



# St. Louis Regional Freightway

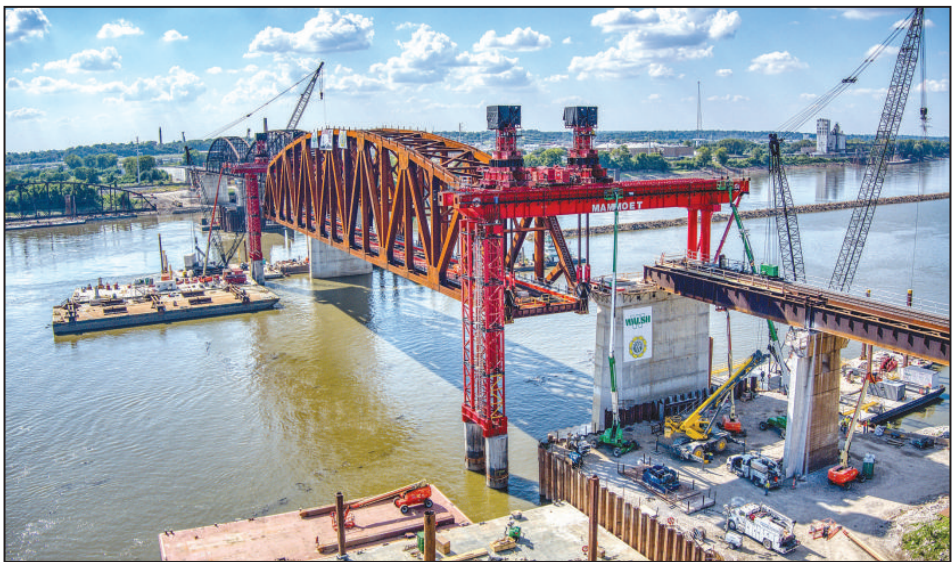
## Collaboration, creativity reinforce St. Louis region’s global access

When the St. Louis region’s freight district was launched in 2014, no one anticipated just how quickly the region would become known as a global freight and logistics hub. Those accomplishments stem from the authorization by East-West Gateway Council of Governments Board of Directors and industry leaders to establish a regional freight district led by Bi-State Development, which is uniquely positioned as both an economic development leader and as an implementation arm for regional projects.

Bi-State Development hired Mary Lamie to lead the new freight district, tapping her more than 25 years of experience in civil engineering, public transportation management, and funding strategies. Her experience brought a proven voice and direction to the forefront of what would become the St. Louis Regional Freightway, an entity focused on growing the \$6 billion in goods moving through the St. Louis area by road, rail, river and runway.

From the outset, Lamie recognized the power of partnerships, and focused on collaboration as an essential component of the St. Louis Regional Freightway’s work to date. Collaboration drives the process to develop the annual Priority Projects List that identifies key infrastructure projects and advocates for funding for them. The Priority Projects List is compiled annually by the St. Louis Regional Freightway’s Freight Development Committee. Business and industry leaders work directly with local and state officials and the Departments of Transportation from Illinois and Missouri to set infrastructure priorities by helping them to understand how infrastructure and efficiency impact on-time delivery and costs. The 2022 Priority Projects List features 21 projects representing a total investment of \$2.75 billion, and far more than \$1.1 billion of the projects on the list are already funded and under construction, expected to start in 2022, or scheduled to begin within the next few years. The 2023 List will be released during FreightWeekSTL 2022 in late May.

“The ongoing regional effort to compile and build consensus for this list remains a key accomplishment of our Freightway enterprise and plays a vital role in helping to ensure various parties are familiar with the priorities



The first new truss is installed on the Merchants Bridge connecting Venice, Ill., with St. Louis. Photo courtesy of Walsh Construction and Trey Cambern Photography

before they see them on a grant application,” said Taulby Roach, Bi-State Development president and CEO.

The St. Louis Regional Freightway’s ability to identify and market some of the bi-state area’s most unique selling points is another key contributor to its success in raising awareness of the region as a global freight hub. Much of that effort revolves around putting the spotlight on featured corridors with attributes that help to distinguish the two-state area from other region’s vying for recognition as logistics and distribution hubs.

“Handling approximately 436,000 tons per mile, the St. Louis region’s port system is more than two and a half times more efficient on its river usage than its closest competitor, according to 2020 rankings by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers,” Lamie said. “This efficiency along with available capacity matters as shippers continue to look for the most efficient and reliable ways to move their agriculture products and related commodities, and it’s particularly evident in the Ag Coast of America.”

Google the “Ag Coast of America” and you’ll find links to numerous regional, national and trade news articles and social posts that highlight the 15-mile stretch of the Mississippi River running through the St. Louis region. It is home to 16 barge-transfer facilities that, at total capacity,

can handle more than 150 barges a day – the highest level of capacity anywhere along the Mississippi River. It is also a “coast” that didn’t exist until the St. Louis Regional Freightway decided that branding terminology would be a good way to communicate the incredible efficiency of the barge operations in the region.

While most of us overlook the real time commerce at work when we cross over the Mississippi River, the St. Louis Regional Freightway sees opportunity at the Riverboats at the Gateway Arch. In addition to sightseeing and dinner cruises, the riverboats occasionally offer specialized cruises to view the Ag Coast from a unique perspective and others that help raise awareness of the various types of jobs available in transportation, maritime, manufacturing and logistics industries and career pathways for student groups or educational administrators. Those specialty cruises help connect classroom academic knowledge to real world business and industry application. Taking MetroLink to the Gateway Riverboats highlights transit employment opportunities and provides a fun introduction to a mode of public transportation for job interviews, for the commute to work and to participate in work-related training programs.

Another corridor being promoted by the St. Louis Regional Freightway is on Illinois Route 3. Route 3 is the back-

bone of the 60-mile corridor in southwestern Illinois that runs parallel to the Mississippi River and Interstate 255. A recently completed economic impact study indicates the corridor generates \$16 billion in annual business revenue and supports nearly 222,000 direct and indirect jobs. (See related article).

The Mississippi River from St. Louis to the Gulf of Mexico is an underutilized corridor the St. Louis Regional Freightway is also focused on promoting. By 2024, that stretch of the river is expected to host innovative container-on-vessel (COV) service featuring patented new waterway vessels that will swiftly move large volumes of goods and commodities along the inland waterways. That will effectively create an all-water north-south trade lane connecting the Midwest to the lower Mississippi River and on to other destinations around the world. Shippers using the new service on this marine highway could see cost savings ranging from 30 to 40 percent.

The bi-state St. Louis region is located at the nexus of the nation’s freight network, where it is home to the northernmost lock-and ice-free port on the Mississippi River, six Class 1 railroads connecting to East and West Coast ports, four Interstate Highways that make two-day shipping to much of the country possible, and two international cargo airports. In addition, this region boasts more skilled workers employed in manufacturing and supply chain industries than all peer cities in the Midwest – a strength supported by plentiful logistics and supply chain-based educational opportunities and regional feeder institutions.

“The One Location. Global Access. branding continues to help raise shipper and supply chain carrier awareness, nationally and internationally, putting the region’s industrial real estate market and manufacturing and logistic opportunities in the forefront. This is an enviable asset that differentiates the St. Louis region from others. Our multimodal flexibility, infrastructure investment, great business climate along with a can-do workforce attitude are strengths embraced by public and private sector collaboration and demonstrate bi-state unity,” said Lamie.

## ROUTE 3

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**Accessible and highly skilled workforce:** The accessible, good-paying jobs in the corridor attract workers from more than 1,000 different ZIP codes across three states, including Illinois, Missouri and Indiana. More than 22,000 of the workers are employed in the top two sectors within the corridor – manufacturing and transportation/warehousing – which respectively represent 14 percent and 13.8 percent of the total workforce. That is significantly greater than the St. Louis region and the United States, where manufacturing is just over 8 percent and transportation/warehousing is 5 percent of the total workforce. More than 20 types of manufacturing operations are present in the corridor, delivering a location quotient of 1.26 or more and indicating a noteworthy regional concentration.

**Optimized for manufacturing and logistics:** Companies already operating in the corridor benefit from the available workforce with requisite skills, and those looking to locate here will

benefit from the labor pool and the corridor’s other locational advantages.

“It is centrally located within the nation and the region, home to the nation’s most efficient inland port, positioned at the crossroads of six Class I railroads with global connectivity via scheduled rail to coastal ports, and offers strategic access to national interstates and international passenger and cargo airports,” said Lamie. “This coupled with the availability of developable land makes the corridor ideal for anyone looking to establish a business in the manufacturing, logistics or distribution sector and leverage one location with global access.”

The Illinois Route 3 corridor has continued to evolve and grow by developing available land and repurposing vacant industrial sites through infrastructure investment and public-private partnerships. With these existing buildings and sites with heavy infrastructure in place (power, water, rail, roads), the region reduces capital investment costs for manufacturers and lowers barriers to entry, making site

selection easier for emerging to medium size businesses. The corridor also contains exceptional multimodal infrastructure that supports complex and integrated manufacturing operations and inbound and outbound transportation (including transloading between barge, rail, road and air), supporting speed of delivery that gives users a unique operational agility and competitive advantage that yields cost savings.

**Eye on the future:** This is not the first time this corridor was recognized as a trendsetter, and it will not be the last. Fifteen years ago, the federal government threatened to de-accredit the levees which protect the Illinois Route 3 corridor, limiting the potential of existing businesses and putting future development at risk. The corridor is vibrant today because of the major efforts made by regional business and government leaders to improve and fortify the levees so they would remain accredited, allowing the corridor to maximize its site selection advantages and attract capital investment and job growth.

Just as the region came together and passed a sales tax to fund the work needed to improve the levee system protecting the Illinois Route 3 corridor, regional leaders are working together to identify and advocate for funding for other infrastructure priorities, with additional improvements to Illinois Route 3 on the list.

“The Illinois Department of Transportation announced more than \$20 million dollars of funding over the last several years for sections of the Illinois Route 3 corridor, and a total of \$300 million in improvements is on the St. Louis Regional Freightway’s 2022 Priority Projects List,” Lamie said. “Completion of the improvements, which are partially funded and programmed for construction, will support long-term, high-paying job growth in manufacturing and transportation sectors, improve access to the Interstate 70 Stan Musial Veterans Memorial Bridge, Sauget Industrial Park, and St. Louis Downtown Airport, and accelerate the redevelopment of additional properties along the corridor, ensuring continued growth and success.”