

# Rail plan may create trucking center

Proposed upgrade  
of switch would  
benefit area firms

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**HAMILTON** — A new rail freight initiative of the Butler County Port Authority and Transportation Improvement District may one day give birth to a trucking and rail hub in New Miami, officials said Thursday.

In a work session of the county commissioners, John Fonner, administrative head of both the authority and the TID, said as many as 8,000 jobs in the county depend on adequate rail service from CSX Transportation and Norfolk-Southern. Fonner said many businesses have reported less than satisfactory service, though.

Sam Reed, operations manager for Terry Industries, said his company was promised service from CSX three times per week but has had problems since signing on with the rail company in the late 1990s.

"They're saying there's so much traffic coming through here that they can't get out on the main line to switch us," Reed said.

Help could be on the way. Fonner said the problem could be alleviated if the manual switch there was replaced with an electronic one at a cost of \$80,000. The upgraded switch would benefit other nearby companies such as CHEMCENTRAL and Universal Forest Products and may open another site for a new business, he said.

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A recent grant from Cinergy and a promise from the Ohio Rail Commission for another \$50,000 has put the project within \$20,000 of the price tag. Fonner said that CSX could refund the entire amount of the project over five years through a per-car rebate program.

"An \$80,000 project isn't the biggest project we'll do, but it's a nice one and it's an eye-opener, hopefully," he said.

The authority, and economic development group created by the commissioners last summer, has been scoping out a first project for several months now.

As part of a larger economic development strategy, Fonner said he hopes to work on projects that will help larger employers like AK Steel stay happy, to redevelop old

industrial sites and make them viable again and to open greenfields to industrial uses.

He said there is great potential to develop a hub in New Miami that could serve as either a rail hub alone or as an intermodal hub with freight trucking.

A project like that, he said, could be the impetus to finally extend Ohio 63 across the Great Miami River or even as a motive to create another north-south route to Interstate 70 in Preble County.

In the short term, he hopes to create a network of business users to generate more leverage with rail companies in order to get track improvements under way.

Commissioners said they were impressed at the progress so far, given rocky and slow relationships with rail companies in the past.

"They're so big the right hand doesn't know what the left hand is doing sometimes," County Commissioner Gregory Jolivette said.

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