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USDOT grants target three rail, intermodal research centers

The [U.S. Department of Transportation \(USDOT\)](#) recently awarded a \$3.5 million grant to a multi-university consortium led by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign to establish a rail transportation and engineering research center.

Headquartered within the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at Illinois, the National University Rail (NURail) Center will focus on rail education and research to improve railroad safety, efficiency and reliability. The center primarily will focus on challenges associated with rail corridors in which higher-speed passenger trains share infrastructure with freight trains, consortium officials said in a prepared statement. Research projects will focus on track and structures; train control; rolling stock; human factors; and other topics identified based on Federal Railroad Administration and

Association of American Railroads priorities.

NURail will be the first University Transportation Center focused solely on rail, consortium officials said.

The consortium also includes the University of Illinois at Chicago, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Michigan Technical University, Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology, University of Kentucky and University of Tennessee. The NURAIL center will be directed by Professor Christopher Barkan, who serves as director of University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign's railroad engineering program.

The USDOT also awarded a \$3.5 million grant to a Mississippi State University- and University of Denver-led consortium to establish the National Center for Intermodal Transportation for Economic Competitiveness (NCITEC) in Colorado.

The new center will work to promote the development of an integrated, economically competitive, efficient, safe, secure and sustainable national intermodal transportation network by integrating all transportation modes both for freight and passenger mobility, consortium officials said in a prepared statement. The consortium also includes Hampton University, Louisiana State University and the University of Mississippi.

The center's areas of expertise will include intermodal planning, safety and security, public policy, workforce development and economic competitiveness. The NCITEC will focus on the economics, assessment, design, and development of planning methodologies, operational tools, technology and human resources needed to improve intermodal connectivity and capacity, and to reduce congestion in the nation's transportation system, consortium officials said. The NCITEC will also will seek to improve the transportation workforce's capacity and capability.

Meanwhile, the USDOT awarded a \$3.5 million grant to a consortium led by the University of Memphis and University of Wisconsin for the National Center for

Freight and Infrastructure Research and Education (CFIRE).

The University of Memphis will coordinate the center's southern hub, which includes Vanderbilt University, the University of Alabama-Huntsville, and University of Southern Mississippi. The University of Wisconsin will serve as CFIRE's lead institute and will head the northern hub, which includes the University of Wisconsin-Superior, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, University of Toledo, University of Illinois-Chicago and Michigan Technological University.

CFIRE aims to maximize the effectiveness of multi-modal and intermodal development in the region and nation to move freight efficiently from border to border and abroad, consortium officials said in a prepared statement, adding that those objectives will help create jobs and sustain growth.

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