

# **Alton, Carlinville To Benefit; Pritzker Administration Announces \$10.1 Million Rail Improvement Project**

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SPRINGFIELD— The Illinois Department of Transportation announced today a \$10.1 million project to modernize rail operations, improve safety and enhance the mobility of goods, people and services throughout Metro East. The project, a joint federal and state

effort with several railroads, will reconfigure an outdated network of tracks and signals, while replacing a 97-year-old trackside control tower and transferring its functions to a centralized facility.

“I’m committed to rebuilding and revitalizing Metro East, and this investment in freight and passenger rail is just the latest of our efforts to ensure the infrastructure of the region is worthy of the people it serves,” said Governor JB Pritzker. “Hand in hand with federal and private partners, Illinois is ensuring our status as the nation’s transportation and logistics hub remains strong for generations to come.”

The project is made possible by a \$5.1 million grant from the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements Program, administered by the Federal Railroad Administration, with contributions of \$1.3 million from IDOT, \$2 million from Union Pacific, \$1 million from Amtrak, \$440,000 from BNSF Railway and \$300,000 from Kansas City Southern.

The project represents yet another achievement on the Chicago-to-St. Louis rail corridor, joining enhanced safety and performance between Joliet and Alton, safer crossings and new or improved stations in Joliet, Dwight, Pontiac, Lincoln, Springfield, Carlinville, and Alton. New Amtrak locomotives were introduced in 2017, with new passenger railcars and higher speeds anticipated later this year.

“Metro East is one of the country’s critical freight and travel hubs. These improvements will improve quality of life and make the area an even more attractive location for business activity for years to come,” said Illinois Transportation Secretary Omer Osman. “We are especially proud of the teamwork between IDOT, the FRA and our rail partners to find a solution that positively impacts multiple modes of transportation.”

The project will streamline rail operations by untangling a complex system of tracks, signals, and switches where four lines intersect at one of the most congested areas in the state near Mitchell starting next week. The Lenox Tower, a two-story facility that used antiquated switching machinery to control train traffic, was taken down in May, with operations transferred to a Union Pacific dispatching center.

When completed this fall, the improvements will increase the speed of freight train operations and decrease traffic congestion on local roads, resulting in fewer blocked crossings and reducing passenger service travel times. Up to 35 trains pass through the location daily.

“CRISI grants allow the Federal Railroad Administration to help communities improve passenger and freight rail safety,” said FRA Deputy Administrator Amit Bose. “This investment of more than \$5 million will increase train speeds, permitting passengers and

freight to arrive at their destinations more quickly, while easing traffic congestion along this rail corridor.”

“Freight railroads are the backbone of the U.S. economy, supporting America’s transportation infrastructure and enabling economic growth,” said Union Pacific Assistant Vice President – Public Affairs Liisa Stark. “This project is a great example of state, federal and private entities coming together and supporting an investment that benefits both the public and private sectors, while providing safe, reliable and efficient freight transportation.”

“Amtrak is proud to contribute to this project, which will improve dependability for our IDOT-sponsored *Lincoln Service* and National Network *Texas Eagle* trains,” said Ray Lang, Amtrak vice president. “The best way for our trains to make their schedules is to have reliable, modern infrastructure, and this project will be welcomed by customers and by our train crews on the busiest downstate Illinois Amtrak route.”

“For nearly a century, Mitchell’s Lenox Tower has been the heart of railroad operations throughout Metro East,” said state Sen. Rachelle Crowe (D-Glen Carbon). “With this much-needed upgrade, the structure will safely support train traffic, prevent collisions and improve infrastructure efficiency.”