

## The Grainger College of Engineering

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# Grainger Engineering launches USDOT funded NURail Center, celebrates 'the future of rail transport in this country'

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The Grainger College of Engineering at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign officially opened the University-led National University Rail Center of Excellence (NURail CoE) on Wednesday at the Newmark Civil Engineering Laboratory with a ribbon-cutting ceremony attended by federal and state dignitaries.

Attendees at the NURail CoE ribbon cutting included Illinois Grainger Engineering professor [Chris Barkan](#), of the Civil and Environmental Engineering department, Federal Railroad Administration Administrator Amit Bose, Illinois Senator Dick Durbin, Illinois Representative Nikki Budzinski, Illinois Department of Transportation Secretary Omer Osman, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign Provost John Coleman, and University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation Susan Martinis.

Together, everyone celebrated the first ever academic rail research and education center of excellence to be supported by the US Department of Transportation's (DOT) Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) with the help of new funding in President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. The \$15-million center will advance research solutions to enhance the safety, efficiency, reliability, and sustainability of both passenger and freight rail transportation.

"A lot of people are saying thank you today, which is appropriate because a lot of work has been going on for years to bring us to this day," Barkan said.

He continued by thanking the partners and collaborators within academia, government, and industry that made NURail CoE a possibility here at Grainger Engineering. And "most of all" Barkan thanked the students in attendance, as they are the reason "why we do this. You are the future of rail transport in this country."

Barkan will serve as NURail CoE director and also serves as the George Krambles Director of Grainger Engineering's esteemed [Rail Transportation and Engineering Center \(RailTEC\)](#), which recently celebrated its 25th anniversary and is the largest railway educational program



Photo Credit: *Heather Coit*

Official ribbon-cutting attended by federal and state dignitaries, including Federal Railroad Administration Administrator Amit Bose, Illinois Senator Dick Durbin, Illinois Representative Nikki Budzinski, Illinois Department of Transportation Secretary Omer Osman, and university officials.

in North America.

Coleman began the event by expressing how the center's efforts touch on all aspects of the University of Illinois' mission. Martinis followed and emphasized the importance of this work, as the climate for such activity has benefitted from an outpouring of support from government and academic partners across the country and locally here in Illinois.

Senator Durbin addressed the crowd, speaking about how engrained rail is with the state of Illinois – pointing even to his own background working as a yard clerk. The state's emphasis on rail, he thought, made Grainger Engineering and the University of Illinois a perfect home for NURail CoE.

“The University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign is the right institution to advance research and development to improve safety, efficiency, and reliability of both passenger and freight rail operations,” said Durbin. “As home of the largest railroad track research laboratory in the United States, I look forward to the progress the U of I will make in collaboration with the National University Rail Center of Excellence consortium.”

Congresswoman Budzinski, herself an Illinois alumna, spoke of the pride she has in her fellow Illini, as they continue improving the safety and condition of rail in this country through NURail CoE.

“Students and faculty at the University of Illinois lead the way in 21st century research and technology every day – and it's only fitting we tap their expertise to help bring our rail system into the future,” said Budzinski. “I'm thrilled to see my alma mater designated as the National University Rail Center of Excellence with a \$7.5 million investment from the U.S. Department of Transportation. Along with partners across the country, the University of Illinois and our Illini students will continue to lead the way in improving safety and efficiency in our nation's rail system. Their work will make a difference for passengers, for rail workers and for businesses transporting goods across the country and to the global marketplace.”



The event concluded with a ribbon cutting, photo opportunity, and a tour of the RailTEC Research and Innovation Lab (RAIL) that Administrator Bose and Secretary Osman and their staff attended.

“Today's ribbon cutting is another instance where investments from President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law are advancing rail safety, expanding opportunity, and laying the foundation for the modern 21st-century rail network Americans deserve,” said Bose. “The rail safety research and innovation that will move forward at the National University Rail Center of Excellence will be felt nationwide, helping to get people and goods where they need to be safely, efficiently, and reliably. FRA thanks Senator Durbin, Senator (Tammy) Duckworth, and others who supported the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, and we congratulate all involved in the NURail Center as this exciting opportunity officially kicks off.”

The NURail Center is a nine-university consortium led by RailTEC at The University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. The Center includes The University of Illinois Chicago, University of Delaware, Kansas State University, Michigan Technological University, Morgan State University, Rutgers University, University of Texas at Austin, and Tuskegee University.

The University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign has been a leader in railroad transportation engineering research and education for over 140 years.

“We are excited to celebrate this important milestone in the advancement of rail transportation,” Barkan said. “My partners and I are incredibly grateful for the support that the NURail CoE has received from the USDOT Federal Railroad Administration as well as the Illinois Department of Transportation, Michigan Department of Transportation, New Jersey Transit and our many rail sector sponsors and supporters. We look forward to continuing our work together and are eager to get started.”

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