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City asks for help with railroad project

Hamilton requests financial support from port authority

By Chris Dumond
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HAMILTON — City leaders asked the Butler County Port Authority Tuesday to help finance a \$1.1 million railroad project that could bring new jobs to Hamilton and help existing industries.

For more than a month, Port Authority and Transportation Improvement District officials have been in talks with local economic developers, business leaders and CSX Corp.

— the major rail freight company serving Butler County — about how to improve local service.

Authority President and TID Director John Fomner said local rail freight service is inadequate because most of the CSX trains are passing through Butler County on their way to Detroit or Atlanta. Because that traffic is so heavy and local switching infrastructure is limited, it is difficult to schedule trains coming off of and on to the main line, Fomner said.

A local economic development prospect that could bring about 80 jobs to Hamilton could be a way to put a dent in the problem, city Economic Development Director

Tim Bigler told the port authority Tuesday morning.

Bigler said Steven Davis, the regional development director for CSX, recently contacted him about a rail customer looking for new location.

"The site they have identified in Hamilton is a site along Gilmore Road and the CSX tracks near the Symmes Road intersection," Bigler said.

Building a siding to provide access to the rail line nearby is expected to cost about \$1.1 million, according to CSX estimates. However, Bigler said, the siding would improve service to several other users, including

Terry Industries, Universal Forest Products and ChemCentral.

If the city can land the prospect, the company is expected to bring in 78 to 80 jobs with annual salaries of about \$50,000, in addition to \$25 million in site improvements.

Because CSX stands to benefit from added freight from the local traffic, the company has offered to reimburse construction costs over five years if the port authority provides the initial financing.

"As you are aware, our service to this (industrial) park has not met our customers' expectations, due to heavy mainline traffic, which has resulted in additional truck traffic in the community,"

Davis wrote in a letter to Fomner. "In addition, the proposed rail infrastructure will enable an adjoining available industrial site to access rail transportation."

Though the board took no action on the matter, Bigler said he will continue in his talks with CSX and the prospect. Fomner said the Port Authority will also apply for a \$15,000 grant from Energy to work toward the improvement of local rail service through the entire county.

He said he expects more to come before the port authority on the matter at next month's meeting.

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