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JTA hits milestone in critical project

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The Jacksonville Transportation Authority put the final steel beam in place Thursday at the Jacksonville Regional Transportation Center at LaVilla, the authority's \$58 million building to connect all forms of transportation.

"This is a major milestone in the construction of what we believe will be a game changer for this community in terms of transportation," said JTA CEO Nat Ford.

JTA broke ground on the four-acre site 19 months ago. The building will house JTA's administrative offices and connect bus rapid transit, fixed-route bus service, ridesharing, bikesharing, autonomous vehicles and even commuter rail. Ford likened the JRTC at Lavilla to the "heartbeat" of downtowns across the country as epitomized by Union Station, Grand Central Station and others.

"Get ready to add the Jacksonville Regional Transportation Center at LaVilla to that list," he said.



JAMES CRICLOW

Scenes from the Jacksonville Transportation Authority's Topping Out Ceremony for the Jacksonville Regional Transportation Center.

The "crown jewel" of the JRTC, according to Ford, will be the Ultimate Urban Circulator (U2C), JTA's plan to use the Skyway elevated tracks as the foundation of a 10-mile autonomous vehicle network connecting downtown and its surrounding districts.

Council President Aaron Bowman touted the building's ability to adapt to future transportation modes and needs.

"This is being built to handle all of the things that are changing most," said Bowman, noting rideshares and autonomous vehicles.

The JRTC will be able to handle 42,000 passengers a day, three times the volume handled by JTA's Rosa Parks station today. It is still a year away from opening.

The building has also been planned as a spark on development in LaVilla. A master development plan for LaVilla, commissioned in 2016, is being finalized, and the JTA landed more than \$1 million in federal funds to study development opportunities around the U2C's stations.

"LaVilla is on the cusp of a major growth pattern," said Ford, "and we will be a part of the catalyst to start that growth."

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