

New intermodal means jobs for Joliet area

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JOLIET -- Joliet was the focus of the state's economic development efforts Thursday.

Gov. Pat Quinn, U.S. Sen. Richard Durbin, and more than 350 other people joined in a celebration for the construction of Union Pacific's Joliet Intermodal Terminal.

Facts on the Joliet intermodal

- Completion date of June 2010
- 785-acre site
- Cost of \$370 million
- 3,400 "staging" or parking places for trailers and containers
- Can handle 500,000 ocean-going containers annually
- 30 to 90 seconds — the amount of time a truck will be stopped entering or leaving facility; a time cut down from an average of 5 minutes due to advanced technology and computer systems

Initial phase of 550 acres features:

- Four loading tracks, each 8,000 feet long
- Six 8,000-foot tracks to stage rail cars for loading
- Six track classification yards
- 10-lane next-generation automated gate system

The 785-acre intermodal yard is part of the 3,900-acre CenterPoint Intermodal Center -- Joliet industrial park. Add in the 2,500-acre CenterPoint Intermodal Center just a few miles to the south in Elwood, and it wasn't hard to see why so many people were drawn to what would become the largest such combined operation in the United States.



(From left) Will County executive Larry Walsh, U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin, Gov. Pat Quinn, and CenterPoint Properties CEO Mike Mullen sign their names in concrete at the Joliet Intermodal Terminal construction site groundbreaking Thursday in Joliet.
(Ryan Thompson/For The Herald News)

"We understand that the challenge of our time is to have a growing economy," Quinn told the crowd gathered under a big-top tent on ground that will become the intermodal yard. The intermodal operations in Will County, he said, will serve Illinois' role as "the transportation center of the United States," Quinn said.

Jobs come with center

Trucks and construction equipment were running just outside the tent -- evidence that the job already has begun.

But hundreds of construction workers are expected to be hired in the coming months to get the Union Pacific yard open by June.

Thousands more would be hired in coming years as distribution centers and other operations are built and opened at the development located west of Route 53 and along a Laraway Road that already has been reconfigured to serve the needs of the industrial park.

"We've got 15 miles of road being cut," Neil Doyle, executive vice president of CenterPoint, said when asked about progress at the park. "They've got 18 miles of rail down already."

Probably, more than 1,200 workers will be hired between now and June to finish the intermodal yard on schedule, said Martyn J. Guimon, president of Ragnar Benson Construction, the Park Ridge-based general contractor for the Union Pacific site.

"It's a fast-track job, and it's moving quite rapidly," Guimon said.

Good sign, bad economy

Numerous speakers at the event called the project true "economic stimulus" amid a still troubled economy.

Jim Young, chairman and chief executive officer for Union Pacific Corp., said the Joliet project shows his company's confidence that the economy will come back.

"At the end of the day, this is all about investment in the future," Young said. "I think now is the time to make this investment. I have confidence in our economy. I have confidence in the railroads."

Numerous speakers also extolled the environmental value of using more trains and fewer trucks, along with less fuel and lower emissions, to move the nation's goods.

Joe Szabo, administrator for the Federal Railroad Administration, said, "A single train can take 280 trucks off the road." That, he added, is the equivalent of 1,100 cars.

Durbin also commented on the growth of the intermodal business in the area since a similar ceremony was held at the CenterPoint Intermodal Park in Elwood in 2002.

That development, Durbin said, "has been so successful that it's outgrown the facility. Today we are writing the next chapter."

<http://www.suburbanchicagonews.com/heraldnews/news/1751797.Joliet-economy-Quinn-intermodal-Jo090309.article>