



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For more information, contact:

Julie Hauser
The Hauser Group, Inc.
314.436.9090

ST. CLAIR COUNTY BREAKS GROUND FOR \$8.1 MILLION RIVER BRIDGE DISTRICT PROJECT

Critical infrastructure improvements aim to attract additional industry and jobs along East St. Louis Riverfront

EAST ST. LOUIS, IL., NOV. 1, 2016 . . . With a ceremonial tossing of the dirt by several public and private stakeholders, work got underway this morning on the \$8.1 million River Bridge District Project that is focused on transforming a key section of the East St. Louis Riverfront into a magnet for additional industry and jobs. St. Clair County Board Chairman Mark Kern was joined by East St. Louis Mayor Emeka Jackson-Hicks; James Nations, chairman of the Southwestern Illinois Development Authority (SWIDA), and representatives of the various funding partners and other invited guests for the official groundbreaking, 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.

The River Bridge District Project involves a comprehensive, multi-million dollar overhaul of Front Street from Trendley Ave. in East St. Louis to where the road dead ends in Fairmont City, as well as improvements to connecting roadways. The initial phase includes the critical rebuilding and upgrading of Front Street to allow for enhanced access for the burgeoning commercial traffic being generated by Cargill and Bunge-SCF along the East St. Louis Riverfront. In addition to improving the mile long stretch of Front Street that links these two industry leaders so it can better support their growing operations, the project will also open up several hundred acres of undeveloped, newly accessible ground that is ripe for investment by other agribusiness and distribution companies.

Speaking at the event, St. Clair County Board Chairman Mark Kern noted, "Many of you know that over the recent years the surrounding area has seen millions of dollars in transportation infrastructure investment – much of it actually visible from this very spot," said Kern. "The policy strategy here is to return this area to the strategic center as a prime location for smooth and convenient transportation efficiencies. Ultimately, we believe this investment will continue to spur the robust expansion of business, leading to economic health and local prosperity."

Specific improvements include 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 trucks currently use the road, and that number is expected to grow by 30 percent given market growth and conditions. The project also will include 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 would be 24-feet wide upon completion of the work.

This important infrastructure work will create enhanced access for patrons and employees of the Casino Queen and citizens of East St. Louis, providing separation of the heavy commercial traffic from other normal public movement.

Instead of using River Park Drive, truck traffic would come down Trendley Ave. to Front Street and have direct access from there to Route 3, which is now connected to the new Mississippi River Bridge. As part of the rebuilding of Front Street, a separated lane for pedestrian and bike traffic would be included that would tie into the Malcolm W. Martin Memorial Park. A new roundabout near the Casino Queen on River Park Drive is part of Phase 2 of the project, and will help with traffic congestion issues in the vicinity.

“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 the City,” stated East St. Louis Mayor Emeka Jackson-Hicks. “This project clearly delivers great enhancements to the existing businesses of Cargill, Bunge-SCF and the Casino Queen. But as mayor of this City, I have to ask myself, ‘What else can such a project bring to the citizens and economic health of our City?’ We would like to ensure that more of the benefits of this project can see their way to the citizens of East St. Louis. I am proud and happy to announce that the project team - under Chairman’s Kern direction, has accomplished this and the minority participation goal for this project has been increased from 12% to 20%. We fully expect that some of these jobs will bring more prosperity and experience to my citizens.”

Funding for the project is coming from various public and private sources, including \$1.5 million from the private sector. Bunge-SFC, Cargill and Casino Queen have each committed \$500,000 for the project. The additional funding is being provided in the form of a \$3.5 million grant from the US Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration (EDA); a \$1.5 million contribution from SWIDA; \$900,000 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.

“SWIDA’s participation in this program was spawned from the diverse combination of public and private sector partners, who united to design a project that capitalizes on a connection to this vast transportation system around us,” noted James Nations, chairman of the Southwestern Illinois Development Authority. “Additionally we are excited by the fact that the growth of these industries spurred a request for partnership, and that this partnership included an equity investment component. This is the kind of growth that SWIDA hopes to be involved in, serving the growth and economic expansion of our community.”

Illinois-based Baxmeyer Construction Co. has been selected as the general contractor for the job, while engineering is being handled by TWM of Swansea. Work on phase one is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2017, while Phase 2 is expected to wrap up a year thereafter.

U.S. Congressman Mike Bost shared a written statement expressing his enthusiasm for the project, noting “This project contains all the elements of a project that I can support, concentration on infrastructure, governmental cooperation and partnership, and true private sector equity partners. I am especially hopeful of the support that this sort of project provides the American Farm community through competitive markets and access to international trade.”

Also excited to see the project get underway is Illinois State Senator James Clayborne. While he couldn’t attend the groundbreaking due to commitments in Springfield, he shared his thoughts on the project’s significance.

“The infrastructure of the River Bridge District is the culmination of years of transportation planning and investment,” stated Senator Clayborne. “Planning that returns this Riverfront area to a nexus of economic health based on the exchange of American goods. The strategy is to utilize our traditional centralized location and become an economic hub for regional growth. In the case of the trucks that call to these facilities that’s apparent from their doors, which announce the farms they serve including the far corners of Missouri, Iowa, and of course Illinois.”

###