



National Freight Strategic Plan Will Strengthen Nation's and Region's Competitiveness

by Mary Lamie
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We commend the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) for announcing the first-ever National Freight Strategic Plan (NFSP) earlier this month. This historic initiative will go a long way toward strengthening national and regional competitiveness amidst continued growth in freight demand by laying out a vision for long-term investments in infrastructure, the workforce and other essential parts of the freight system.

There is no question America's ability to compete is dependent on adequate infrastructure to move freight safely and efficiently. Every day, America's transportation network moves more than 51 million tons of freight and energy products valued at nearly \$52 billion. The St. Louis region's freight network annually carries a total of 210 million tons of inbound and outbound freight with a value of \$6 billion.

The St. Louis Regional Freightway works to enhance the freight network in eastern Missouri and southwestern Illinois to accommodate the anticipated growth here and as a pivotal hub in the national freight network. We are excited to see this plan for improving the safety, security and resilience of the national freight system we're part of. USDOT efforts to build this plan have been in the works for some time and affirm the strategy already proven effective here.

The St. Louis region is delivering safe and reliable transportation by following guiding principles in the Plan by establishing partnerships bridging government boundaries, public and private sector, industries and modes of transportation. In the last 24 months, nearly one billion dollars have been invested in the region's roadways, rail, barge terminals and airports. Many projects funded have been identified in the St. Louis Regional Freightway's Priority Projects List, a valuable tool to align and amplify advocacy for support and funding for critical infrastructure improvements.

The current list includes 21 projects representing a total investment of \$2.2 billion, with half that amount covering projects under construction or funded. These include the \$222 million project to replace the Merchants Bridge, a vital rail artery across the Mississippi River and one of America's primary east-west rail corridors serving the third largest rail hub in the country. The public-private partnership delivering this multimodal rail project is an example of success when you follow the USDOT NFSP. Hundreds of millions more dollars are supporting projects along the Interstate 270/Interstate 70 Corridor -one of the nation's primary east-west manufacturing and logistics corridors.

Unprecedented collaboration between the Missouri and Illinois Departments of Transportation is a key example of the multi-jurisdictional success the new Plan hopes to foster, and it supports industry giants such as AB-InBev, Boeing, World Wide Technology, Procter & Gamble and Amazon, which all have facilities along the bi-state corridor. Prioritizing projects that improve freight intermodal connectivity and enhance freight flows on first-and last-mile connectors also supports other key employers in the

region, such as GM, which continues to have a national role in automotive manufacturing, and Bunge, which has its global headquarters, R&D and terminals in the St. Louis region.

We also continue to develop partnerships to establish new transportation links with coastal ports in Savannah, Georgia; and southern Louisiana to facilitate the movement of cargo between America's Heartland and overseas destinations via the inland waterway system with containerized cargo, which will help reduce transportation costs and improve safety.

The St. Louis region shares the USDOT NFSP's goal to lower costs to businesses and consumers and to boost the competitiveness of American goods abroad, and we will do that by maximizing our strategic location on the Mississippi River. We are within 500 miles of 80% of agriculture and livestock production in the country and home to the Ag Coast of America, the nation's most efficient port system and third largest rail hub and two international airports. Almost \$40 million in recent BUILD Grant awards to regional ports and airports will further enhance our strategic advantages.

With USDOT support, we see regions like the bi-state St. Louis area maintaining our competitive edge across major industries like agriculture, manufacturing, energy production and E-commerce and continuing to support the global supply chain through cost-effective, fast and reliable transportation.

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