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110 mph speeds approved for Chicago-St. Louis Amtrak corridor

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Amtrak and the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) have received federal approval for maximum speeds up to 110 mph along much of the Chicago-St. Louis corridor, primarily between the Amtrak stations in Joliet and Alton.

This will help establish shorter schedules for the four Amtrak Lincoln Service roundtrips and the Texas Eagle. Currently, there are no timetable changes for the 10 daily Amtrak trains on the route.

"Trains will continue to operate at 110 mph for several weeks without a change in schedule to ensure everything on the system is running properly and to monitor the actual travel time between stations," said John Oimoen, IDOT's deputy director, Rails.

When asked how this might impact tourist travel to and from Alton, Mayor David Goins said, "We believe that the improved speeds of the Amtrak line between here and Chicago will increase the opportunities for our area to attract additional tourists and families from upstate Illinois to downstate.

"The significant outdoor recreational assets that we possess in the Alton area serve as a great attractor to families and businesses to come into our area and this transportation improvement will



A southbound Amtrak Midwest train pulls in at the Alton station on a recent afternoon in late May, ready to welcome passengers onboard and assist those departing the train. (Melissa Crockett Meske/Illinois Business Journal)

certainly help increase our visibility," Goins added. "Our area can serve as a 'green getaway' for those who live in the Chicago region, and we can keep these dollars in Illinois," Goins added.

"We continue to also advocate for improvements within the City of Chicago to alleviate some of the bottlenecks that

impede the speed and travel time once the trains get into the city," he said further.

In a social media post, Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau President & CEO Cory Jobe noted, "This is exciting news for Alton and southwest Illinois. The Chicagoland area is one of our fastest growing markets for visitor travel with 20

percent increased spending and bookings to the Metro North region year over year."

Until now, 90 mph has been the maximum authorized speed on the tracks owned by Union Pacific Railroad. Amtrak operates Lincoln Service and other trains under a contract with IDOT.

"Amtrak, IDOT and the Illinois Commerce Commission work with Operation Lifesaver, an industry-sponsored campaign that educates persons of all ages on how to stay safe around railroad tracks," said Justin Meko, Amtrak vice president, Operational Safety.

"Now is a great time for schools, companies, and other groups to schedule safety presentations," added Meko. Volunteers make the presentations, and they can be requested by contacting the Illinois coordinator for Operation Lifesaver through the oli.org website.

Motorists, pedestrians, and bicyclists are reminded to always use caution on this rail corridor, as trains are faster than they can appear, and are quieter than ever. Be sure to only use designated public crossings, and never disregard flashing crossing signals or go around lowered gates or trespass on railroad property.

If there is a problem or emergency on or near railroad tracks, the railroad company can be contacted immediately utilizing the telephone number on the blue Emergency Notification Sign located at every crossing. See StayOffTheTracks.org for more.

Special equipment, installed as part of IDOT's Chicago to St. Louis High Speed Rail Project, monitors the trains and traffic control systems, alerting the train crews of any potential problems. Additional warning signs and fencing have also been installed in select areas to encourage safety and deter trespassing.

'Fueling the Future' awards recognize realized dreams, lessons from life

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Two local small businesses have made it "big" around the globe, but their CEOs still pay it forward right here at home.

Their efforts were recently recognized at the inaugural "Fuel the Future" event hosted this spring by the SIUE School of Business, the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) and International Trade Center for the Metro East.

Craig Eversmann and Karen Tinsley-Sroka were presented with the inaugural "Fueling the Future" awards for their extraordinary international trade achievements.

The event itself provided local small business representatives with the opportunity to learn about the no-cost services available to them through SIUE and its hosted centers.

Craig Eversmann is the president and CEO of Marsh Shipping Supply Co., more commonly known as MMSC. Eversmann's company manufactures industrial stenciling, marking, sealing and coding products for a network of distribu-



From left, Craig Eversmann and Karen Tinsley-Sroka were recently presented with the inaugural "Fueling the Future" awards, recognizing their successes in international trade while also providing valuable insight and guidance to students in the SIUE School of Business and its hosted Small Business Development and International Trade Centers. (Submitted photo)

tors. MSSC products are represented by approximately 170 distributors in North America, and another 90 worldwide.

Eversmann's company started up in 2000 in Collinsville; today it employs 30 and has an added location in Owensville,

Mo. "I always dreamed of owning my own business. Working at Marsh, I found it exciting to see the stenciled dispensers, product markers, and other items we were putting out into the market," he said.

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