union.

Pritzker issued executive orders in late August and early September that apply to state employees, contractors and vendors who work in congregate facilities, as well as certain health care workers, school personnel and higher education employees. Congregate facilities include those operated by the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs, the Illinois Department of Human Services, the Illinois Department of Corrections, and the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice.

The original deadline for a first dose was set for Oct. 4 but was extended several times.

The order also directed the Department of Central Management Services Labor Relations team to negotiate how to implement the mandate. While four unions have entered agreements with the state, negotiations continue with the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, or AFSCME, which is the

largest public employee union in Illinois.

"Leadership by President Biden and businesses across the country show that vaccine requirements work," Pritzker said in a statement. "I'm proud to announce that Illinois has reached our fourth union agreement to ensure those we serve are protected. Vaccination remains our strongest tool to stay safe from COVID-19 and protect our children."

The order allows for exemptions for medical or religious reasons, but those who take the exemption will be subject to additional testing requirements. Those who remain unvaccinated and are not granted an exemption will be subject to progressive disciplinary actions that could ultimately lead to being fired, the administration said in a news release.

The agreements reached so far cover about 1,990 employees throughout the state. In addition to the trade unions, which represent about 470 employees at various facilities, other agreements include VR-704, which represents 260 supervisory workers at the Department of Corrections and Department of Juvenile Justice; the Illinois Nurses Association, representing about 1,100 nurses at state facilities; and the Illinois Federation of Public Employees, with about 160 workers.



Gov. JB Pritzker is pictured after receiving his COVID-19 vaccine in March. (Capitol News Illinois file photo by Jerry Nowicki)

Under the agreements, if the vaccine is not available during an employee's regularly scheduled shift, they will receive regular pay for the time taken for the time taken to get the vaccine. Employees will also receive paid "COVID time" so if a vaccinated worker contracts the disease, they will receive paid time off without using their benefit time.

But the administration still has not reached such an agreement with AFSCME, which, according to a union

spokesman, represents 39,000 state workers — including more than 20,000 in facilities covered by the executive order.

More information about where vaccines are available can be found at www.vaccines.gov.

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High Speed Rail Alliance praises plan laid out for Midwest network

The High Speed Rail Alliance is praising the Midwest Regional Rail Plan released by the Federal Railroad Administration, saying it provides a framework for building a network of fast, frequent and affordable trains throughout the region.

The plan envisions a network consisting of four "pillar corridors" radiating out from Chicago, with endpoints in Minneapolis-St. Paul, St. Louis, Indianapolis and Detroit, said HSRA Executive Director Rick Harnish.

"These corridors are the system's backbone, but their real power lies in how they would make connections much faster and easier between hundreds of Midwest cities," the association said in a release.

That's because the "pillar corridors" would be integrated with transit systems

and regional lines that connect mid-sized and major cities — like Indianapolis and Cincinnati, and Kansas City and St. Louis. There would be 24 trains per day on the "pillar" lines and 16 trains per day on the regional lines — a vast increase over current service levels on U.S. passenger trains.

The FRA has demonstrated the value of reconnecting the Midwest and shown how it will benefit cities large and small throughout the region, the association said.

"This is a milestone achievement that should be celebrated," said Harnish. "The FRA has laid out a compelling vision for transforming travel throughout the region. The important next step is for Midwest states to come together and work out the details of this vision. We will continue to support this ef-

fort as planning moves forward."

Based in Chicago, the High Speed Rail Alliance calls itself the nation's largest high-speed rail advocacy organization supporting regional and national plans that integrate both immediate improvements to the existing networks and the construction of transformative high-speed lines.

In a blog posting, the association says the federal plan "lays out a compelling vision for a network of high-speed trains that would transform travel across the Midwest. Second, it makes a strong case for fast, frequent trains that are coordinated and well-integrated into a network. While speed gets most of the spotlight when people talk about trains, frequency and coordination are key to leveraging the full power of a rail network. Third, it

points out the urgency of regional cooperation and big-picture planning."

Incorporating the different regional lines into a single vision and coordinating them — as the Midwest Regional Rail Plan envisions—gives travelers lots of new options, the association said.

The report notes, for example, that there are 189 connections between city pairs if the corridors in the plan are considered as standalone entities, independent of the others. But in a network model — a model in which travelers can transfer easily between two corridors — the city-pair connections increase to nearly 1,100.

As a result, projected ridership increases to 17 million annual trips by 2055 — versus 12 million in the standalone model.