

# Public, private stakeholders celebrate transformation of key section of East St. Louis Riverfront

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EAST ST. LOUIS - Public and private stakeholders gathered August 30th to celebrate the transformation of a key section of the East St. Louis Riverfront into a magnet for additional industry and jobs. A ceremonial snip of the ribbon marked the completion of the \$7 million River Bridge District Project that came in on time and more than \$1

million under budget. The landmark project opened up several hundred acres of undeveloped, newly accessible ground that is already sparking interest from other agribusiness and distribution companies in a section of the East St. Louis Riverfront that is part of the thriving Ag Coast of America.

The River Bridge District Project included a comprehensive overhaul of Front Street from Trendley Avenue in East St. Louis to where the road terminates in Fairmont City, as well as improvements to various connecting roadways. The initial phase, for which ground was broken in August 2016, included the critical rebuilding and upgrading of Front Street to allow for enhanced access for the burgeoning commercial traffic generated by Cargill and Bunge-SCF along the East St. Louis Riverfront. The second phase included a new roundabout near the Casino Queen on River Park Drive and associated improvements to other parts of River Park Drive and B Street. This important infrastructure work was aimed at addressing traffic congestion issues in the vicinity; creating enhanced access for patrons and employees of the Casino Queen and citizens of East St. Louis and providing separation of the heavy commercial traffic from other normal public movement.

U.S. Senator Dick Durbin, who grew up in East St. Louis, was on hand for the ceremony. “I am so glad be back here in my hometown today to celebrate a project that will help attract businesses to a long-dormant area on the East St. Louis Riverfront. I helped secure federal funding for this successful public-private partnership that will improve travel through East St. Louis and increase economic opportunity,” Durbin said.

“This infrastructure project substantially improves commerce through a key stretch of East St. Louis and shows what can happen when government partners with the private sector,” noted Congressman Mike Bost (IL-12) in a written statement, as a conflict prevented him from attending. “I am especially hopeful that this project will provide our farmers better access to international markets.”

St. Clair County Board Chairman Mark Kern, Illinois State Representative LaToya Greenwood, East St. Louis Mayor Emeka Jackson-Hicks, and representatives of the various funding partners and other invited guests also were on site for the official ribbon cutting, which took place on Front Street at the intersection of Trendley Ave., directly across from the Gateway Arch. The project is the final piece of substantial highway infrastructure improvements already made by state and federal partners in the immediate vicinity, including the relocation of Illinois Route 3 and the opening of the new Stan Musial Veteran’s Memorial Bridge.

“This project is the culmination of many millions of dollars in transportation infrastructure investment over the past several years in the surrounding area – much of which can be seen from right here,” said Kern. “Through those investments, we are

solidifying this area's strategic position as a prime central location for smooth and convenient transportation efficiencies, and we fully expect that this latest investment will be a catalyst for business expansion, enhanced economic health and local prosperity."

Taulby Roach, project coordinator for St. Clair County Transit and the individual tasked with managing the River Bridge District project, was also in attendance.

"This project is about partnership - from federal to state to county and city; from financier, to engineer, to superintendent to laborer - all of these diverse groups finding a single purpose to build a project for the public good," noted Roach. "I am proud to be a part of this partnership and I hope that it can provide a model of how to unite diverse interests to a single goal – better, more efficient infrastructure."

The improvements along the mile-long stretch of Front Street that links Cargill and Bunge-SCF will better support their growing operations and pave the way other businesses to invest and grow in the area.

Specific improvements included adding a thick concrete surface to Front Street and widening the road to 30 feet from its existing 20 – 24-foot footprint, so that it can better handle the heavy truck traffic, especially during harvest season. An estimated 400 -500 trucks currently use the road, and that number is expected to continue to grow given market growth and conditions. The project also included resurfacing of Trendley Avenue from Front Street to Main Street, the reconstruction of West Missouri Avenue from Front Street to B Street and the reconstruction of B Street from Missouri Avenue to River Park Drive. All three streets are now 24-feet wide following completion of the work. The only outstanding items are minor details such as quality inspections and sign placement.

The investment means that now, instead of using River Park Drive, truck traffic will come down Trendley Ave. to Front Street and have direct access from there to Route 3, which is already connected to the new Stan Musial Veteran's Memorial Bridge. As part of the rebuilding of Front Street, a separated lane for pedestrian and bike traffic has been included that ties into the Malcolm W. Martin Memorial Park. A final phase of the project will link that on-road bike path to the Confluence Trail that runs along the eastern shore of the Mississippi, and via the Eads Bridge to the Riverfront Trail that runs along the western shore, providing an unrivaled opportunity for trail enthusiasts interested in that unique vantage point to experience the mighty Mississippi.

"From the very beginning when this project was first presented to the City, we were hopeful of the tremendous potential that this kind of infrastructure investment could produce for East St. Louis," said East St. Louis Mayor Emeka Jackson-Hicks. "Today,

we are elated to celebrate its completion and the benefits it is delivering, not just in terms of the great enhancements to the existing businesses of Cargill, Bunge-SCF and the Casino Queen, but also in the ripple effect it will have for the citizens and economic health of our City.”

Funding for the project, which was originally estimated at \$8.1 million but was delivered under budget, came from various public and private sources, including more than \$1.5 million from the private sector. Bungee-SCF, Cargill and Casino Queen each committed \$520,000 for the project. The additional funding was provided in the form of a \$2.65 million grant from the US Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration (EDA); a \$1.5 million contribution from SWIDA; \$1.125 million from the St. Clair County Transit District; \$500,000 from the Metro East Park and Recreation District and a \$125,000 TARP grant from the Illinois Department of Transportation. Illinois American Water also invested in the project, spending approximately \$9 million above and beyond the project budget on replacing more than two and a half miles of water main lines along Front Street.

Illinois-based Baxmeyer Construction Co. served as the general contractor for the job, while engineering was handled by TWM of Swansea.