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Durbin, Duckworth, Budzinski Announce \$5 Million for University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign to Establish National University Rail Center of Excellence

WASHINGTON – U.S. Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin (D-IL), U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), and U.S. Representative Nikki Budzinski (D-IL-13) today announced \$5,000,000 for the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign through the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) Federal Railroad Administration's (FRA) Rail Research and Development Center of Excellence (CoE) program to establish and maintain a CoE to advance research and development that improves the safety, efficiency, and reliability of passenger and freight rail transportation.

Last year, Durbin, Duckworth, U.S. Representative Mike Quigley (D-IL-5), and former U.S. Representative Marie Newman (D-IL-3) sent a letter to FRA Administrator Amit Bose urging him to consider Illinois as a home for the future University Rail Research and Development CoE.

Durbin also established a provision in the bipartisan *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act* requiring FRA to establish the CoE.

“Our railways have always been the backbone of America, connecting communities, powering industries, and propelling our economy forward,” said Durbin. “Yet, with the evolving demands of the 21st century, there is an urgent need to modernize and optimize our rail systems. The National University Rail Center of Excellence, led by the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, will harness the collective wisdom of academia, industry experts, and government agencies to tackle the challenges facing our passenger and freight rail transportation systems, ensuring safety, efficiency, and reliability are at the core of its mission.”

“Modern and safe rail infrastructure is critically important to our state and nation, and this investment will help boost the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign’s efforts to improve our rail systems,” said Duckworth. “I’m proud to see the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law continuing to deliver right here in Illinois, and I’ll keep advocating for federal resources for infrastructure improvements that help working families across our state get where they need to be faster, safer and easier all while helping create jobs in the process.”

“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 selected by the U.S. Department of Transportation to spearhead a National University Rail Center of Excellence with partners across the country. I look forward to seeing the hard work of our Illini improve safety and efficiency in this critical national industry.”

“I am delighted that the Federal Railroad Administration is recognizing Urbana’s expertise in rail research and workforce development,” said Susan Martinis, Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. “I applaud Sen. Durbin for his work to authorize the Rail R&D Center of Excellence, and for being such a champion of our research enterprise.”

The National University Rail CoE will be led by the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and includes the following partner institutions: 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. One of the main efforts across all consortium members within the National University Rail CoE will be the development of structured programs that introduce minority and women scholars to the different facets of rail transportation and provide pathways for them to begin rail facility careers.