

# St. Louis Regional Freightway’s 2024 Priority Projects List features \$3.7 billion in investments

The St. Louis Regional Freightway’s 2024 Priority Projects List includes more than 25 projects representing a total investment approaching \$3.7 billion and underscoring the ongoing commitment to improving freight infrastructure in the bi-state region.

Approximately \$2.7 billion of the 2024 total covers infrastructure projects that have recently been completed, are already funded and under construction or expected to start in 2023 and 2024, or are at least partially programmed for construction. That’s up from \$2 billion a year ago, a reflection of the progress being made securing funding and advancing major projects through the development pipeline to strengthen critical roads, bridges, rail infrastructure, and port and airport facilities across the bi-state St. Louis region.

The List represents the infrastructure needs of the manufacturing and logistics industries in Eastern Missouri and Southwestern Illinois and was released during a Freight Summit held May 24 as part of FreightWeekSTL 2023.

Kirk Brown, Region 5 engineer for the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT), provided an overview of some of the most significant projects on the list that IDOT is advancing, ranging from the Chain of Rocks Bridge and nearby Illinois 111 Interchange to the Illinois Route 3 connector in Fairmont City/East St. Louis and Illinois Route 158 improvements by MidAmerica St. Louis Airport. He also highlighted the level of funding the state is committing to roadway and bridge improvements, both statewide and in District 8, which includes Madison and St. Clair Counties.

“In the state’s multi-year program, there is \$24.6 billion that Illinois has slated for highway improvements and, out of that, District 8 gets roughly 10 % or \$2.3 billion just within the next six years,” said Brown. “That should tell you just how serious the department and the state are about bringing transportation improvements to this vital part of the state.”

Michelle Forneris, assistant district engineer for the Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT) talked about some of the most significant Missouri projects moving forward, including the Interstate 270 North improvements that will wrap up later this year and the Interstate 70 bottleneck improvements from Wentzville Parkway to Route Z. She also shared the agency’s excitement over the very real potential for more funding for Interstate 70.

“We are very humbled right now that the Missouri General Assembly, for fiscal year 2024, has slated \$2.8 billion dollars for I-70 improvements from Wentzville to Blue Springs - more than 200 miles. So there’s more to come on overall I-70 projects as we are hopeful the Governor will sign that legislation.”

Among the other highlights on the 2024 Priority Project’s List is the recently completed \$222 million replacement of the Merchants Bridge, a vital rail link connecting Missouri and Illinois at St. Louis. It has been the region’s highest priority infrastructure project since 2016. Joe Torp, industrial development manager for Norfolk Southern, said the new bridge is delivering tremendous benefits for the rail industry and for shippers, eliminating bottlenecks caused when two trains couldn’t pass on the old bridge at the same time due to load and speed restrictions.

“The Merchants Bridge is one of those few locations in the St. Louis area where rail can cross from one side of the Mississippi River to the other, so any



MacArthur Bridge is new to the 2024 Priority Projects List. (Photo courtesy Bi-State Development)

delay in that vital link had a follow-on effect up and down the network,” Torp said. “We are very excited about the completion of the Merchants Bridge, especially from the operations side.”

Other completed projects include the Union Pacific Railroad Lenox Tower Replacement and Track Realignment, a \$10.1 million modernization project that reduced freight train delays by 43 hours a week for combined freight, or more than 10 hours per day. Overall, the project enabled freight, including four Class I rail carriers, and passenger trains to travel through the region more safely and efficiently while allowing rail traffic to be better integrated into system-wide patterns.

More than \$900 million in funded projects on I-270, almost \$670 million in partially funded improvements to Interstate 70, and \$233 million in improvements advancing on I-55 from Rte. Z to U.S. Rte. 67 (MO) represent other landmark investments in integral components of the region’s freight network. Meanwhile other projects are supporting critical first mile/last mile connections that serve our region’s thriving industrial parks and ports.

Another high priority project now underway that Brown talked about is the new Interstate 270 (I-270) Chain of Rocks Bridge over the Mississippi River in a corridor featuring an abundance of manufacturing, logistics and distribution facilities. The project advanced to become one of the region’s highest priorities due to rising maintenance costs for the aging structure, and increased traffic volumes and safety issues associated with narrow shoulders. Construction to replace it began in January, marking another significant milestone for infrastructure investment in the region. It also is a testament to the strength of the continued collaboration helping to add capacity and redundancy to the St. Louis region’s freight network.

Over a three-year period during the project planning phase, in a demonstration of remarkable bi-state unity, the MoDOT and IDOT jointly secured more than \$600 million in funding for the

bridge replacement, along with improvements to adjacent sections of I-270. The new bridge is part of a regional plan to improve a 30-mile section of I-270 from James S. McDonnell Boulevard in Missouri to Illinois Route 157 in Illinois.

Other newly added but currently unfunded projects include \$34 million in improvements to the MacArthur Bridge over the Mississippi River at St. Louis. Now that the Merchants Bridge replacement project is complete, Terminal Railroad Association of St. Louis, which owns both structures, is turning its attention to the significant work required to keep the MacArthur Bridge functioning effectively as part of the St. Louis Region’s freight network.

“The MacArthur and Merchants Bridges together represent the highest-volume rail crossing on the Mississippi River,” said Mary Lamie, executive vice president – Multi Modal Enterprises at Bi-State Development. “These projects are essential to strengthen our region’s role in the global freight network and support our position as a reliever during supply chain disruption. We will continue to follow the region’s model of public-private collaboration for multimodal investment to advance important projects.”

The St. Louis Regional Freightway was established in 2014 by Bi-State Development to create a regional freight district and to advance infrastructure projects to support freight movement through the region.

The Priority Projects List is a valuable tool compiled annually by the St. Louis Regional Freightway’s Freight Develop-

ment Committee and used to align and amplify advocacy for support and funding for critical infrastructure improvements. Business and industry leaders work directly with local and state officials and departments of transportation to set infrastructure priorities by helping them to understand how infrastructure and efficiency impacts on-time delivery and costs.

A project’s inclusion on the Priority Projects List signifies unanimous support by the Freight Development Committee and helps raise awareness about the project’s need, while demonstrating that all partners see the benefits of the project to the entire freight network, making it a stronger candidate for funding.

“This environment of collaboration is critical to the region’s success in funding and advancing some of our highest priority projects,” said Lamie.

The list of 2024 Priority Projects is included below, and more details about each of these projects and their current funding status can be found online: <https://www.thefreightway.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Freightway-2024-Priority-Freight-Projects.pdf>.

Detailed fact sheets highlight how these projects are supporting multimodal connectivity and adding capacity to the region’s freight network so it can continue providing global access to shippers and carriers.

The 2024 Priority Projects List will be submitted to the East-West Gateway Council of Governments for approval later this year. Comments on the 2023 list can be submitted through Aug. 1 at [MCLamie@TheFreightway.com](mailto:MCLamie@TheFreightway.com).



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