



# **IDOT in 2017: Building connections, improving safety, focusing on innovation**

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SPRINGFIELD - The Illinois Department of Transportation, under the leadership of Gov. Bruce Rauner and Illinois Transportation Secretary Randy Blakenhorne, delivered in 2017 on its commitment to create economic opportunity throughout the state by better connecting communities, improving safety and enhancing quality of life.

'With the third-largest highway system and one of the busiest rail networks in the country, Illinois' transportation system gives us a true competitive edge,' Gov. Rauner said. 'It is vital that we continue to support the important work IDOT does on behalf of the traveling public and the businesses that rely on our roads, transit, rail lines, airports and waterways to move people and goods throughout Illinois.'

Over the past year, IDOT completed almost 750 highway projects alone, ranging from minor resurfacings to interstate and bridge reconstructions. Investments in transit and passenger rail this year will provide access to jobs and facilitate long-term growth in communities across Illinois. In 2017, IDOT continued its focus on exploring innovative strategies and solutions to strengthen the state's status as the transportation hub of North America.

'The work IDOT did in 2017 will make a positive impact for generations to come,' Secretary Blakenhorne said. 'We look forward to more hard work to meet the public's goals and expectations for us in 2018 and beyond.'

## **Northeastern Illinois**

This fall, the three-year reconstruction of the Interstate 55 and Lake Shore Drive interchange, a complex system of six elevated bridges that provide a vital gateway to Chicago's lakefront, was completed on time. Progress continued on IDOT's largest project, the Jane Byrne Interchange in the heart of Chicago, setting the stage for improvements to begin in 2018 on the section connecting to Interstate 290.

At Irving Park and York roads in Bensenville, capacity upgrades, as well as a new railroad overpass, will help support regional mobility and freight activity at O'Hare International Airport. In the south suburbs, the Torrence Avenue bridge was rebuilt with new pedestrian and bicycle accommodations.

Participation by IDOT made possible the Chicago Transit Authority's new Wilson Street Station and the ongoing construction of the 95th Street Station on the Red Line.

Plans for the I-55 Managed Lanes project were revised to include a second lane between the Tri-State Tollway and the Dan Ryan Expressway, subject to federal approval. The additional capacity will make it easier to maintain consistent, reliable speeds and travel times for all I-55 users. The state is pursuing the project as a public-private partnership to deliver the project more quickly and to encourage private investment in rebuilding the state's infrastructure, pending a vote by the General Assembly.

In the summer, IDOT received federal approval to proceed with a proposed overhaul of Interstate 290, an important step toward allowing the state to pursue private partners for that project as well. Plans include the addition of a managed lane and transit opportunities to address congestion.

Shoulders were upgraded on the Edens Expressway to accommodate the addition of Pace's popular Bus on Shoulders program in 2018.

### **Downstate**

The Illinois and Iowa departments of transportation broke ground in June on the new Interstate 74 Mississippi River Bridge in the Quad Cities. The Federal Highway Administration gave the project the 2017 Environmental Excellence Award for Environmental Research for the extensive work that went into relocating several species of mussels prior to construction.

A new U.S. 52-Illinois 64 bridge over the Mississippi River, connecting Savanna and Sabula, Iowa, opened to traffic in November, replacing a structure built in 1932. Progress was made on a number of other bridge projects throughout the state, including Illinois 89 in Spring Valley, Illinois 178 in Utica, Illinois 104 in Meredosia, the Champ Clark Bridge in Pike County and the Poplar Street Bridge in Metro East.

Pavement improvements were made during the summer on I-55 through Springfield.

The department's Division of Aeronautics helped oversee airfield upgrades at Willard Airport at the University of Illinois and at General Wayne A. Downing Peoria International Airport.

The end of construction neared after years of work on the Chicago-St. Louis passenger rail line. New stations opened in Pontiac, Lincoln, Alton and Carlinville. Tracks and ties have been modernized, with higher speeds scheduled to start in 2018. Almost 200 crossings have been upgraded with state-of-the-art safety equipment. The first new locomotives in decades arrived in August to be put into service on all lines in Illinois and throughout the Midwest.

### **Eye on innovation**

Additionally in 2017, IDOT stepped up efforts to facilitate development of autonomous vehicle technology in Illinois by partnering with Illinois State Police, the Secretary of State and the Department of Insurance to begin developing guidelines and policy.

The department's commitment to sustainability and green practices led to new roadside mowing practices to help revive the shrinking populations of the monarch butterfly and other pollinators while reducing fuel consumption.

In IDOT's District 1, which includes Cook and the collar counties, the district materials testing lab to approve materials used in highway projects was accredited by the American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials. The achievement, rare for a state district lab department of transportation, will make the construction process more efficient, resulting in both cost and time savings.

Illinois was recognized as the top state in the country for road safety, according to The State of Safety report released by the National Safety Council in June. The report uses a grading system to rank states based on policy and laws pertaining to key safety issues.

To further engage the public in its programs and projects, IDOT expanded its annual customer service survey to make it available online for the first time. A statewide survey on rest areas also was launched to solicit feedback on the future of IDOT facilities that have reached the end of their anticipated lifecycle.

The popular [GettingAroundIllinois.com](http://GettingAroundIllinois.com) was relaunched with a more user-friendly format that's viewable on mobile devices. The IDOT site receives more than 2 million visits during winter from travelers seeking information on the latest road conditions.