

# Groundbreaking kicks off construction of Public Safety Center at the Emerson Park Transit Center

## *\$13.5 million project made possible with Rebuild Illinois grant funding support*

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One year after Illinois Governor JB Pritzker awarded St. Clair County Transit District a “Rebuild Illinois” grant totaling \$9,975,000, dozens gathered on Jan. 23, 2023, at the Emerson Park Transit Center in East St. Louis to mark the official start of construction on a new \$13,584,000 Public Safety Center onsite.

The new facility will fulfill a key role to further public transit safety and security enhancements, a top regional priority. Construction is expected to be completed in 2024.

The state-of-the-art, two-story, 16,000-square-foot facility will house the backup Metro Transit Operations Control Center and the St. Clair County CENCOM West 9-1-1 Emergency Dispatch Center. It will also include office space for St. Clair County MetroLink Sheriff’s deputies.

“This project is a critical public safety investment for East St. Louis, St. Clair County and the entire St. Louis metropolitan region,” said Herb Simmons, chair of St. Clair County Transit District’s Board of Trustees and director of the St. Clair County Emergency Management Agency. “It will bolster communications and security collaboration among Metro Transit, the St.



Illinois State Senator Christopher Belt shares remarks from the podium during the Jan. 23, 2023, groundbreaking ceremony launching the construction of a new Public Safety Center at St. Clair County Transit District’s Emerson Park Transit Center in East St. Louis. To Belt’s left is Chair of St. Clair County Transit District’s Board of Trustees and Director of the St. Clair County Emergency Management Agency Herb Simmons, with former Illinois State Representative LaToya Greenwood to the immediate right, and Assistant Majority Leader and Illinois State Representative Jay Hoffman standing in the far right of the photo.

Clair County Sheriff’s Department, Metro Transit Public Safety, the Bureau of Transit Police and other public safety partners.”

The goal of the new space is to help bolster communications and security collaboration among Metro Transit, the St. Clair County Sheriff’s Department, Metro Transit Public Safety, the Bureau of Transit Police and other public safety partners.

Facility features include improved rider amenities as well as public restrooms for riders and operators of the transit system.

Valued at \$13,584,000, the project is being funded by a \$9,975,000 “Rebuild Illinois” grant awarded by Illinois Governor JB Pritzker in January 2022, along with funding from St. Clair County Transit District and Bi-State Development. The

new facility will be owned and operated by St. Clair County Transit District.

Project team members include FGM Architects, Poettker Construction, Southwestern Illinois Building Trades, BRIC Partnership, LLC, Kreher Engineering and Gonzalez Companies, LLC.

“The new Public Safety Center is an investment that is critical to the public safety and security of transit,” commented Kimberly Cella, executive director of Citizens for Modern Transit. “This project is also about the creation of a job center along the alignment and the addition of rider amenities – making it a significant win for transit. The more we invest in and around transit, the more opportunity we can drive for this region.”

“This project proves that public transportation can, and will continue to, serve as a catalyst for change in St. Clair County and, more specifically, East St. Louis where new development and jobs have been absent for a long time,” state Senator Christopher Belt (D-Swansea) said. “And I wanted to give a special thank you to Citizens for Modern Transit, AARP in St. Louis, St. Clair County Transit District and Metro Transit for their work in 2021 to help transform the Emerson Park Transit Center as part of its Transit Stop Transformation projects.”

Founded in 1981, St. Clair County Transit District contracts with Bi-State Development to provide public transportation services in St. Clair County, Ill., by way of 11 Metro Transit Centers; 12 MetroBus routes; on-demand, shared-ride services and more – connecting individuals to jobs, education, healthcare, entertainment, the MetroBikeLink and other destinations. Those with questions about service can call (618) 628-8090 between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. Monday through Friday. Visit online at [www.sccdt.org](http://www.sccdt.org).

## Former US Bank building in Troy to house restaurant, upscale apartments

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Construction is progressing on the old US Bank building at the corner of Main and Market Streets in Troy, which upon completion will house a new restaurant and apartments.

The eatery to open on the ground floor of the former bank building has not yet been named, as an opening timeline has not been established but an announcement is expected in the near future. The space formerly occupied by the bank drive thru, will be covered, and will offer patio seating for the new restaurant. At the north end of that outside area, will be a walk-up coffee shop.

On the newly constructed top floor of the building, there will also be several upscale apartments. In its entirety, the project is estimated to cost about \$2.4 million. Work is being completed by Pfund construction of Edwardsville.

City Administrator Jay Keeven said the business will be a welcome addition to the downtown business district, which like its cities across America, has struggled to thrive amid competition from online retailers and big box stores.

“It’s tough,” Keeven said. “When I can order something and have it on my doorstep within two days, sometimes within two hours, for many retailers that is hard to compete with. What we do have is – if you want to go out for an evening of entertainment or go out to dinner or a bar or get a massage – there are certain things you can’t have delivered.”

In light of the current business climate, city officials have in recent years focused on a larger downtown revitalization effort. Keeven said those efforts are being led by Mayor David Nonn, who upon election in April 2021 spearheaded improvements in the downtown and other business districts in the city.

“His marching orders were pretty clear,” Keeven said. “He wanted down-

town to be revitalized. We had a dozen, at the time, vacant buildings. You see what Edwardsville and Collinsville and Highland have done with TIF funding and he said we need to do the same thing. We need to be aggressively trying to get developers interested in downtown Troy.”

Tax increment financing (TIF) is where some taxes are diverted or refunded to companies or developers for improvements. Those are usually collected under a tax applied to a geographical area, such as a downtown or other business district.

While the practice has met with controversy in some towns and cities for diverting funds from municipal governments and schools, and other reasons, it has also been lauded for helping recover blighted areas.

In the case of Troy, one TIF area which encompassed much of Edwardsville Road leading from downtown to Interstate 55 and beyond recently expired after 23 years.

“It was a bigger footprint which included our downtown area, but it went all the way out by EJ Equipment off of Formosa Road,” Keeven said. “It went down by 162 and just covered a ton of area.”

Keeven said funds remaining from that district are now being used to incentivize the bank building project. In order to garner the perks offered by TIF, Pfund Construction will have to meet certain milestones along the way, such as project completion, as well as the building being occupied by the business and tenants.

“When we closed that TIF district out we had money that was available for redevelopment agreements. Typically on a TIF what you are saying is we will refund your property taxes back for a period of time. In Pfund’s case, he is doing a \$2.4-2.5 million project and we agreed to \$400,000 of rebate taxes.”

After the rebate is fulfilled, taxes collected on the new development will be used to offer others incentives in the downtown and surrounding area. Some of the funds collected in the more recently established district, which has a 1 percent sales tax

overlay, can also be used for infrastructure improvements, such as streets and sidewalks.

“You can use TIF in the business district to improve infrastructure and you can also use it to incentivize development,” Keeven said. “So those are the two things we did right away and it’s starting to move.”

Keeven said with the establishment of the new district, interest has been shown by developers or investors for four vacant buildings downtown. With other nearby cities offering the same or similar incentives, the tax breaks have become almost commonplace and necessary to attract investment.

And in Troy, it seems to be working. Keeven said talks are in the works or investors have shown interest in four buildings downtown currently vacant.

“You are looking at four buildings in our downtown that had been sitting vacant and within two to three years we are going to have those occupied and generating sales tax and more property tax,” Keeven said.

**EDITOR’S NOTE:** Pat Pratt is the editor of the Troy Times-Tribune, a Better Newspapers Inc. publication.

### Attention, Contractors & Community Developers!

The Illinois-Business Journal will be shining the spotlight on Commercial Construction and impactful Community and Economic Development projects in our March issue.

If you’d like to be included, contact Charlie Huelsmann, at (618) 973-0414 or [chuelsmann@better-newspapers.com](mailto:chuelsmann@better-newspapers.com)

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