

ConstructConnect, Dodge differ on starts trends; ABI remains downbeat; worker tenure declines

The latest releases on construction starts from ConstructConnect and Dodge Construction Data again show divergent patterns. For the first eight months of 2026 combined compared to January-August 2025, the **value of construction starts** climbed 12% year-to-date (YTD), including a 9.1% increase (not seasonally adjusted) from July to August, ConstructConnect [reported](#) on Wednesday. **Nonresidential building starts** jumped 26% YTD, with commercial up 49% (led by a 110% leap in combined office and data center starts), institutional up 19% and industrial (manufacturing) down 2.8%. **Engineering (civil) starts** rose 11% YTD, with roads up 3.3%, water and sewage treatment up 4.5%, bridges up 22%, electric power infrastructure up 120%, dams/marine up 25% and airports down 31%. **Residential starts** declined 8.8% YTD, with single-family down 9.2% and apartments down 8.4%. “August was a strong month for the industry with total nonresidential construction starts totaling \$99.0 billion, the second-highest reading in recorded history,” Chief Economist Michael Guckes stated. “While many subcategories are pointing to positive annual spending growth, the majority of increased spending year-to-date has originated from offices including data centers, hospitals and power infrastructure.”

Total **construction starts** plunged 25% at a seasonally adjusted annual rate from July to August, largely offsetting a downwardly revised 28% increase from June to July, Dodge Construction Network [reported](#) on Tuesday. “Nonresidential building starts fell 32.0% over the month, residential starts decreased 5.2%, and nonbuilding declined by 26.7%.” Total construction starts were up 15% YTD. Nonresidential starts were up 23%, with commercial and industrial construction up 48% and institutional starts down 3.9%. Nonbuilding starts rose 22% YTD, with electric power/utilities up 70%, miscellaneous nonbuilding up 23%, highways and bridges up 2.3% and environmental public works down 4.2%. Residential starts were slipped 1.8% YTD, with single-family starts down 4.6% and multifamily starts up 3.0%. “‘After a pop in activity last month, construction starts largely normalized throughout August,’ stated Sarah Martin, Director of Economic Research at Dodge Construction Network. ‘Abstracting from the month-to-month volatility, the story remains consistent. Data center, semiconductor and energy construction are driving growth, while several other sectors are facing subdued activity alongside deeper labor shortages, and accelerating material prices.’”

The **Architecture Billings Index (ABI)** rose to 47.2 in August, seasonally adjusted, from 46.6 in July but has been below 50 (indicating decreasing business conditions at architecture firms) since March 2023, the American Institute of Architects [reported](#) on Wednesday. The index is “a leading economic indicator that leads nonresidential construction activity by approximately 9-12 months.” The ABI is derived from the share of responding architecture firms that report a gain in billings from the previous month less the share reporting a decline, on a 0-to-100 scale. Subindexes (based on three-month moving averages) varied for practice specializations: commercial/industrial, 50.4 (up from 48.6 in July); multifamily residential, 47.8 (up from 46.3); institutional, 47.0 (down from 48.5); and mixed practice, 42.5 (down from 42.9). “Architecture firms are growing less optimistic about future billings, with the share expecting declines rising from 21% at the end of the first quarter to 29% by the end of the third quarter.”

Employees in the construction industry had an average (**median**) **tenure** of 3.9 years with their current employer as of January 2026, the same as for all private-sector employees, the Bureau of Labor Statistics [reported](#) on Thursday. Two years earlier, the median tenure was 4.2 years for construction vs. 3.5 years for the private sector. The decline in construction employees’ tenure may reflect the increase in hiring that has occurred among nonresidential contractors, as workers change employers or enter the industry at a time hiring in other sectors has slowed. It may also reflect elevated departures of older employees.

Click [here](#) for AGC's five-part webinar series, “Building the Future: The Data Center Construction Playbook,” on Oct. 6-Nov. 4, 2026, 2-3:30 pm ET. AGC Chief Economist Ken Simonson will moderate the first webinar, “The State of Data Center Construction: Market Trends, Growth Opportunities, and What's Next,” with Dodge Chief Economist Eric Gaus and Brian Lewandowski, University of Colorado, Boulder, who has created a model for AGC that measures the in-state jobs and economic impact of several types of construction projects.