2026 AAPA Lighthouse Award Submission
Economic Development Practices

Ports of Indiana Project Title: “Indiana River & Rail Terminals: New Venture Creates Largest Ohio River General Cargo Terminal”

June 12, 2026



INDIANA RIVER & RAIL TERMINALS

Project Summary

Ports of Indiana recently launched “Indiana River & Rail Terminals” – the largest general cargo operation on the Ohio River. This stevedoring joint venture revitalized two underutilized port operations under one brand, one management structure, and one strategic vision, creating a transformative economic development platform for southern Indiana and the state as a whole. Since launch, IRRT has created significant economic development, demonstrated major revenue growth, expanded facilities at two ports, handled new high-profile cargo for the pharmaceutical industry, and diverted thousands of trucks from local highways with a new barge shuttle. What started as a one-building operation has rapidly expanded to include seven buildings, six barge docks, 400,000 sq.ft. of indoor storage, and 10+ acres of outdoor storage. With access to multiple Class I railroads, and more than 40 customers across 2,200 acres, IRRT has rapidly become one of the most important cargo hubs on the inland waterway system.

1. Background, Purpose, and Goals

Ports of Indiana operates two Ohio River ports — at Jeffersonville (near Louisville, Ky.) and Mount Vernon (near Evansville, Ind.) — within the Southern Indiana Port District, which the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers ranks as the nation's No. 1 inland port district, shipping 27.7 million tons of cargo annually via barge. That total is approximately 60 percent more than any other inland port in the country and ranks as the nation's 22nd largest port overall.

Despite this scale, the general cargo stevedoring operations at these two ports had historically been managed by independent private stevedoring companies and the related port assets were significantly underutilized. Each facility operated in relative isolation – often competing against each other – without a unified brand, coordinated marketing, or the operational synergies that a shared corporate structure could provide. Customers had to navigate separate relationships, pricing structures, and service offerings for each location. The fragmented two-facility structure also limited POI's ability to attract larger regional and national customers who needed flexible, scalable solutions across multiple locations. To fully leverage the competitive advantages of the No. 1-ranked inland port district, a unified, professionally branded operation was essential.

2. Implementation and Resources

Ports of Indiana partnered with Superior River Terminals Indiana (SRTI) to create “Indiana River & Rail Terminals” — a joint venture that brought both facilities under one brand, one management structure, and a shared investment and marketing strategy. The partnership combined SRTI's 30-plus years of stevedoring expertise with Ports of Indiana's infrastructure, economic development mission, Foreign-Trade Zones (FTZ), and capital investment capabilities. The result was immediate: a stronger market presence, more competitive customer offerings, and a platform for sustained growth.

The joint venture created a financial structure that allowed Ports of Indiana and the terminal operator to share in the costs and revenue, but most importantly eliminated the operator's upfront lease commitment or financial investment. This allows IRRT to easily expand into port-owned facilities without having to first purchase, lease, or construct new facilities. The port gets to start generating revenue from underutilized assets and the operator can grow without the risk of "biting off more than it can chew" by taking over a building or dock without first having the cargo revenue to justify it. As a joint venture, all parties work together to secure the best long-term outcomes and focus on creating business services that meet customer needs, without having to justify high start-up costs. The financial structure also allows the port to collect depreciation on its assets as an IRRT expense in order maintain baseline revenue from assets in addition to the revenue share. This is a scalable model that can be quickly implemented with every new asset acquired by the joint venture, which has included six docks, seven warehouses, three cranes, many fork trucks, two bonded storage areas, two new laydown yards, etc.

3. Innovation and Relevance

Venture Structure and Partnership
Indiana River & Rail Terminals is structured as a joint venture between Ports of Indiana and Superior River Terminals Indiana. Under the agreement:

- SRTI provides operational expertise, stevedoring management, and customer relationships built over more than 30 years in breakbulk, containerized, and project cargo
- Ports of Indiana provides infrastructure, capital investment, Foreign-Trade Zone access, rail connections, and the public-sector economic development mission that frames IRRT as a community asset
- Both partners share investment costs, operating expenses, and marketing, including a unified website at www.IndianaRiverandRail.com
- The innovate structure of the deal allows IRRT to avoid the typical risks of a start-up port operations that must lease, build or buy a facility for its operations. With the port supplying underutilized facilities, both entities can grow together and share revenues without the start-up costs of establishing a new operational footprint.

Facilities and Infrastructure
IRRT has expanded to now serve customers across 2,200 acres at two ports including:

- Seven warehouses with a total of 400,000 square feet of indoor storage
- Six barge docks on the Ohio River
- 20 acres of land directly adjacent to the river
- 10 acres of outdoor laydown area
- Two river crane ways with 60-ton and 35-ton overhead cranes
- A $3 million 250-ton capacity crawler crane added in 2025
- Connections to five Class I railroads

- Storage and fleeting capacity for 300 railcars and 500 barges
- Foreign-Trade Zone designations at both locations
- Two new rail and transload yards now under construction in support of the venture

Commodity Handling Capabilities
IRRT provides multimodal services across a broad spectrum of cargo types, including:

- Steel products: coils, slabs, plates, wire rod
- Project cargo and oversized/out-of-gauge shipments
- Breakbulk and general cargo
- Containers and automotive components
- Super sacks and bulk materials
- Barge-to-truck transload operations
- Rail transload services

Capacity Expansion at Jeffersonville (December 2025)
With steady growth, IRRT outgrew its original Jeffersonville warehouse footprint by late 2024. In December 2025, IRRT leased a 156,000-square-foot building from another port tenant to secure its seventh port warehouse, expanding total storage capacity to just over 400,000 square feet. This Jeffersonville building enables:

- Expanded Foreign-Trade Zone storage opportunities
- Enhanced heavy-lift cargo handling
- Additional rail transload capacity
- Increased volumes for barge, rail, and truck operations
- A broader range of industries and cargo types served

Marine Highway Grant and Truck Diversion
Ports of Indiana secured a U.S. DOT Marine Highway grant to fund a new outdoor storage facility at Jeffersonville, specifically designed to accommodate barge shuttle operations for steel companies. This initiative takes thousands of trucks off local roadways and highways, reducing road wear, improving community quality of life, and supporting local logistics jobs — a direct, tangible benefit to the surrounding community.

Notable Project Cargo: Pharmaceutical Manufacturing Support (August 2025)
In July-August 2025, IRRT demonstrated its heavy-lift and project cargo expertise in a high-profile shipment that illustrated the venture's statewide economic importance. Two 51-ton specialized pharmaceutical production tanks — built in the Houston metro area — required barge transport from Texas to Indiana due to their oversized dimensions and significant weight, making overland transport financially and logistically impractical.

The tanks traveled via the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway, Mississippi River, and Ohio River, arriving at Ports of Indiana-Mount Vernon in a standard 195-by-35-foot barge. IRRT crews carefully transloaded each tank onto specialized heavy-haul trucks for the final overland leg

to a pharmaceutical research, development and production campus under construction in central Indiana.

This single shipment illustrated IRRT's critical role as a logistics gateway for Indiana's fastest-growing industries. Barnhart had previously chosen IRRT at Jeffersonville for earlier Lebanon-bound pharmaceutical materials, making IRRT a trusted logistics partner for one of the most significant economic development projects in Indiana's recent history.

4. Results, Evidence & Impact

Regional Economic Significance
Indiana River & Rail Terminals operates at the heart of the Southern Indiana Port District — the busiest inland port in the United States. The combined Jeffersonville and Mount Vernon ports serve the greater Louisville, Kentucky and Evansville, Indiana metropolitan areas, two of the Midwest's most significant manufacturing, agriculture, and energy regions.

By creating a unified general cargo operation across both facilities, IRRT has enhanced the competitiveness of the entire region, attracting customers that a fragmented, two-facility approach could not have served effectively.

Business Incubator
IRRT is also developing a business incubator program for companies that ship cargo through the port to set up a short-term operating footprint within its facilities as they analyze the opportunity to construct a permanent home at the ports. This tool has already been used by a metals company that is now constructing a steel processing facility at the port.

Currently, a minerals company is leasing temporary space from IRRT to develop a testing/research facility that will be scaled into a larger facility once the company secures federal grants, project financing, and customer orders. In addition, a cement company is considering using IRRT facilities and services to install a state-of-the-art blending facility at the port. Having flexible space and a business incubator program will support start-up operations, reduce business risks, and drive the creation of new jobs and investments for those firms in our region.

Job Creation and Workforce Development

- IRRT has directly hired ~20 employees from the local workforce for terminal operations, crane operation, stevedoring, and logistics management
- IRRT’s expanded operations has generated significant employment benefits for barge operators, railroads, truckers, port tenants and regional customers that utilized IRRT’s expanded services. This has greatly increased employment for related services providers, mechanics, fuel providers, logistics services, etc.
- The Marine Highway barge shuttle operation supports ongoing local jobs while removing truck traffic from community roadways

- IRRT will be participating in a Ports of Indiana partnership with Indiana University Southeast that provides an intern with first-hand stevedoring experience by working multiple weeks on IRRT staff while spending time in different section of port operations. This effort demonstrates IRRT commitment to building a new scalable internship program that will support workforce development of the next generation of port and logistics professionals in the region.

Recent Projects

Here are a few recent projects created by the IRRT venture at Indiana's ports:

- Ports, IRRT construct and open federally-approved bonded storage in record time
- New bonded storage facility at Mount Vernon handles first aluminum shipment
- IRRT expands Jeffersonville capacity for shipments of steel, general cargo by 40%
- Mount Vernon port earns federal grant for first heavy-lift crane, operated by IRRT
- IRRT increases Mount Vernon steel shipments from 0 to >150K tons in two years
- Mill Steel diverts rail shipments to IRRT to make room for manufacturing expansion
- Arctic Minerals enlists IRRT to manage storage of mineral inventory, barge transload

Statewide Industry Connectivity

IRRT's ability to serve as a multimodal gateway for Indiana's largest industries has been demonstrated across multiple sectors:

- Steel and manufacturing: IRRT handles steel coils, slabs, plates, and wire rod for regional manufacturers, with the barge shuttle operation reducing highway congestion and supply chain costs
- Pharmaceutical and life sciences: The pharmaceutical campus shipments show IRRT's capability to support Indiana's growing life sciences sector with oversized, high-value cargo handling
- Agriculture and energy: Operating within the Midwest's most active agricultural and energy corridor, IRRT's proximity to Class I rail connections and the Ohio River positions it as a key distribution hub

Foreign-Trade Zone Access

Both IRRT facilities operate within Ports of Indiana's Foreign-Trade Zones, providing eligible customers with significant duty deferral, reduction, and supply chain advantages that enhance the competitiveness of Indiana-based manufacturers and importers in global markets.

Infrastructure Investment

Ports of Indiana's investment in IRRT infrastructure includes:

- Construction of two new rail yards to support rail transload operations
- Addition of a $3 million 250-ton capacity crawler crane expanding project cargo capabilities
- Marine Highway grant-funded outdoor storage facility for barge shuttle operations
- Addition of 70,000-pound-capacity forklift
- Support for the 40-percent warehouse capacity expansion at Jeffersonville

These investments directly support the long-term economic productivity of southern Indiana by creating logistics infrastructure that attracts and retains businesses and supply chains in the region.

The following chart shows a few of the economic development outcomes that have been produced by the IRRT operations since it launched.

Metric	Result
Cargo Volume	250,000 tons of cargo annually
New Indoor storage capacity	400,000 square feet across two ports
Warehouse/building count	7 buildings across both ports under IRRT management
Barge docks	6 docks along the Ohio River
Crane investment	$3 million 250-ton capacity crawler crane added in 2025
Notable project cargo	Two pharmaceutical production tanks transloaded at Mount Vernon, supporting central Indiana life sciences campus
Truck diversion	Marine Highway grant-funded barge shuttle removes thousands of trucks annually from local highways.
Growth trajectory	Double-digit growth in 2025

5. Integration, Adaptability & Scalability

Indiana River & Rail Terminals represents a model for public-private partnership in port economic development that other inland port authorities can learn from:

- Public-private structure: The joint venture model combining a port authority's public infrastructure and mission with a private operator's commercial agility and market expertise has produced faster growth and better customer outcomes than either party could have achieved alone
- Unified branding from day one: Launching IRRT with a single brand, website, and marketing identity across two ports immediately elevated market perception and created a consistent customer experience
- Capacity investment ahead of demand: Rather than waiting for capacity constraints to turn away customers, IRRT and POI invested proactively — adding rail yards, a new crane, and warehouse space — to stay ahead of double-digit growth trends

- Multimodal integration: By combining barge, rail, truck, and Foreign-Trade Zone capabilities under one operation, IRRT offers customers genuinely integrated supply chain solutions rather than a collection of separate services
- Community-oriented operations: The Marine Highway grant-funded truck diversion program demonstrates IRRT's commitment to being a responsible community partner, not just a commercial operator
- Serving diverse industries: From steel to pharmaceuticals, from Fortune 500 companies to family-owned small businesses, IRRT's broad commodity capabilities and flexible service model position it to grow with Indiana's evolving economy

6. Stakeholder Engagement & Collaboration

The success of Indiana River & Rail Terminals reflects strong alignment and collaboration among Ports of Indiana leadership, the SRTI operating team, regional economic development partners, and the customers who rely on IRRT's services every day. From the initial vision for a unified venture to the day-to-day execution of complex cargo operations, stakeholders across the organization have worked together to ensure IRRT delivers on its promise to the region. The following perspectives from Ports of Indiana and IRRT leadership illustrate the shared commitment and collaborative spirit that have driven this project's rapid growth and community impact. Extensive marketing, public relations, and media engagement has driven significant press coverage about the facility and create tremendous opportunities for collaboration throughout Ports of Indiana’s family of companies.

"We're excited to launch Indiana River & Rail Terminals because it expands the general cargo operations at our Ohio River ports under one brand and creates new services for our customers. Indiana River & Rail immediately becomes one of the most important general cargo operations on the Ohio River by serving the greater Louisville and Evansville metro areas as well as one of the Midwest's busiest manufacturing, agriculture and energy regions."
— Jody Peacock, CEO, Ports of Indiana

"We're not just adding square footage — we're adding opportunity. This expansion is about meeting demand and staying ahead of the curve. We've seen consistent double-digit growth since 2022, and adding new warehouse space ensures we can continue to serve our customers with speed, flexibility, and reliability. Jeffersonville is ready for more — and we're building the capacity to deliver."
— Jonathan Lamb, President, Indiana River & Rail Terminals / SRTI

"Indiana River & Rail serves as a model of collaborative growth, combining the operational expertise of an experienced logistics company and the economic development mission of Ports of Indiana to deliver major returns for our region."
— George Ott, Regional Director, Ports of Indiana

"Our team utilized the same expertise, operational skill and care for transloading this cargo that they do for every customer, no matter the commodity. However, we took some extra pride from this knowing that this equipment will aide in creating medications that can improve thousands of lives for many years to come."
— Shane Davenport, Terminal Manager, Indiana River & Rail Terminals

7. Conclusion

In summary, Indiana River & Rail Terminals stands as a replicable model for how port authorities can unlock the full economic potential of underutilized assets through strategic partnership rather than incremental, isolated investment. By unifying two competing facilities under one brand, one operational team, and one shared vision, Ports of Indiana and Superior River Terminals Indiana have created a venture whose growth — in tonnage, infrastructure, customer base, and community benefit — has consistently outpaced what either party could have achieved independently.

The results speak for themselves: expanding from one to seven buildings in just over a year of launch, reenergizing multimillion-dollar capital investments in cranes and rail infrastructure, a growing roster of customers across steel, pharmaceuticals, agriculture, and energy, and a Marine Highway program actively reducing the strain on local roadways. Equally important, IRRT's business incubator approach is already translating into new permanent facilities and jobs for the region, demonstrating that this is not a static success story but an ongoing engine for economic development.

Ports of Indiana respectfully submits Indiana River & Rail Terminals for the 2026 AAPA Lighthouse Award in Economic Development, confident that this project reflects the innovation, collaboration, and community impact that the award is designed to celebrate — and that it offers a blueprint other ports can adapt to transform their own underutilized assets into engines of regional growth.

Beacon of Excellence Statement

Indiana River & Rail Terminals represents a port-led economic development success that defines excellence in the inland maritime industry. In less than two years, this bold joint venture has transformed a fragmented two-port cargo operation into the largest such operation on the Ohio River — one that is growing double digits annually, attracting new industries, protecting community infrastructure, and creating a model for public-private partnership. IRRT is not just moving cargo. It is moving Indiana's economy forward — connecting the state's manufacturers, pharmaceutical producers, steel companies, and agricultural processors to the world via the nation's most productive inland waterway system. It is diverting trucks from community roads. It is building workforce capacity in partnership with regional universities. It is doing so from a position of financial discipline, leveraging grants, joint investment, and operational efficiency to maximize public return.

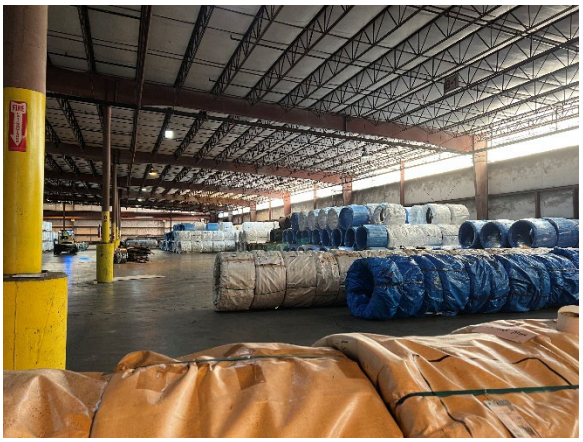
Indiana River & Rail Terminals Photos:



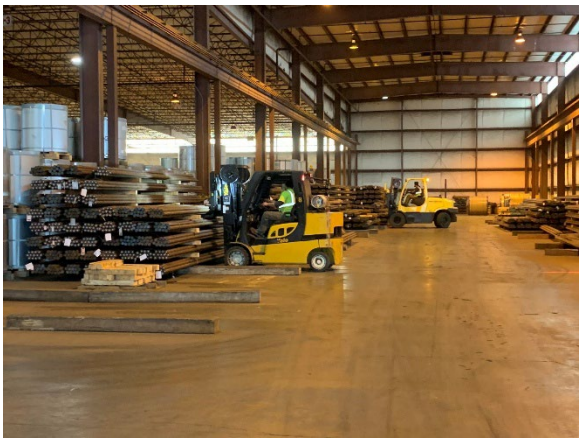
Indiana River & Rail Terminals operation at Ports of Indiana-Jeffersonville.



Indiana River & Rail Terminals operation at Ports of Indiana-Jeffersonville.



400,000 sq ft of warehouse space is available.



Indiana River & Rail Terminals warehouse space



Indiana River & Rail Terminals warehouse space



Overhead bridge crane – Mount Vernon



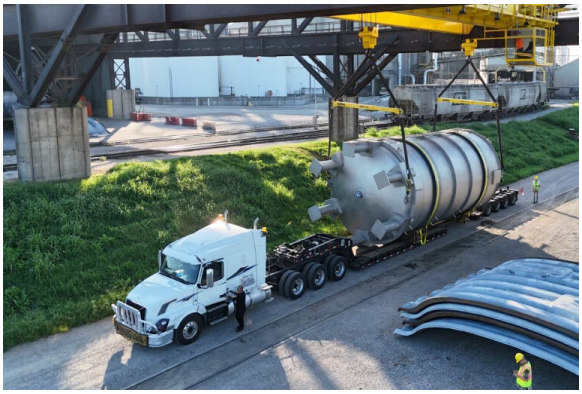
Rail operations at Jeffersonville



Indiana River & Rail operations at Mount Vernon.



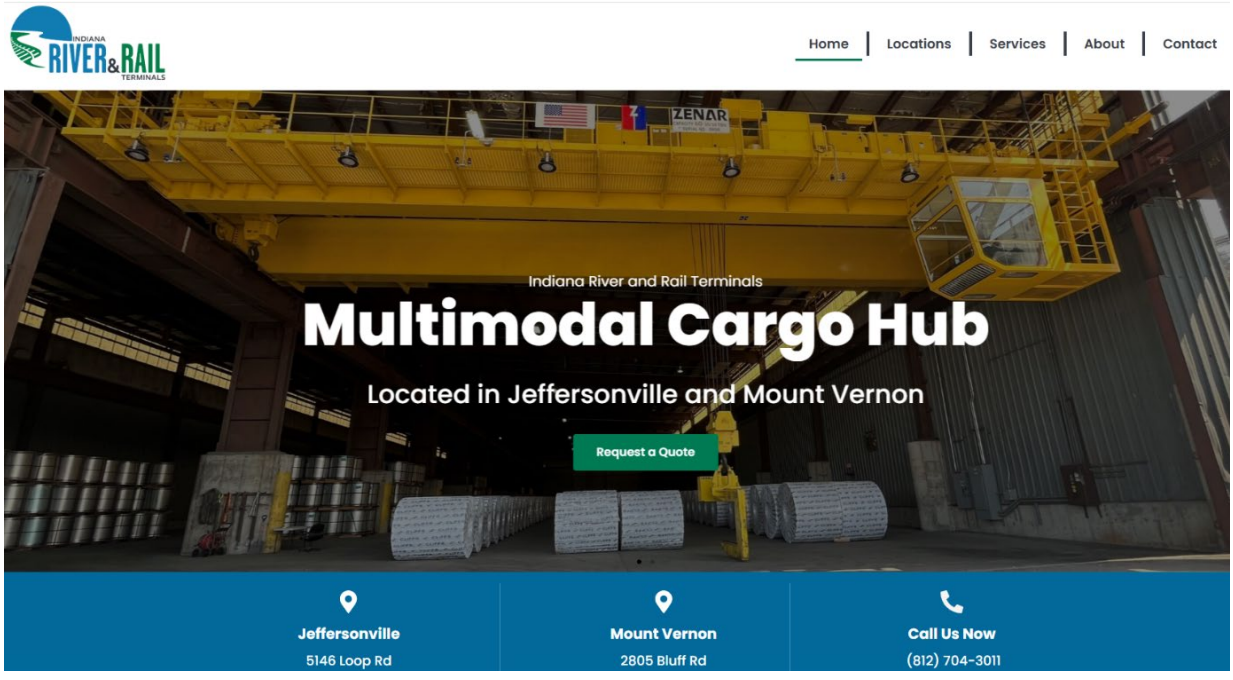
Indiana River & Rail lifts a 51-ton tank for Eli Lilly pharmaceutical project from an Ohio River barge at Ports of Indiana-Mount Vernon, July 28, 2025.



Indiana River & Rail Terminals crew completes transload of pharmaceutical production tank from a barge on the Ohio River.

www.IndianaRiverandRail.com

Indiana River & Rail website is a part of the marketing partnership at Ports of Indiana river facilities.



Recent Media Coverage Samples:

Progressive Railroading

Rail News - Indiana River & Rail Terminals completes oversized transload job. For Railroad Career Professionals

Railroad industry news about: Indiana River & Rail Terminals, Ports of Indiana - Mount Vernon, oversized transload job, barge shipment,...

Aug 8, 2025



Railway Age

IRRT Boosts Capacity at Rail-Served Ports of Indiana-Jeffersonville

Indiana River & Rail Terminals (IRRT) has leased a fourth building at Ports of Indiana-Jeffersonville, expanding its capacity for handling...

Dec 4, 2025



Inside INdiana Business

Ports of Indiana terminal operator growing capacity in Jeffersonville

Indiana River & Rail Terminals is based out of the Ports of Indiana-Jeffersonville. (photo courtesy of the Ports of Indiana).

Dec 3, 2025



Railway Track and Structures

Ports of Indiana Receives First Aluminum Shipment at New Bonded Storage Facility at Mount Vernon

MOUNT VERNON, Ind. –– The Ports of Indiana this week announced that it has opened a new federally approved bonded storage facility at its...

Mar 25, 2026



Marine News Magazine

Ports Of Indiana Handles First Aluminum Shipment

Ports of Indiana has opened a new federally approved bonded storage facility at its Mount Vernon port, marking a major expansion...

Mar 24, 2026



Railway Age

Intermodal Briefs: Ports of Indiana, Port of Los Angeles

Written by Carolina Worrell, Senior Editor. Indiana River & Rail Terminals carefully lifts a 51-ton tank from an Ohio River barge at Ports...

Aug 7, 2025



Eyewitness News (WEHT/WTVW)

Barge shipment at Mount Vernon intended for large pharmaceutical project

WEHT / WTVW - Officials say Indiana River and Rail Terminals recently managed the barge-to-truck transload of some cargo at Ports of...

Aug 6, 2025

