

# Trains

## University of Illinois celebrates opening of National University Rail Center of Excellence

By [Trains Staff](#) | May 30, 2024



Officials cut the ribbon at the ceremony marking the opening of the National University Rail Center of Excellence at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. University of Illinois

URBANA-CHAMPAIGN, Ill. — The Grainger College of Engineering at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign officially opened the National University Rail Center of Excellence with a ribbon-cutting ceremony Wednesday (May 29).

The center is the first academic rail research and education center of excellence to be supported by the Federal Railroad Administration with the help of funding from the 2021 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. The \$15 million center will advance research solutions to improve the safety, efficiency, and reliability of passenger and freight rail.

“We are excited to celebrate this important milestone in the advancement of rail transportation,” said Illinois Grainger Engineering professor Chris Barkan. “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.”

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 in North America.

Attendees at the NURail ribbon cutting included Barkan, Federal Railroad Administration Administrator Amit Bose; U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill.; Illinois Rep. 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.

“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,” Budzinski said. “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 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.