



ACEC ILLINOIS THE CONNECTOR

LEADERSHIP & POLICY BRIEFING

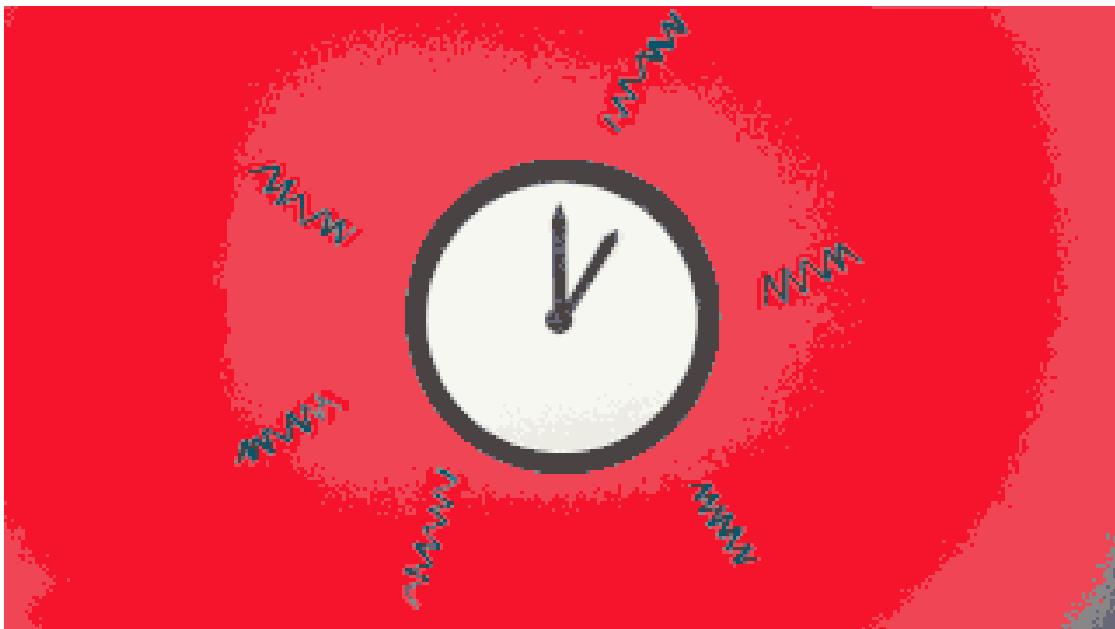


KEVIN ARTL
PRESIDENT & CEO

JANUARY 2026



House committee advances SPEED Act



The House Natural Resources Committee has advanced the SPEED Act, bipartisan legislation aimed at modernizing the federal environmental review and permitting process for infrastructure projects.

Why it matters: The SPEED Act addresses long-standing concerns that the NEPA process is unpredictable, potentially stretching project timelines and increasing costs. - By establishing clearer judicial timelines and reducing duplicative reviews, the act aims to restore predictability.

ACEC's stance: The American Council of Engineering Companies supports responsible environmental review but sees inefficiencies in the current system as

delaying vital infrastructure improvements. - ACEC argues the SPEED Act preserves environmental protections while clarifying agency responsibilities.

Chamber of Commerce insight: The U.S. Chamber of Commerce highlights how extended federal permitting timelines delay construction starts and increase costs. - The SPEED Act could aid in timely deployment of infrastructure investments, supporting economic growth.

Zoom in: For complete details and the full legislative text of the SPEED Act (H.R. 4776), see the official bill page on [Congress.gov](https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/4776) — “Standardizing Permitting and Expediting Economic Development Act.”



The U.S. data center market is entering a phase of unprecedented growth, largely driven by the rapid adoption of AI and increasing digital infrastructure demands.

Why it matters: Design and construction spending in the data center sector is projected to rise from \$38 billion in 2025 to approximately \$62 billion by 2029. - This positions the sector as a key growth area for engineering firms.

AI's impact: AI technologies have drastically increased power demands, with AI-driven data centers expected to consume up to 123GW by 2035. - ACEC highlights that AI workloads will account for 70% of total data center power demand.

Zoom in: Concerns over water use in data centers have led to innovations in cooling technologies, significantly reducing freshwater consumption. - Leading operators like AWS and Google aim to be water-positive by 2030, replenishing more water than they use.

Emerging trends: The diversification of data center models, including edge and modular centers, presents new engineering challenges. - These trends require a broad range of engineering disciplines, from civil to environmental services.

Learn more: Dive into the ACEC Market Intelligence Brief on data centers to explore the full scope of opportunities and challenges. - [Read the ACEC brief](#) for detailed insights.

Wage compression: A strategic risk for AEC firms



Ongoing workforce shortages and a competitive labor market are intensifying compensation challenges in the engineering and construction industry.

Why it matters:

For AEC firms, wage compression is no longer just an HR concern—it is a strategic business risk that directly affects retention, productivity, project quality, and firm profitability.

- The narrowing pay gap between new hires and long-tenured employees is becoming a systemic issue due to salary inflation and cost-of-living pressures.

What they're saying:

Industry leaders warn of higher turnover, declining morale, and increased operational risk as firms struggle to balance starting salaries with existing compensation structures.

What's next:

Firms must reassess compensation strategies. Regular market benchmarking, structured career progression, and greater transparency in pay practices are essential to mitigating risks and ensuring long-term resilience.

Zoom out:

For a deeper dive into effective strategies and tips to combat wage compression, read the full article [here](#). This resource provides comprehensive insights to help firms navigate these challenges effectively.



Rebuild Illinois — By the Numbers (as of Dec. 15, 2025)

Fund Balances

- Total Transportation Funds: \$6.15B
- Road Fund: \$3.61B (\$132.1M)
- State Construction Account: \$2.54B (\$47.8M)

Motor Fuel Tax (MFT)

- November Revenue: \$243.1M
- vs. Pre-Rebuild IL Avg (FY16–FY19): +\$13.25M (+5.8%)

- Still the most stable Rebuild Illinois funding source
- ⚡ Electric Vehicles
 - Registered EVs (June 2025): 160,907 
 - Share of Total Vehicles: <1.5% of 11.0M 
 - Minimal near-term impact on MFT revenues
- ⌚ Sales Tax on Motor Fuel
 - Statutory Transfer: 100% → Actual (FY26): 80% 
 - Q1 Transfer: \$51.9M 
 - Q2 Transfer: \$56.2M 
- 🚗 Motor Vehicle Registrations
 - November Revenue: \$116.3M 
 - vs. Projection: -\$37.6M (-24.4%) 
- 📝 Certificate of Title
 - November Revenue: \$30.1M 
 - vs. FY18-19 Avg: +\$7.0M 
 - vs. Projection: -\$4.1M (-12%) 

Bottom Line:

Rebuild Illinois funding remains fundamentally stable, anchored by strong MFT performance, but soft vehicle-related revenues, reduced sales tax transfers and the new transit bill that removes the sale tax on motor fuel funding warrant continued monitoring.



News Briefs

IDOT Adds a New Deputy Secretary of Project Implementation

Ryan Mitchell has been appointed Deputy Secretary of Project Implementation for the Illinois Department of Transportation, bringing extensive experience in major and complex project delivery to the role. Most recently, Mitchell served as Administrator of the Office of Major Projects at the Michigan Department of Transportation, and he holds degrees from DePaul University and Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

A/E Industry Remains Resilient Despite Broader Economic Volatility

The A/E services industry continued to show resilience in the third quarter of 2025, with revenues rising to \$124.4 billion—up 0.8% quarter over quarter and 4.6% year over year—despite broader economic volatility. Employment also remained strong, reaching 1.76 million workers in November 2025, even as the national unemployment rate increased.

IDOT Adds In-Person DBE Interim Final Rule Workshops

The Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) has added in-person DBE Interim Final Rule workshops in response to strong participation in its virtual sessions. These workshops will mirror the virtual content and include on-site assistance from IDOT Supportive Services consultants to review draft personal narratives and personal net worth statements.

Upcoming DBE Workshops:

- [In-Person: Tuesday, January 13, 2026 | 1:00–3:00 PM — IDOT District 1 Headquarters, Schaumburg](#)
- [In-Person: Tuesday, January 20, 2026 | 3:00–5:00 PM — IDOT District 1 Resource Center, Chicago](#)
- [Virtual: Tuesday, December 30, 2025 | 10:00–11:30 AM](#)

Reminder: DBEs must submit required documentation by January 31, 2026. Firms missing the deadline will not be decertified but will be ineligible to perform DBE work until recertification is complete.

Don't Miss Out

Upcoming ACEC Illinois Events

[IDOT ORD Overview | Springfield & Lombard \(January 13-14\)](#)

- Join IDOT staff for a hands-on overview of ORD standards and tools, including the IDOT Support Website, project/work set setup, DGN creation, survey/design/build container files, sheet creation, CADD Manual updates, and the IDOT/Tollway CADD environmental update schedule. Presenters include **Dan Mlacnik, Policy Engineer; Drew Christopher, Technology Policy & Support Manager; and Jamie Shaw, Senior CADD Support Specialist with the Illinois Department of Transportation.**

[Innovative Project Delivery Seminar \(January 27\)](#)

- Designed for firms new to IPD as well as those with prior experience, this seminar provides direct insight from Illinois Department of Transportation and the Illinois Tollway on the expanding role of IPD in Illinois. **Speakers include Manar Nashif, Chief Engineering Officer, Illinois Tollway; Mike Stirk, Bureau Chief, Innovative Project Delivery, IDOT; Ryan Mitchell, Deputy Secretary of Project Implementation, IDOT; and Shane Cullen, Bureau of Innovative Project Delivery, IDOT.**

[Metra Regional Luncheon \(January 29\)](#)

- Join ACEC Illinois for a regional luncheon featuring **Janice Thomas, Chief of Staff and Deputy Executive Director for External Affairs at Metra**, for a discussion on regional priorities, agency initiatives, and engagement with the consulting community.



[Listen Here!](#)

Member Updates:



InNova Consulting, Inc. Continues to Grow Team and Services

We are excited to announce our team and services at InNova continues to grow!

- **Amal Muhsin – Solutions and Strategy Manager;** Amal is a 10-year technology leader and solutions architect with an M.S. in Computer Information Systems, specializing in regulated sectors. She leads complex cloud, data, and compliance projects, turning business objectives into secure, efficient solutions. Her experience includes guiding major digital transformations and streamlining data systems for government and commercial.
- **James Saba – Mechanical Engineer, Intern;** James is currently a Mechanical Engineering student at the University of Illinois Chicago and an MEP Intern with InNova, where he supports the design and documentation of building systems for commercial and residential projects. He develops HVAC and MEP layouts in Revit, produces construction documents, and assists with on-site inspections to verify system installations and building code compliance.

InNova would love to help with your Federal Grant Writing & Application Management!

We provide full grant-writing and application management services for state and federal programs, such as the U.S. Department of Transportation's BUILD Grant, supporting both planning and capital transportation projects. Our experienced team helps clients assess project eligibility and competitiveness, develop compelling narratives, and coordinate required documentation to maximize scoring potential. From early project framing through final submission, we guide clients through the entire federal funding process to position projects for success.

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COMMITTEE CHAIR

Spotlight

KYLE DUFFEY

GFT

How long have you been a part of ACEC IL?

6 years

Tell us a little bit about the committee you chair.

The Emerging Professionals Committee is targeted towards those in the first 15 years of their career. It's meant to be an introduction to all things ACEC. Our committee puts on a monthly webinar series, hosts social events, and an annual 3-on-3 basketball tournament. As the number of people on our committee has grown we've continued to expand the events and opportunities we offer. Keep an eye out for a few new things coming in 2026!

What's the number one reason people should join your committee?

Joining the EP Committee is what opened my eyes to how much goes on in the world of engineering consulting beyond preparing plans or writing reports. The EP Committee has been a great way to start getting exposure to more people in the industry and the different paths that this career can take you. It gives a good perspective on the positive impacts of the work we do and all of the people it takes to make these projects happen.

What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

In my spare time I enjoy cooking, working on projects around the house, running, travelling, and rooting for the Fighting Illini.

Tell us one fun fact about yourself.

I have an app that I use to track every type of plane I've ever flown on and have been known to choose a slightly more inconvenient route if it means getting to fly on a new plane.





Secure Source America Lemont, IL

Secure Source America is a local manufacturer of cold rolled metal framing studs. Based out of Lemont, IL, we have a wide selection of studs, tracks, and accessory pieces in stock.



UPCOMING EVENTS...

ACEC ILLINOIS



1.13.2026 - IDOT ORD Overview - Springfield, IL - [Register now](#)

1.14.2026 - IDOT ORD Overview - Lombard, IL - [Register now](#)

1.22.2026 - Webinar: *Permeable Paver Design, Construction, & Maintenance* - [Register here](#)

1.23.2026 - Webinar: *The 2026 Congressional Outlook: Funding, STR, & Emerging Infrastructure Policy* - [Register here](#)

1.26.2026 - Webinar: *Illinois State Legislative Outlook: What to Expect in the Upcoming Session* - [Register here](#)

1.28.2026 - Webinar: 2026 Tax and Regulatory Outlook for Engineering Firms - [Register here](#)

2.2.2026 - Webinar Series: Retention & Recruitment - A Webinar Series to Enhance the Employee Experience (1 of 4) - [Register here](#)

2.3.2026 - 2.5.2026 - OpenRoads Designer Fundamentals Training - [Register here](#)

2.4.2025 - Webinar: Risk Management Essentials of the New Normal - [Register here](#)

2.9.2026 - Webinar Series: Retention & Recruitment - A Webinar Series to Enhance the Employee Experience (2 of 4) - [Register here](#)

2.10.2026 - Very Hands-On ChatGPT & Claude - Engineering Use Cases - [Save the Date](#)

2.12.2026 - Emerging Professionals Webinar: *Illinois Autonomous and Connected Track (I-ACT) Facility* - [Register here](#)

2.16.2026 - Webinar Series: Retention & Recruitment - A Webinar Series to Enhance the Employee Experience (3 of 4) - [Register here](#)

2.18.2026 - ACEC IL 2026 EEA Gala - [Save the Date](#)

2.23.2026 - Webinar Series: Retention & Recruitment - A Webinar Series to Enhance the Employee Experience (4 of 4) - [Register here](#)

2.25.2026 - 2026 Leadership Institute - [Registration is open!](#)

3.3.2026 - 3.31.2026 - Webinar Series: Seller-Doer Accelerator - Business Development for Engineers - [Save the Dates](#)

3.3.2026 - 3.4.2026 - OpenRoads StormCAD Training - [Register here](#)

3.5.2026 - Emerging Professionals Webinar - [Save the Date](#)

3.7.2026 - 3v3 Basketball Tournament - [Save the Date](#)

4.23.2026 - Emerging Professionals Webinar - [Save the Date](#)

4.29.2026 - Future Leaders - Your Journey Starts Here - [Save the Date](#)

6.16.2026 - ACEC IL Spring Board Meeting & Luncheon - [Save the Date](#)

On Demand Education - Virtual Trainings:

- Get Compliant & Build a Respectful Workplace - [Register here](#) for one, or all, of these virtual trainings:
 - Ethics & Statutes
 - Bystander Training
 - Manager Harassment Training
 - Illinois Sexual Harassment Training
- Earthwork Webinar - [Register here](#)



Please submit firm update & news articles by the 20th of each month to: bethany@acecil.org
Articles and updates will be included in the membership newsletter, posted on our website, and shared through our social media feeds.



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