

Media Contact:

Julie Hauser, PR Counsel, St. Louis Regional Freightway
(314) 629-3887 (c)

Educators Explore the Ag Coast of America and Career Pathways in Logistics and Aviation

Immersive experiences during FreightWeekSTL highlight multimodal freight network and expanding career opportunities

[ST. LOUIS, MO/June 18, 2026] – The St. Louis Regional Freightway hosted a riverboat cruise on June 11 as part of FreightWeekSTL 2026, offering educators and other industry leaders an up-close look at the Ag Coast of America and the multimodal infrastructure that supports the region’s role as a leading global logistics hub. The curated tour showcased the integrated system of rail, barge, trucking and infrastructure assets that move millions of tons of freight through the St. Louis region each year, while highlighting a wide range of career opportunities available across these industries. The day’s activities also included a visit to St. Louis Downtown Airport to learn all about careers in aerospace and aviation.

More than 40 educators participating in the Show-Me Careers: Educator Experience externship program were among those taking part in the immersive experiences. The week-long program—offered through a partnership between the Missouri Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Regional Business Council and the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education—provides educators, counselors and administrators with direct exposure to real-world career pathways they can share with students.

An Abundance of Opportunities

During the Ag Coast cruise, industry leaders representing engineering, rail, barge and logistics sectors engaged directly with educators, offering insights into workforce needs, entry-level opportunities and advancement pathways.

Bill Kinzeler, Senior Vice President & General Manager of Ingram Infrastructure Group, highlighted the scale of river operations and career potential across the marine industry. He noted they move over four million tons annually, transloading cargo from rail to barge at their river terminals. He also emphasized strong entry-level wages and opportunities for advancement and long-term earning potential across the sector.

“Our starting base pay is going to put you at the mid-\$40’s plus full benefits and overtime opportunities, and we’ve developed a job progression growth structure where you can come in and move up,” Kinzeler said. “On the Marine side, we’ve got a program to take you from the deck to the wheelhouse earning six-figures.”

Kinzeler also shared details regarding Ingram’s recently launched internship program, noting they have hired all three of their first interns full time and that they are all learning multiple sides of the business and providing immense value and impact less than two years out of school.

Adam Mahlandt, General Manager of the Terminal Railroad Association of St. Louis, underscored the scale and economic impact of rail operations while highlighting high-paying career opportunities available right out of high school.

“We run 115 trains through the St. Louis metro area daily,” Mahlandt said. “Eighteen-year-olds can come to us and make six figures a year along with every benefit you can imagine.” As an example he pointed to a conductor who was brand new last year and made \$108,000.

“There are no prerequisites for the railroad,” Mahlandt said. “The only requirement is to come in and be ready to learn.”

Brad Reinhardt, Global Sales Director for Watco, outlined opportunities across trucking, warehousing and logistics, noting both accessibility of the jobs and earning potential. Watco owns 48 Shortline railroads in the United States and Australia and multiple river terminals and also has a highway logistics division that moves freight via truck on other people's trucks. Reinhardt also is president of the Transportation Club of St. Louis.

“The trucking industry can be very lucrative,” Reinhardt said, pointing to examples such as Walmart. “Walmart just announced their starting pay for drivers is \$125,000 a year and they are home most evenings.”

He noted that those sorts of jobs require a Class A Commercial Driver’s License, which you can’t obtain until you’re 22 years old, but also highlighted strong starting salaries in the range of \$45,000 to \$50,000 a year for entry-level truck driving roles for smaller vehicles, such as those used for Amazon deliveries.

He also highlighted careers in the warehousing and logistics industries that offer similar compensation. Reinhardt emphasized that logistics careers combine technology and communication skills. “It’s a very computer and techy industry,” Reinhardt said. “You do have to talk to people, and there’s a decent amount of stress, but it’s a pretty easy industry to learn.”

Nicole Adewale, Principal/Owner of ABNA Engineering, Inc., highlighted how infrastructure investment is fueling demand for engineering and technical roles. “There’s a lot of money still out here for infrastructure,” Adewale said.

She noted that opportunities exist for both college-bound students and those entering the workforce directly. “You can come in straight out of high school and work as a surveying technician, construction inspection tech, as well as materials testing technicians,” Adewale said. “Some work outside in the field, some work in a laboratory. You’re probably making somewhere between \$40,000 and \$60,000, especially if you have a little bit of experience, plus full benefits.”

Adewale added they also have entry-level openings for CAD technicians who receive on-the-job training and emphasized the importance of getting certain certifications while still in high school.

Across all sectors, speakers reinforced that these careers offer strong wages, advancement opportunities and multiple entry points, including internships and apprenticeships, and they talked about how they are AI proof.

“You’re not going to AI these jobs,” Kinzeler said. “These are jobs you can go into and grow in.”

Educators Also Explore Aerospace Careers at St. Louis Downtown Airport

In addition to the riverboat cruise, educators participated in a second FreightWeekSTL experience on June 11 at St. Louis Downtown Airport (KCPS), titled “Connecting Classrooms to Careers in Aerospace and Aviation.” Led by Airport Director Sandra Shore, the session provided a behind-the-scenes look at operations at the airport in Cahokia Heights and Sauget, Ill., and highlighted its role within the region’s growing aerospace ecosystem.

Through a two-part presentation, educators explored career pathways in aerospace, aviation and avionics, including job roles, salary outlooks and training requirements. The session also highlighted pathways from high school to high-paying careers through apprenticeships, community colleges and four-year degree programs, along with resources such as [AeroSTL.org](https://www.aerostl.org) designed to connect students with to real-world career pathways.

Shore outlined the airport's significance as a national general aviation reliever and its growing economic impact. KCPS generates more than \$422 million in annual economic activity, according to the most recent data from the Illinois Department of Transportation.

"All that economic impact comes from our tenants and our businesses—we're very proud of them, and they're thriving right now," Shore said. "The opportunities here are so much larger than us."

Representatives from Gulfstream Aerospace Corp., which recently completed a more than \$30 million expansion at its St. Louis facility located at the airport, discussed career opportunities at the company and its partnerships with area high schools and higher education institutions to support its workforce pipeline. They also highlighted Gulfstream's internships, co-ops and apprenticeship programs, which provide hands-on experience and direct pathways to careers in aerospace.

Shore also emphasized the airport's focus on workforce development, announcing a new internship initiative. "We are currently hiring our first intern. We just started up an internship program—that's how I got my start, and it's something that is very important to me."

Educators said the experiences during FreightWeekSTL provided valuable insights they can bring back to their classrooms. Jennings Middle School Assistant Principal Stan Johnson emphasized the importance of participation in experiences like FreightWeekSTL. "The message is that everyone needs to come to these events," Johnson said. "This is connecting us to the community and connecting schools to the companies with the jobs."

Rene Vega, a school counselor at Christian Brothers College High School who also was representing the Missouri Chamber of Commerce, said the experience helped clarify how to guide students toward success. "Kids nowadays often start by asking, 'How much am I going to make?'" But what we can take back to our campuses is the reality that these opportunities are out there—and what it takes to get there," Vega said. "You have to work hard, show up, have the basics down and be willing to learn. If you do that, the sky's the limit."

The Ag Coast Cruise and St. Louis Downtown Airport session were part of FreightWeekSTL 2026, hosted by the St. Louis Regional Freightway. The annual event brings together industry leaders, educators and policymakers to highlight the importance of freight, infrastructure and workforce development to the region's economy.

Mary Lamie, Executive Vice President of Multimodal Enterprises at Bi-State Development and head of the St. Louis Regional Freightway, emphasized the value of connecting educators with industry. "The St. Louis region continues to stand out as a global logistics hub, and experiences like this help educators connect classroom learning with impactful career opportunities," Lamie said. "By showcasing our multimodal assets and the breadth of jobs they support, we're helping build stronger awareness of these critical industries among the next generation of workers."

To learn more about FreightWeekSTL, visit freightweekstl.com. For information on Gateway Arch Riverboats cruises, visit gatewayarch.com/riverboats. To learn more about St. Louis Downtown Airport, visit stlouisdowntownairport.com.

About St. Louis Regional Freightway

Established as the St. Louis region's authority for coordinating support for industrial businesses and the logistics infrastructure they depend on, the St. Louis Regional Freightway (the Freightway) provides site selection and business assistance to manufacturing, logistics and multimodal transportation companies and their service providers. As an enterprise of Bi-State Development, the Freightway partners with public sector and private industry businesses to advocate for infrastructure development that supports the movement of freight, leads initiatives to grow the region's talent pool, and plays a critical role in marketing the region as a world-class manufacturing and distribution cluster within the City of St. Louis and seven adjacent counties in Missouri and Illinois. To learn more, visit TheFreightway.com.