

Rail yard called inefficient

Businesses say their trucks wait for transfers

By Dan Klepal
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Some business and political leaders in Greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky say railroad cars backing up around the Queensgate rail yard threaten to cause regional growth gridlock.

Queensgate is one of the largest rail yards in the Midwest, and several Northern Kentucky businesses have complained to the chamber of commerce about long waits for delivery of everything from airplane parts to greeting cards.

"We've got companies experiencing tremendously long delays in getting cargo off trains to transport," said Steve Stevens, senior vice president of governmental affairs for the Northern Kentucky Chamber of Commerce.

Stevens' first call was to Mark Policinski, director of the Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments. The two hope a regional freight rail study will happen in the next 18 months and that will lead to a plan for a more seamless movement of cargo.

Policinski says the issue is tremendously important because many businesses don't stock inventory. Instead, they rely on the on-time delivery of goods - meaning parts are delivered at a strategic time in the manufacturing process.

OKI will pay for a \$125,000 freight rail study in Butler County this year, with hopes of a complete regional study sometime in 2007.

"If you can't get your goods out or your materials in to build those goods, you've got a problem to say the least," Policinski said. "It's a huge transportation and economic development issue. If this region is going to grow, it'll depend on on-time delivery. That's the kind of world we live in."

Delays affect some 20 brokers and hundreds of companies in the region, said Tom Voss, who heads the regional association for customs brokers. He also is president of Exel, an international freight handler out of Hebron.

"This affects all the importers in the region," he said. "When trucks go in there, they have to wait two or three hours, just waiting and burning gas. It's causing a lot of difficulty, because everybody wants delivery yesterday."

Voss said the railroads haven't invested enough into moving incoming containers more efficiently.

Railroad officials disagree.

Rudy Husband, spokesman for Norfolk Southern Railroad, said his company's yard at Queensgate has had a double-digit increase in traffic in the last five years. "We've had concerns about overall congestion at the Cincinnati yard," he said. "We're considering our long-term options."

Husband declined to say what those options are.

A person who answered the phone for Norfolk Southern at Queensgate on Friday confirmed a new company has been hired to move goods in the yard.

Voss said he's hopeful that will help, but he said the new contractor can't affect all the problems.

"There are times when it's so busy there that (rail) cars are parked miles out of town waiting on a slot," he said.

OKI's Policinski said the freight study will have to incorporate information from other studies already under way, such as Interstate 75 and the Brent Spence Bridge.

"It's a question of truck traffic, rail traffic and how you can combine the two," Policinski said. "It all gets back to how the world is changing. On-time delivery is today's pace of business."

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