

Opinion

Next to its workforce, multimodal transportation system is Southwestern Illinois' greatest resource

We hope you're enjoying reading this full-color May 2013 edition filled with Industry Leaders from our region. It's truly been an exciting one to publish because it exemplifies a sampling of the rich tapestry



Smith

of executive leadership here in Southwestern Illinois. The previous 16 pages include conversations from senior-level executives about the crux of their organization's mission - why it is that they do what they do, for whom they do it and what sets them apart.

Many of us who work in this region agree there's something special about it. The quality of our workforce, transparency of local governance (in many cases), a largely pro-business climate and competitive development costs are just some examples. But all of this wouldn't mean a whole lot if clients couldn't reach us, or if products and services couldn't be exported or imported. I'm talking about a multimodal transportation system.

We've got that, too. It's one of the best - if not the best - in the U.S., and in 2013-

2014 it's on track to become even better.

Did you know that there is only one other spot in the U.S. - other than in St. Louis - where three interstate highways come together to cross a single bridge? There's no doubt that our region's highway system is already second to none. And when the New Mississippi River Bridge is completed in Summer 2014, that \$640 million centerpiece will add to the ground segment of our multimodal equation, interconnecting the also soon-to-be-completed Tri-Level Interchange of 55/70/64 with the I-70 Connector and reconfigured Illinois Rte. 3.

Our five metro airports add a valuable component to the multimodal mix. In Illinois, we've got St. Louis Regional Airport, Saint Louis Downtown Airport and MidAmerica St. Louis Airport; in Missouri, there's Lambert - St. Louis and the Spirit of St. Louis. Each has access to the federal airway system, which is critical; in addition, each has its own niche and works cooperatively with the other four.

When America's Central Port in Granite City (Tri-City Regional Port District) completes the new South Harbor on the Mississippi River in Spring 2014, six Class I railroads and four interstate highways will come together with a lock-free, public

inland waterway environment to create a multimodal gateway.

Speaking of rail, Southwestern Illinois and the St. Louis region overall has bragging rights there, too. The bi-state region is America's second-largest rail center in the U.S., routinely servicing 68 percent of all Class I railroad lines in this country.

Leadership Council Southwestern Illinois, under executive director Ellen Krohne's direction, is making tracks with one of its core initiatives specific to multimodal transportation in our region. SITE - Southwestern Illinois

Transportation Enhancement - is the organization's committee-driven effort, led by co-chairmen Mark Harms and Bruce Holland. SITE is working to market the competitive advantages of Southwestern Illinois' multimodal resources to attract transportation and logistics business here from across the nation and around the globe.

Isn't it a great time to be working in and around Southwestern Illinois?

Kerry L. Smith is president and chief executive officer of the Illinois Business Journal. She can be reached at ksmith@ibjonline.com.

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Opinion

After many decades away, St. Louis is finally returning to its roots

Cities are located where they are for a reason. Some, like Boston or New York, are there because of their deep water harbors. Pittsburgh started out as a military



Ortbals

fort. St. Louis began as a fur trading post, located on high ground just below the confluence of the Illinois and Missouri Rivers with the mighty Mississippi. The first steamboat docked

on the St. Louis riverfront in 1818 and the city grew by leaps and bounds for the rest of the 19th century. Fed by the bustling, river traffic, St. Louis became the fourth-largest city in the United States by 1900.

With the rivers being the founders of the feast, so to speak, I think it's rather astonishing and depressing that we have - for many decades now - turned our backs on the river that gave us life.

In the 1960s we built the Gateway Arch on the grounds of the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial. As part of the project, we built huge concrete cliffs that cut the park off from the river and we built I-70 on the other side which severed

the park grounds from the city. With the National Park Service's prohibition on development, the Arch grounds became 90 acres of fallow ground, and the riverfront became comatose.

This may come as a shock to Missourians who are only familiar with the eastern riverfront across from the Arch, but the best connections to our rivers are to be found on the Illinois side. The city of Alton has done a terrific job with its riverfront, creating a marina, a beautiful riverfront park and an attractive amphitheater against the backdrop of the Clark Bridge and the Mississippi River.

And the tiny town of Grafton, near the north end of the Great River Road, is perhaps the only place in the entire metro area where you can get down by the river and enjoy a meal, a drink and even some live music.

It was therefore heartening to see the voters of the city of St. Louis and St. Louis County pass Proposition P last month. Prop P adopted a sales tax across the two jurisdictions that will help fund the CityArchRiver 2015 project - a \$380 million plan to connect the city to the

national park and the park to the river.

The project will include a park over the depressed lanes of I-70, for the first time connecting the city seamlessly with the Arch grounds. The museum of westward expansion will be greatly expanded and improved, and a spectacular new entrance will be created opening to the west.

One of the more exciting parts of the project is the reconstruction of Lenore K. Sullivan Blvd. that runs along the riverfront at the bottom of the concrete cliffs. Rather than the silly island idea that was floated a few years ago (pun intended), this is a realistic plan to raise and expand the area below the Arch to make it usable, creating seating areas and places for kiosks to provide food, drink and entertainment.

Construction will begin this summer with a target completion date of Oct. 28, 2015, the 50th anniversary of the completion of the Arch. With this project, finally the city will be returning to its roots. Bravo, St. Louis!

Alan J. Ortbal is vice president and chief operating officer of the Illinois Business Journal. He can be reached at aortbals@ibjonline.com.

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