

UI opens railroad-focused laboratory

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Coming at 1:30 p.m. today on campus: a ceremony marking the opening of the UI's railroad-focused Research and Innovation Laboratory. A few things you ought to know about RAIL:

1 It is 3,500 square feet, part of the UI's 1-year-old Rail Transportation and Engineering Center (RailTEC) and paid for in part through grants and funds from the Federal Railroad Administration. Its purpose: to find new ways to make rail and transit lines safer, more resilient and cost-effective.



Photo by: Heather Coit/The News-Gazette

Riley Edwards, research scientist and senior lecturer with Rail Transportation and Engineering Center (RailTEC), stands on the track loading system area looking over a fastening system, which attaches the rail to cross-tie, in the Harry Schnabel, Jr. Geotechnical Laboratory in Champaign on Tuesday, August 18, 2015. Edwards, who helped get the new Research and Innovation Laboratory (RAIL) up and running, will be among those to attend RAIL's grand opening on Wednesday.

2 It will attract industry A-listers. Among those on hand today: Gregory Winfree, assistant secretary of the U.S. Department of Transportation; Joseph Leader, senior VP for the New York City Transit Authority; and Mike Franke, Amtrak's senior director of state government contracts.

3 It's part of a tradition at the UI. In the mid-20th century, the emergence of highways led many schools to stop railroad research. But not Illinois, which early in the 20th century gave the world the "Davis Equation," used to calculate rail resistance.