



# All Aboard for Alton: Ribbon cutting commenced at new regional multi-modal transportation center

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ALTON - History has a tendency of repeating itself, which is illustrated by the future reliance on high-speed rail for mass transportation - something Alton realizes firsthand with its new train station.

Hundreds of guests from across the Riverbend area gathered at the new Alton Regional Multi-Modal Transportation Center (RMMTC) Friday afternoon for speeches from dignitaries involved in the center's creation as well as a ribbon cutting to celebrate its designation. The \$20 million center, which acts as a station for both Amtrak passenger trains and Madison County Transit (MCT) buses, is also cycle-friendly and has free wi-fi. It was built utilizing a Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant of \$13.85 million from the federal government as well as a grant worth more than \$6 million from Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT).

The project began in 2011, under the administration of Alton Mayor Tom Hoescht, and has continued under current Alton Mayor Brant Walker. Both men were at the ribbon cutting, and Walker was the first dignitary to speak.



He was introduced by Alton Convention and Visitors Bureau Executive Director Brett Stawar, who emceed the event.

"It's a monumental day for the city of Alton," Stawar said before the ceremony. "It's been years in planning. Thirteen years ago, I was at the old train station and just did not think it was a good gateway to the city or to the region."

When Walker took the podium, he immediately beamed at how much better and more modern the new train station is compared to the old one off College Avenue, which will most likely be demolished. The new station, he said is 10 times larger than the old - at 9,000 square feet.

"It is 10 times larger than the former train station, which served our community for nearly 90 years," Walker said. "It will continue to raise Alton's profile and be a huge economic catalyst."





As per the latter part of his statement, Walker showcased nearly 30 acres of land around the station, which was once the Robert P. Wadlow Golf Course, as being rife for economic development.

Walker also thanked Hoescht as well as the other city, county, state and federal entities involved in the creation of the new station. He also thanked Phil Roggio and Alton Building, Zoning and Economic Director Greg Caffey for his assistance on the project, joking that he would love to see Caffey back at city hall after the last view years.

Prior to the ceremony, Caffey also described the day as monumental for Alton. He said the city owns the entire structure and leases it to Amtrak and MCT. He credited the large TIGER grant, which was the largest in Alton's history, as well as the IDOT grant for allowing the city to do the \$20 million worth of work on the structure, which utilized organized labor.

Following Walker, Illinois State Senator William Haine (D-Alton) spoke. He thanked former United States Congressman Jerry Costello for his efforts in getting things rolling down the tracks on the new station.



Haine also described the new station as "a handsome structure," before thanking the City of Alton and its police department for keeping the station safe. He said it was a lot safer than other stations across the nation.

He also used the Alton station as an example of cooperation within government creating great results.

"This was a bipartisan effort in the Illinois General Assembly," he said. "Also, former Governor Pat Quinn jumped on the light rail money. I think we got a big chunk of Scott Walker's money, and we put it toward putting our people to work."





Illinois State Representative Dan Beiser (D-Alton) also thanked all levels of government involved in the creation of the station from the federal to the city level. Beiser, who served on the Illinois General Assembly's Transportation Committee as its director, said he worked with several elected officials to ensure all of them were in sync as they were waiting for approval from IDOT. He said he was happy when IDOT was aboard the project as well.

United States Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) spoke from the federal level, claiming to have been raised in East St. Louis with "railroads in his blood." Like Haine, Durbin described the event as a bipartisan effort on the federal level as well as the state.

"President Barrack Obama made a national investment in our railroads, and he was the first president to do that in a long time," Durbin said.

Durbin said the route from St. Louis to Chicago was chosen because of its economic importance as well as it being the home state of the president at that time. He said states such as Iowa and Wisconsin did refuse the federal money from Obama, but Democrats and Republicans across the nation were excited to put the nearly \$1 billion in federal investment in railroads to good use. Illinois was one of the states, which decided to use the money.

"Think of what these railroads mean to the students across the state attending universities," Durbin said. "One third of the students at will use this station to get home and back. That's what we have in this state: good railroads and great universities."

Before ending his speech, Durbin also thanked Costello for the work he did to ensure the station's completion.

"Jerry was a great partner as a congressman," he said. "He knew how to get the job done and get the money home."

Lauren Sanders of United States Congressman Mike Bost's (R-IL) office read a letter from Bost, who could not attend. In it, Bost spoke highly of the economic potential the new station could bring to Alton as well as how the new rail renovations could better the entire state of Illinois. He also thanked Costello for allowing him to "be a part of the excitement" of the new station's opening.

Costello himself spoke at the event, and said everyone had already said everything he wanted to say. He added that Hoescht approached him about the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) not doing much about Alton, and Costello said he contacted Durbin, who had a friend at the administration. Costello said Durbin made a call and Hoescht told him someone from the FRA called and said they "believed there was a misunderstanding." In that sense, Costello gave Durbin the credit for getting this train on the tracks and rolling.

Mike Franke of Amtrak spoke next, and he spoke on the history of the Alton-Chicago rail line. He said it was the fastest way to travel between St. Louis and Chicago, and said the first Pullman sleeper cars were utilized on that line. He also said the former Alton train station was never meant to be its main depot, and added the new station would be much more accommodating.

The history of Alton rail is also displayed within the walls of the new station.

IDOT Assistant Secretary Rich Brauer also spoke at the event, describing the new station as a great location for the eighth busiest rail stop in Illinois - a number Stawar said he would like to see become possibly as highly ranked as number five or three in the future. Brauer said as many as 60,000 passengers utilize the Alton station annually.

Charlie Juneau from Juneau and Associates, the head design firm on the project, finished the ceremony before Walker cut the ribbon. He praised the station's design as well as all the designing and engineering firms working on the project. He proudly displayed the energy-efficient self-dimming parking lot lights, the expansive parking lot and the 168 security cameras on the premises.



Juneau said a lot of work went into the station, especially in securing the permits needed to build on a former golf course and securing the ability to continue developing the land with retail space.

The new station went into operation Wednesday morning, and the old station closed its doors Tuesday night.

Stawar said he was sad to see the old station go, but hoped elements of it could be incorporated in the new station, possibly in something such as flower beds built using bricks from the old building.











