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## St. Louis Regional Freightway's Strategic Approach Attracts Major Industrial Developments

### *Collaboration Moves Targeted Sites from Underutilized to Developer-Ready, Helps Secure \$820M project*

**[ST. LOUIS/June 6, 2025]** Avina Clean Hydrogen’s plans to develop an \$820 million sustainable aviation fuel plant facility in the St. Louis region – and the process that influenced the company’s site selection - were spotlighted during FreightWeekSTL. Avina is a New Jersey-based company that designs, builds, and operates facilities that produce cost-effective clean fuels for aviation, maritime and mobility industries. It will be building its new facility on a rail-served site identified and marketed by the St. Louis Regional Freightway, which hosted the June 6 virtual panel discussion. The panel featured Brent Wood, President of Terminal Railroad Association of St. Louis (TRRA), and Doug Rasmussen, Founder & CEO at Steadfast City Economic and Community Partners.

With several rail-served development sites in the region, TRRA has connections to all six Class I railroads, two Mississippi River bridges and 170 miles of track in the St. Louis area, along with having capacity for 1,200 storage cars and a yard capacity of 2,200 to 2,500 cars at a time. It was one of TRRA's sites that was selected for the Avina project. Steadfast City is a site selection, economic development, community development and urban planning consulting firm that works closely with the St. Louis Regional Freightway on its featured real estate sites initiative, which Rasmussen describes as a best practice for attracting industrial development.

Rasmussen discussed the process the St. Louis Regional Freightway engages in to create and market its list of industrial sites. In conjunction with Steadfast City, the St. Louis Regional Freightway assembled a team of experts in the industrial real estate development and brokerage industries to evaluate potential marketable sites. The team considers different aspects when evaluating sites, including industry and market trends and how economic development professionals and those in the commercial real estate industry can work together to attract new businesses to the sites. Rasmussen explained the team felt it was best to focus on sites that were well vetted, already had due diligence completed and were as close to shovel ready as possible.

“Obviously, there’s a lot of land in the St. Louis Regional Freightway’s region, but we really felt it would be helpful to have a list of criteria and focus on the best opportunities,” said Rasmussen. “That doesn’t mean we weren’t interested in sites that were less ready, but the group thought that it was important for us to really be ready to strike when a prospect comes.”

Rasmussen said the team looked at sites that were at least 20 acres in size, had a broker, developer, economic development corporation or government entity sponsoring the site, zoning already established or in the approval process, and access to freight systems, like Class I railroads, airports, interstates and water ports. Then, the team gathered all the data and further vetted the sites to evaluate them against the remaining criteria related to existing or planned buildings, minimum height requirements and other factors before they were added to the map of featured sites at [TheFreightway.com](http://TheFreightway.com). The list itself is then featured in the Freightway's ongoing media relations efforts to help spread the word about the availability of the various sites.

Rasmussen also spoke about the St. Louis Regional Freightway and Steadfast City's collaboration with TRRA and the various Class I railroads to build the targeted list of rail-served sites over the past three years. He said their relationships with the industrial development representatives at various railroads enabled them to connect and

start a dialogue about additional criteria that would attract rail to these targeted sites. He also said the support of an interested project sponsor, landlord or landowner can help ensure preliminary pre-development due diligence is completed to help attract businesses to these targeted sites.

The virtual panel session was moderated by Mary Lamie, who expressed how excited she was when Illinois Governor JB Pritzker and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity announced the Avina Clean Hydrogen project late last year. Lamie leads the St. Louis Regional Freightway and is Executive Vice President of Multimodal Enterprises for Bi-State Development. She offered insight into the St. Louis Regional Freightway's involvement in helping to secure the Avina project.

"The initial inquiry was sparked by familiarity with our featured sites," said Lamie. "As a result of media coverage, we received a call and were able to quickly respond because of the existing relationships that helped create the featured real estate sites list." Lamie said she provided information on multiple sites that were eventually narrowed down to three, and then leveraging existing relationships with the public and private sectors - including brokers, site selectors, developers, the Illinois Department of Transportation, St Clair County, and other local leaders - she was able to quickly schedule meetings with all the relevant parties so that a final decision could be made swiftly. "The information was available, sites were developer-ready, and thanks to collaboration and relationships, we sent an overwhelming message."

Wood spoke about the advance work TRRA had completed on the site Avina selected that helped it rise to the top of all the prospective sites during the selection process. TRRA purchased the land in 2018 and pre-developed the site with the help of local government authorities and the St. Louis Regional Freightway. He said those efforts helped to facilitate the Avina project coming together in about a month and a half.

"This project really highlights the coordination of the region and how we can work together to make things happen quickly," said Wood. "The St. Louis Regional Freightway was instrumental in coordinating with Ameren, utilities, transportation and rail and putting all the parties together quickly."

Wood added that the Avina project is in the final due diligence phase and that, once completed, the new facility will bring 180 jobs and as many as 20,000 rail cars per year to the bi-state area.

Rasmussen offered insight into St. Louis's ideal location for companies such as Avina due to its central location in the United States, world-class infrastructure and availability of affordable sites. "When you look at the St. Louis region, the manufacturing GDP here has expanded from 19 billion to 26 billion dollars since 2020, and the distribution and logistics GDP has expanded from 6.5 billion dollars to 9 billion dollars. So, both of those sectors have grown by a factor of one third since 2020," said Rasmussen. "That underscores the point that this is an excellent location for manufacturing oriented and distribution and logistics-oriented businesses."

FreightWeekSTL 2025 was held June 2-6. The week-long freight and logistics event was delivered by the St. Louis Regional Freightway. To learn more or view any of past sessions for FreightWeekSTL 2025, visit [www.freightweekstl.com](http://www.freightweekstl.com).

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#### **About St. Louis Regional Freightway**

*A Bi-State Development enterprise, the St. Louis Regional Freightway is a regional freight district and comprehensive authority for freight operations and opportunities within eight counties in southwestern Illinois and eastern Missouri, which comprise the St. Louis metropolitan area. Public sector and private industry businesses are partnering with the St. Louis Regional Freightway to establish the bi-state region as one of the premier multimodal freight hubs and distribution centers in the United States through marketing and advocacy for infrastructure development that supports the movement of freight. To learn more, visit [thefreightway.com](http://thefreightway.com).*