

## **Council seeks to bring back trains Cargo hub sought; passenger service cut to Youngstown in 2005**

**By JOE GORMAN / Tribune Chronicle**

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**YOUNGSTOWN** — The councilwoman who sponsored a resolution supporting a rail cargo hub says her ultimate goal is to bring Amtrak passenger service back to the city.

Councilwoman Carol Rimedio-Righetti, D-4th Ward, said bringing back the service, which was cut because of lack of riders in 2005, is essential because the area does not have a full-time airport. Public hearings held when the service was cut prove there is a demand, she said.

The area's location between prime rail routes in Cleveland and Pittsburgh make rail service a natural fit for Youngstown, she said.

“It should stop here,” Rimedio-Righetti said. “We need to bring things here that are feasible for a small city.”

The resolution council passed urges the state's congressional delegation to support a study for a hub to take advantage of proposed rail system from Illinois to Washington, D.C., said T. Sharon Woodberry, the city's Economic Development Director.

Woodberry said Youngstown is perfectly suited to handle freight that would come in through a rail hub because of its proximity to major cities not just in Pittsburgh and Cleveland but also New York and Chicago.

“We believe this would be a huge asset for us,” Woodberry said.

Michael Keys, head of Warren's Community Development Department, said the city would support such a hub, although he was quick to add that his city also would be perfect for such a hub.

But Keys did say if such a hub was in Youngstown, Warren would support it and the city also would benefit because of the freight that would need to be shipped.

“We've always been geared to manufacturing and we have to change that,” Keys said. “We're just right for any kind of transportation point.”

A spokesman for U.S. Rep. Timothy J. Ryan, D-Niles, said he believes rail traffic is important to the area because of its potential for economic development. He said Ryan will work with local leaders to bring more rail service to his district, including high speed rail service to link high-tech communities.

Rimedio-Righetti said she thinks the old B&O Station, where passengers had to catch a train, was a detriment to the passenger service because of its location. She also said the fact there were no facilities for passengers waiting for a train also discouraged people.

But public support for passenger service is here, she said. The city may want to team with the Western Reserve Transit Authority to use property being cleared by the demolition of the former Salvation Army building next to the B&O for an improved train station. The Salvation Army property is owned by the WRTA.

Rimedio-Righetti noted that when the public hearings were held, council chambers overflowed with people who wanted the passenger service to stay.

The passenger service previously was halted in 1995 but returned in 1997 after intense lobbying by former U.S. Rep. James A. Traficant Jr.