

The Center for Smart Logistics

The Center for Smart Logistics will facilitate the development, testing, and application of automated technology for inland ports, intermodal logistics centers, manufacturing facilities, warehouses, and e-fulfillment centers, leveraging the strengths of the South Suburbs' logistics industry.

Why a Center for Smart Logistics?

Shipping worldwide has increased in volume and complexity, prompting freight systems to more efficiently and cost-effectively manage container movement. Seaports from Long Beach to Rotterdam are investing in electric automated ground vehicles (AGVs) and sophisticated terminal operating systems to increase productivity. Automation can bring similar benefits to inland ports, and is becoming more essential as pressures increase to handle more volume and remain competitive. The relevant technologies exist: the opportunity now is to drive their adaptation and combination into integrated systems to enable effective deployment of autonomous solutions to inland ports and smaller-capacity environments.

The Center for Smart Logistics could transform the Chicago Southland into the nationwide hub of logistics innovation and a model for the future of inland ports. Investment in this growing industry capitalizes on the region's enormous assets, location and infrastructure advantages. The South Suburbs boast the continent's largest inland port, as well as a multi-billion-dollar industry in intermodal, distribution, logistics, and warehouse operations, employing tens of thousands of people. The diverse mix of major manufacturers presents additional opportunities for the deployment of automated goods movement technologies.

What Would the Center Do?

Seizing these opportunities requires a testbed, product customization and integration facility where logistics equipment suppliers, automated systems component suppliers, freight facilities operators and others can address inter-operability, standardization, product design, cost-efficiency and related issues. The Center for Smart Logistics would provide this platform.

Potential products and services include:

- Testing environment
- Software simulation
- Product and system development (both collaborative and proprietary)
- Engineering and logistics services -- customized applications and deployment
- Market research and development
- Workforce training

The project team is currently conducting interviews to further inform the business plan.

Project Partners

The project is led by the South Suburban Economic Growth Initiative and the Chicago Southland Economic Development Corporation, working with the Center for Neighborhood Technology, the Civic Consulting Alliance, Cook County Department of Highways and Transportation, and the Urban Transportation Center of the University of Illinois at Chicago. The U.S. Economic Development Administration and Cook County are providing financial support.