



ACEC ILLINOIS THE CONNECTOR

LEADERSHIP & POLICY BRIEFING



KEVIN ARTL
PRESIDENT & CEO

September 2026

Welcome to this month's ACEC Illinois *Connector*

👋 **Happy Friday!** ACEC's latest industry survey finds engineering firms remain confident, busy and ready to hire—even as Midwest executives grow more cautious about the broader economy.

🚧 **Situational awareness:** Congress extended surface transportation programs through December 11, but Illinois still has nearly \$548 million in FY 2027 formula funding at risk unless lawmakers continue the IIJA's advance appropriations. Closer to home, the new Northern Illinois Transit Authority has officially replaced the RTA and begun a multiyear transformation of regional transit.

📅 **Coming up:** Join us at the [ACEC Illinois Fall Conference](#) for sessions on AI, data centers and other issues shaping the future of engineering—and register for our upcoming [Tollway Lunch](#) and [Energy Forum](#) for deeper insights into the investments and policies creating new opportunities for member firms.

Let's get into it.



Federal Transportation Programs Extended— but Funding Cliff Remains



Congress has bought itself more time to complete a long-term surface transportation bill—but a significant funding gap remains.

What happened: President Trump signed a continuing resolution extending federal surface transportation programs and current government funding through December 11. The extension prevents an immediate interruption of Highway Trust Fund-supported highway, transit and safety programs.

The catch: The measure does not continue the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act's advance appropriations. Without additional congressional action, \$36.8 billion in annual transportation funding will expire in FY 2027, affecting programs for bridges, airports, transit, passenger rail, EV infrastructure and transportation safety.

Why it matters to Illinois: Illinois has approximately \$547.8 million in formula funding at risk in FY 2027 if Congress fails to continue the advance appropriations. The funding supports bridge repairs, airport infrastructure, transit improvements, EV-charging infrastructure and transportation-safety programs. Illinois could also lose opportunities to compete for additional passenger-rail and other federal infrastructure grants.

The big picture: Nationwide, \$10.8 billion of the expiring advance appropriations goes directly to states, local governments, transit agencies and airports through 10 formula programs. The remaining funding supports highly competitive federal grant programs.

What's next: House Speaker Mike Johnson said the five-year surface transportation reauthorization bill will likely be considered during the post-election lame-duck session and called completing it this year "a big priority."

- The House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee has already approved the bipartisan, five-year, \$580 billion BUILD America 250 Act by a 62–2 vote. However, the House has shortened its September schedule, leaving lawmakers with a limited window to complete the legislation before the election.

The bottom line: Congress must use the short-term extension to enact a full reauthorization that provides states with long-term certainty and preserves the higher



Engineering Firms Remain Strong Despite Economic Uncertainty



Engineering firms continue to report strong financial performance, healthy backlogs and aggressive hiring—even as executives grow more cautious about the broader economy.

What's new: The ACEC Research Institute's Q3 2026 Engineering Business Sentiment Study surveyed 591 engineering-firm executives nationwide. Confidence in firms' financial performance remains exceptionally strong, with a net rating of +79, while confidence in the overall engineering industry stands at +76.

By the numbers:

- Half of firms report backlogs of at least one year, with the median increasing to 12 months.
- 88% of firms have at least one open position.
- 65% expect to increase hiring during the next 12 months.
- Data centers and water/wastewater lead all markets, with sentiment ratings of +83 and +82, respectively.

The Midwest view: Engineering executives in the Midwest are more cautious about the broader economy but remain confident enough in their workloads to continue hiring.

- Midwest firms rated the U.S. economy 12 months from now at -16, compared with -8 nationally.
- Midwest hiring expectations registered +62, above the national rating of +59 and 11 points higher than a year ago.
- Midwest firms reported a median of nine open positions, compared with five nationally.
- The median Midwest backlog is 11 months, just below the 12-month national median.

- Midwest executives place the chance of a recession during the next six months at 43%, compared with 41% nationally.

Yes, but: Firm leaders nationwide remain considerably less confident about the broader economy than about their own businesses. Expectations for firms' finances remain positive at +41, even as the 12-month outlook for the U.S. economy has fallen to -8.

- Political and economic uncertainty, general economic uncertainty and inflation are the leading concerns among respondents.

Another takeaway: Professional licensure remains central to the industry's workforce pipeline. Ninety-six percent of firms have positions requiring a Professional Engineer license, and 91% encourage unlicensed engineers to pursue one.

The bottom line: Engineering firms remain busy, financially confident and positioned for continued growth. *In the Midwest, particularly strong hiring expectations are continuing despite greater caution about the economy.*



NITA Launches New Era for Regional Transit



The Northern Illinois Transit Authority officially replaced the RTA on September 1, beginning a multiyear transformation of how transit is funded, planned and coordinated across northeastern Illinois.

Why it matters: NITA now oversees CTA, Metra and Pace and has expanded authority over regional planning, fares, service standards, public safety and capital investment. The NITA Act also provides approximately \$1.5 billion in new annual funding to stabilize transit throughout Illinois.

Zoom in: [NITA's new 20-member board](#) includes five appointees each from the governor, Chicago mayor and Cook County Board president, along with one from each of the five collar counties. Several members will serve simultaneously on the NITA board and the boards of CTA, Metra or Pace to strengthen regional coordination.

What's next: The board will select a chair and begin developing the FY 2027 operating budget and five-year capital program. ACEC Illinois will remain engaged as NITA establishes its investment priorities, procurement processes and long-term approach to delivering regional transit improvements.

New ACEC Framework Helps Firms Manage AI Risk



Artificial intelligence can improve productivity, decision-making and project delivery—but it also creates new risks for engineering firms.

What's new: The ACEC Research Institute has released an [enterprise framework](#) to help firm leaders identify, govern and manage AI-related risks.

Zoom in: The framework covers eight areas, including technical reliability, professional liability, data privacy, intellectual property, workforce development, cybersecurity and organizational governance. Its central finding: Licensed engineers remain responsible for their work and professional judgment regardless of how AI is used.

What's next: The ACEC Research Institute will discuss the framework and what it means for engineering firms at the [ACEC Illinois Fall Conference, October 14–15](#) at the Chicago Marriott Naperville. The conference will also feature additional sessions exploring how engineering firms can use and manage AI.

The bottom line: Managing AI is not simply an IT responsibility. It requires coordination among firm leadership, engineering, legal, operations, human resources and technology teams.

⚡ USDOT Eyes Transportation Corridors for Energy Expansion



Growing electricity demand—driven in part by data-center development—is prompting a new federal effort to colocate energy and utility infrastructure along highways and railroads.

What's new: [USDOT's "America's Great Corridors of Commerce"](#) initiative would encourage public-private partnerships to install transmission lines, broadband and other utilities within existing transportation rights-of-way. USDOT plans to designate up to five corridors annually.

Zoom in: Illinois currently permits underground—but not overhead—utility lines running longitudinally within highway rights-of-way. The federal initiative could provide technical assistance, permitting coordination and potential access to TIFIA or RRIF financing.

What's next: The [ACEC Illinois Fall Conference](#) will feature sessions examining data-center development and the engineering, energy and tax considerations shaping this rapidly growing market.

For deeper insight into state and federal energy policy—and the opportunities they create for engineering firms—members should also register for the [ACEC Illinois Energy Forum](#).

⚡ The ACEC Illinois 5

Five quick updates shaping Illinois' engineering industry.

1.  **Construction Spending Becomes More Selective:** Overall U.S. construction spending has declined since peaking in February 2025, with residential spending down 4.1% and nonresidential spending down 3.1% year to date. Data centers remain a major exception—spending has climbed 34.8% over last year—while power and office construction also continue to grow. [Explore the ACEC analysis](#)

2.  **Private Group Proposes 15-Minute O'Hare Train:** The proposed \$2.25 billion, privately financed O'Hare Flyer would operate every 15 minutes between the Old Post Office and O'Hare's Terminal 2, primarily using existing freight-rail corridors. The project's backers hope to begin service within five years, although agreements,

regulatory approvals and community concerns still must be addressed. [Learn more about the proposal](#)

3. 🛠️ SBA Proposes Major Expansion of “Small Business” Definition: A proposed Small Business Administration rule would raise the revenue limit for engineering firms to qualify as small businesses from \$25.5 million to \$252 million, making thousands of additional firms eligible for federal small-business set-asides. Comments on the proposal are due September 21. [Review the proposed rule](#)

4. 🛣️ Tollway Pipeline Signals Fast Start for Driving Connections: The Tollway’s updated professional-services look-ahead includes a substantial pipeline of new design and construction-management opportunities—an early signal that the \$26.5 billion Driving Connections program is moving full speed toward implementation. Register for the ACEC Illinois Tollway Luncheon on September 22 for more information about the program and upcoming opportunities. [View the Tollway’s procurement information](#) | [Register for the Tollway Luncheon](#)

5. 🌟 Congratulations to Sis Killen: Cook County Department of Transportation and Highways Superintendent Jennifer “Sis” Killen announced at the ACEC Illinois County Engineers Luncheon that she will retire at the end of September, concluding a remarkable career in public service. ACEC Illinois congratulates Sis and thanks her for her leadership, partnership and commitment to improving Cook County’s transportation system; Tara Orbon will serve as acting superintendent.



We're Growing!

Exciting things are happening at InNova Consulting, Inc., and we're looking for talented professionals to grow with us! We're currently hiring for:

- Administrative & Proposal Coordinator
- Lead Civil Engineer - Transportation
- Mechanical Engineer
- Survey Technician

At InNova, we're passionate about building a team that brings fresh ideas, strong expertise, and a commitment to creating better solutions for the communities we serve. Interested in joining our team or know someone who would be a great fit?

Please forward your resume to Amina Saleem at asaleem@innovaconsultinc.com. We look forward to connecting with you!

InNova Consulting, Inc. is proud to be a woman and minority-owned engineering and consulting firm specializing in civil engineering, traffic engineering, transportation planning, infrastructure solutions, and IT solutions for public and private sector clients across the Midwest. Known for our client-focused approach, InNova delivers innovative, data-driven solutions that enhance mobility, safety, and community connectivity.



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MEMBER FIRM:

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If You Need Engineering and Land Surveying in Southern, Illinois - As your local civil engineering and professional land surveyor located in Nashville and Effingham, Illinois, we are directly responsible for the land development of the area. Since 1992, we have collaborated with architects, engineers, developers, and builders to develop surveys and

maps of the surface features of the Earth. We are responsible for establishing boundary surveys, topographic maps, civil engineering designs, and construction layout services.

In short, we are responsible for protecting your investment and making sure nobody is infringing on your property. For more information, call our civil engineering and land surveying team today!

Fun Fact: George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Thomas Jefferson were all land surveyors! So, Mount Rushmore is 3-surveyors and another guy.



AFFILIATE MEMBER FIRM:

Chartwell

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<https://chartwellfa.com/>

Chartwell is a national leader in financial advisory.

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<http://getavila.ai>

AI-powered platform that simplifies government grant discovery and proposal writing.

ACEC IL Member Updates...



August 17, 2026

Chicago, Illinois

Lochner Rebrands as Egis, Advancing Growth Strategy Across the U.S.

Following its 2025 merger, the company has unified under the Egis brand to accelerate growth, expand capabilities, and deliver enhanced solutions for infrastructure clients.

H.W. Lochner, Inc. (Lochner), a leading professional services firm with more than 80 years of experience delivering public infrastructure solutions, today announced it has officially rebranded as Egis. The transition marks a significant milestone in the company's integration into the global Egis organization, a recognized leader in architecture, consulting, construction engineering, operations, and mobility services.

The rebranding represents the next phase of integration following the merger completed on July 23, 2025. As Egis continues to prioritize expansion across the U.S. and North America, the unified brand reinforces the company's long-term commitment to growth in the transportation, water, energy, and environmental markets while strengthening its ability to deliver end-to-end solutions for clients.

"The transition of Lochner and its family of companies to the Egis brand is a pivotal moment," said Laurent Germain, CEO of Egis Group. "Coming together under one brand strengthens our position in the U.S. market and enables us to draw on the full capabilities of our global network to help clients solve their most complex challenges. This rebrand reflects not only who we are today, but also our vision for the future—to expand our presence, broaden our expertise, and create lasting value for the clients and communities we serve."

With a combined U.S. workforce of more than 1,500 professionals spanning 70 offices, Egis' engineers, practice teams, and project managers provide a full range of consulting and technical services, encompassing every aspect of mobility and the built environment. Since 1945, Egis in the U.S. has developed a tradition of engineering excellence, enhancing communities across the nation.

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About Egis

IMAGINE. CREATE. ACHIEVE.
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Egis is an international consultancy active in architecture, consulting, construction engineering, operations, and mobility services. Operating in 70 countries, Egis puts the expertise of its 23,500 employees at the service of its clients, developing cutting-edge innovations accessible to all projects.

Through its wide range of capabilities, Egis is a key player in the collective organization of society and the living environment of citizens all over the world. The company is ranked No. 17 in *Engineering News-Record's* Top 225 International Design Firms and No. 7 in Transportation.

| [LinkedIn: Egis](#) | [Instagram: @egisgroup](#) | [X: @egis](#) | [Facebook: @egisgroup](#)

Press contacts

Laura White

VP of Marketing and Communications Egis
Americas

Tel.: +1 701 269 2110

laura.white@egis-group.com

Isabelle Mayrand

Group Chief Public Affairs and Corporate
Communication Officer

Tel.: +33 6 17 10 29 70

isabelle.mayrand@egis-group.com



Oates Associates Welcomes Stacey Hesselbein, PE, as Associate Project Manager

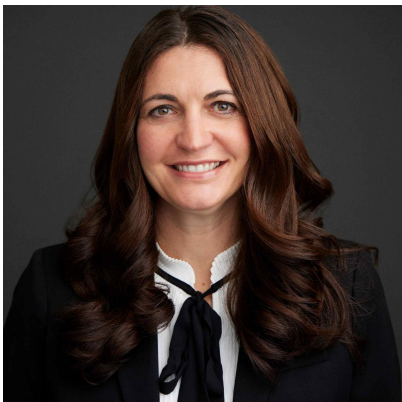
Collinsville, IL (August 25, 2026) - Oates Associates, Inc., a 100% employee-owned civil and structural engineering and surveying firm, proudly welcomes Stacey Hesselbein, PE, to its team as an Associate Project Manager. Her engineering experience and technical expertise will strengthen the firm's building structural engineering team.

Hesselbein brings over 10 years of engineering experience to her role in the firm's St. Louis office. Throughout her career, she has contributed to complex technical projects requiring careful analysis, sound engineering judgment, and attention to detail. Her background also includes training employees on software programs and processes, bringing valuable technical knowledge and a collaborative approach to the team.

The addition of Hesselbein expands the firm's structural engineering capabilities and adds experienced technical expertise and project management support. As an employee-owner, she joins a group committed to making a meaningful impact for clients and communities throughout the region.

Oates Associates is a 100% employee-owned multi-disciplined design firm with offices in Collinsville and Belleville, Illinois and St. Louis and St. Charles, Missouri. Oates provides engineering and surveying services for transportation and building projects. Specifically, this includes transportation and traffic engineering, ADA transition planning, stormwater management, site design, building and bridge structural design and inspections, surveying, and drone operations. For more information, visit www.oatesassociates.com or call 618.345.2200.

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CBBEL Promotes Melissa McGhee, PE to Assistant Department Head of Phase II Engineering

Experienced transportation engineer will help lead final design efforts within CBBEL's Transportation Group

Rosemont, Ill. – Christopher B. Burke Engineering, Ltd. (CBBEL) is announcing the promotion of Melissa McGhee, PE to Assistant Department Head of the Phase II

Engineering Department within the firm's Transportation Group.

Melissa has 23 years of engineering experience, including 12 years with CBBEL, and has served as a Senior Project Manager with experience in Phase I and Phase II transportation and highway engineering. Her work includes transportation planning and design, geometric

design, alternatives analysis, public involvement incorporating Context Sensitive Solutions, Phase I design reports, and construction documents.

“Melissa’s technical knowledge, project leadership, and understanding of complex transportation improvements make her an excellent fit for this expanded leadership role,” said CBBEL President Mike Kerr, PE. “Her experience guiding projects from early planning through detailed design will continue to strengthen the service we provide to our municipal, county, and state transportation clients.”

CBBEL’s Phase II Engineering Department transforms approved concepts into detailed, buildable designs that guide transportation projects from planning into construction. As part of CBBEL’s multidisciplinary Transportation Group, the Phase II team prepares coordinated plans, specifications, and cost estimates for roadway, highway, and multi-use path projects while working closely with in-house civil designers, drainage engineers, traffic operations specialists, structural engineers, environmental professionals, surveyors, and construction staff.

Melissa has served as Project Manager on transportation and trail projects for Kane County, the Village of Rosemont, Village of Wilmette, City of Harvard, and City of Northlake, and has contributed to major transportation assignments for the Illinois Tollway, Chicago Department of Transportation, Illinois Department of Transportation, and other public agencies.

A licensed Professional Engineer in Illinois and Indiana, Melissa earned a Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering from the Illinois Institute of Technology. She is a member of the American Society of Civil Engineers and has completed professional development through PSMJ A/E/C Project Management Boot Camp, ACEC-Illinois/IDOT Drainage Seminar, and FHWA/NEPA and the Transportation Making Process.

“I’m grateful for the opportunity to help lead CBBEL’s Phase II Engineering Department,” said Melissa McGhee, PE. “Our team plays an important role in turning transportation concepts into coordinated, constructable designs, and I look forward to supporting our staff and clients as we continue delivering projects that improve mobility, safety, and community connectivity.”

About Christopher B. Burke Engineering, Ltd. (CBBEL)

Founded in 1986, CBBEL is a multidisciplinary consulting engineering firm that partners with communities and clients to plan, design, and deliver infrastructure that improves how people live, move, and interact with their environment. With more than 270 professionals, CBBEL provides integrated in-house engineering and surveying services, including civil, environmental, transportation, water resources, structural, and construction engineering. Learn more at [CBBEL.com](https://www.cbbel.com).

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ENGINEERING ENTERPRISES, INC. WELCOMES ONE NEW STAFF MEMBER

Engineering Enterprises, Inc. (EEL), an award-winning civil engineering and land surveying firm, is pleased to announce the hiring of Jaden Zaver as a Project Engineer.

Jaden graduated from Milwaukee School of Engineering with a bachelor's degree in civil engineering. He brings transportation-focused experience through internships with the Missouri Department of Transportation and the Illinois Department of Transportation, where



his work included traffic modeling, signal observations, roadway sign inspections, construction work zone inspections, intersection surveying, 3D laser scanning, and ADA ramp and guardrail inspections.

“Jaden’s academic background and hands-on transportation experience make him a strong addition to our team,” said Brad Sanderson, PE, Chief Operating Officer / President. “We look forward to seeing him apply his technical skills and fresh perspective to help serve our clients and support the communities where we work.”

For more information about EEI and our services, please visit:

www.eeiweb.com.

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About Engineering Enterprises, Inc. (EEI)

Engineering Enterprises, Inc. (EEI), founded in 1974, is an award-winning consulting engineering firm providing services to public agencies and private entities throughout northern Illinois. Over 80 experienced firm members including licensed professional civil engineers, land surveyors, and support team members provide a full range of services for planning, design, and construction of infrastructure projects, funding assistance, and municipal consulting. Our core values guide our staff on every project from initiation through completion keeping us committed to quality, service, and value for our clients. By offering outstanding service to every client, every day, we are able to assist with bettering the communities in which we serve.

MEMBERSHIP DUES HAVE BEEN SENT OUT!

ACEC Illinois dues invoices have been sent out. If you need a new copy or have questions, please contact:
Emily Martinez – emily@acecil.org



Email Emily today!

FALL 2026 CONFERENCE

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Get started [here](#).

SUBMIT UPDATES & ARTICLES:

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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