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## Port authority to study county's rail systems

### OKI pledges \$100,000 to look into expanding economic development

By CHRIS DUMOND

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HAMILTON — As officials from across the region look for ways to improve freight traffic on area railways, the Butler County Port Authority is trying to make sure it's part of the solution.

The Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments has pledged \$100,000 toward a \$125,000 study of the county's rail systems. The plan is to study how they could be bolstered to improve service to existing businesses and how they could be expanded to create other economic development opportunities.

Port authority Secretary John Fonner said he will ask the authority's board for permission

today to execute a local project agreement with ODOT in order to move forward with the study.

Fonner said the authority will be looking to assemble a committee of representatives from county communities, railroad companies, private shippers, OKI and other interested parties. The authority will also be looking for \$25,000 in local funds to match the \$100,000 OKI contribution.

Some of the early talk surrounding the study has included the creation of a rail/truck hub in the New Miami area in order to absorb some of the traffic at Cincinnati's Queensgate yard. The hub could also relieve other terminals for new traffic as the Ohio Rail Development Commission moves forward with its plan to introduce passenger service across the state.

"That is a possibility," Fonner said. "CSX owns and operates the Queensgate Yard. Whatever happens, they have to go along with it.

And from a statewide perspective, with the Ohio Hub Plan, there's a desire to have a passenger rail stop in Cincinnati at Union Terminal. I'm told that would require some displacement of CSX traffic down there, too. There may be potential for us to be a piece of that process."

CSX Transportation's Queensgate Yard is among the three largest terminals in CSX's nationwide system. Spokesman Gary Sense said the yard processes between 1,700 and 1,800 cars a day. While there have been public complaints about sluggishness recently, Sense said service is picking up.

"It has been showing improvement in recent weeks," he said. "...Originations have been 100-percent on time some days and generally 80-percent on time."

Sense said the company is open to any discussions about improving the system.

OKI spokesman Allen Freeman said the Butler County study will

be the first in a series.

"Freight is particularly complicated to study because there are so many components," Freeman said. "We're thinking we can take this one bite at a time and that we can start with the rail component. We would hope we can use this, too, to hone our skills."

Freeman said he believes there are lessons and data to be uncovered in the Butler County study that can be used to create a more fully-integrated freight plan for the Greater Cincinnati region.

Fonner said he believes the committee should be organized by late November or early December with its findings completed in the first half of 2006.

The port authority is scheduled to meet at 8:30 a.m. today on the first floor of the Government Services Center at 315 High St.

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