

NEWS

OHIO RAIL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

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Ohio Hub Plan Advancing Tandem Studies Examine Economic Impact & Additional Passenger Rail Routes

(Columbus) --- The light at the end of the tunnel just might be a train. In fact, it could very well be one many Ohioans haven't seen or been able to ride for a long time: a passenger train.

That possibility will be two big steps closer to reality as two studies get underway this week that could greatly advance the Ohio Rail Development Commission's **Ohio Hub Plan** to redevelop and expand passenger rail and increased capacity for freight rail.

"We can build this system", says ORDC Executive Director Jim Seney, as he announced the kickoff of the tandem studies that will:

- Conduct a detailed analysis of the potential statewide economic impact of the Ohio Hub Plan
- Determine the feasibility of adding two new routes to the master plan: a Pittsburgh-Columbus-Chicago route (via Lima and Fort Wayne or Indianapolis) and a Columbus-Toledo-Detroit Route

"The results of these two studies can move the Ohio Hub Plan into its next and most important stage: the environmental impact study", says Seney. "Once we complete that phase, the Ohio Hub can become an official transportation project in the eyes of the federal government and we can start building this system and running the kind of fast, frequent passenger trains and faster, more timely freight rail service that will boost Ohio's economy and create new and better jobs."

Initial meetings have already been held on both studies to set up the framework for field work, information gathering and how to analyze what the study teams discover. It is thought both

studies should be complete within the next 8 to 12 months, but some preliminary information may be available by early next year.

The Detailed Economic Impact Study (DEIS) is being conducted by two teams of economic experts who will examine what were positive preliminary numbers in the initial Ohio Hub Report. Those numbers include an estimated economic impact of:

- 6,000-plus construction jobs
- 1,500 permanent railroad jobs
- 6,000-plus permanent jobs tied to development around rail stations and the general communities served by the Ohio Hub
- \$1-billion dollar increase in property values
- Annual tax revenue increased by \$28-million

The DEIS will attempt to quantify and refine these numbers down to the local level to see which communities and segments of Ohio's economy will benefit and by how much.

The additional route study will take a detailed look at the infrastructure (rails, bridges, right of way, station facilities, etc) along the projected routes. The aims will be to determine, among other things:

- Condition of rights-of-way (both existing and abandoned), bridges, signal systems, tracks
- Ridership projections from each community along the routes
- Existing or potential connections with other modes: airports, mass transit, bikeways, hotels and local business districts
- What needs to be done to bring route conditions up to grade to handle higher speed trains and greater volume

“The goal is to bring these additional routes up to the same level of feasibility as the rest of the route system outlined in the Ohio Hub Report”, says Executive Director Seney. “In doing so, when federal funding becomes available to match with state dollars, we can proceed with building the entire system and not just phasing in one rail line at a time.”

“And with the possibility of legislation now in Congress that would establish a first-ever federal rail infrastructure funding program”, says Seney, “it's all the more important now that Ohio works to have a funding-ready rail plan in place so we can get more people, freight and Ohio's economy moving forward.”

(The Ohio Rail Development Commission is an independent agency operating within the Ohio Department of Transportation. ORDC is responsible for economic development through the improvement and expansion of passenger and freight rail service, railroad grade crossing safety and rail travel & tourism issues. For more information about what ORDC does for Ohio, visit our website at <http://www.dot.state.oh.us/ohiorail/>)