

# Sandusky on board for high-speed rail project

By JENNIFER GRATHWOL | Sunday January 20 2008, 1:14am

## SANDUSKY REGISTER

City leaders are laying the tracks to connect Sandusky to the future of high-speed transportation.

High-speed passenger trains running 79 to 110 mph have caught the attention of both Ohio legislators and Sandusky City Commissioners.

"Passenger rail is penicillin for pain at the pump," said Stu Nicholson, public information officer for the Ohio Rail Development Commission.

**At its most recent meeting, the Sandusky City Commission voted to support U.S. Rep. Marcy Kaptur's federal appropriation request for matching funds for the development of the Ohio Hub Cleveland-Toledo- Detroit passenger rail corridor, which would connect many Ohio cities and in the long run save Midwesterners about 9.4 million gallons of fuel.**

Nicholson said if the funding can be secured, some initial passenger trains could be up and running in as soon as two years. To build the entire system, with 6-8 trains running 110 mph on seven different corridors, could take 10-11 years. The rail development commission is now in early talks with Amtrak about a partnership to utilize existing corridors. Sandusky has an Amtrak station on North Depot Street.

**"It's a big step to take, but an important step," said Steve Fought, spokesman for Kaptur, D-Toledo. "It's not 'pie in the sky' anymore."**

This isn't the first time Ohioans have heard talk of a high-speed rail. In 1975, the state General Assembly created the Ohio Rail Transportation Authority to develop a long-term high-speed passenger rail plan.

In 1980, the commission determined that a 1 percent increase in sales tax could finance a 600-mile system connecting 13 Ohio cities. The proposed tax increase was put on the ballot in 1982 but was defeated.

However, with rising gas prices and increasingly congested highways, the idea of high-speed passenger rail is picking up steam once again.

Late last fall, the U.S. Senate passed Bill 294, the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act, which was co-sponsored by U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio. Nicholson said they expect the House of Representatives to introduce a companion bill within the month. According to the 2007 Ohio and Lake Erie Regional Rail Ohio Hub Study, the grand total capital investment requirement including planning, engineering, design and construction costs would be more than \$4 billion dollars.

Proponents of high-speed rail say the benefits will more than justify the cost, and point to examples of high-speed rail in Germany, France, China and Japan as testimonies of success.

"We're missing an opportunity by not taking advantage of this technology," Fought said.

High-speed passenger rail is also expected give a boost to the state's tourism industry to the tune of \$80 million annually, according to the Ohio Rail Development Commission. Ohio now ranks number seven in the top ten list of destination states, with Sandusky's own Cedar Point being

among the top attractions. The commission estimates that at least 80 percent of the overnight tourists who come to Ohio are from areas that would be connected through the Ohio Hub railway.

In addition to generating more than \$23 billion dollars of revenue throughout the Midwest, the Ohio Rail Development Commission estimates that over the anticipated nine-year construction phase there will be at least 7,000 short-term jobs available. Over the long-term, they estimate the Ohio Hub project will yield 16,700 permanent jobs and raise the region's income by over \$1 billion over the life of the project. According to their calculations, that will raise the average household income by at least \$90.

<http://www.sanduskyregister.com/articles/2008/01/20/front/572358.txt#blogform>