

TRANSPORTATION

Strickland wants 3-C passenger rail restored

Governor consults Amtrak on intercity rail

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[The Columbus Dispatch](#) By [Jim Siegel](#)

State officials have talked about it for a good two decades, and now Gov. Ted Strickland is taking steps toward creating a passenger rail corridor connecting Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton and Cincinnati.

With gas prices shooting past \$3 a gallon and new federal funding for rail projects pending in Congress, Strickland has asked Amtrak to estimate what it would take to initiate a Cleveland-Columbus corridor, and separately estimate a corridor extended to Dayton and Cincinnati.

In a recent letter to Amtrak CEO Alex Kummant, Strickland said he hopes to "embark on the first step of an incremental approach that puts Ohio on a path to realizing the enormous economic benefits of a vibrant intercity passenger rail system."

Strickland cites the need for both passenger and freight service in the so-called 3-C corridor, which excites local business advocates.

"We are clearly for reducing the amount of congestion on those freight lines," said Steve Tugend, a lobbyist for the Columbus Chamber of Commerce. "Congestion is the enemy of job creation in the logistics fields."

Strickland is the latest to tackle railroad transportation. In 2000, state officials rejected a temporary \$50million Columbus-to-Cleveland route designed to alleviate congestion during the I-71 widening. Since then, the state has completed its Ohio Hub plan for connecting the state's major cities with one another and a Midwest regional high-speed passenger rail system.

"I've lived in Ohio the better part of 23 years and I don't think I've ever been more enthusiastic about our chances than right now," said Stu Nicholson, spokesman for the Ohio Rail Development Commission. "I think there is a tremendous amount of pent-up demand out there."

A 3-C passenger line has not existed since 1971, and Columbus is one of the nation's largest cities not served by any passenger rail service. Based on prices elsewhere, a one-way coach ticket from Columbus to Cleveland could run from \$15 to \$45.

Amtrak currently is studying similar rail corridors in a handful of states, including Michigan, Iowa and Illinois.

Amtrak spokesman Marc Magliari said Congress for the first time is offering federal matching money for rail infrastructure improvements, and more could be on the way.

"The major roadblock to a lot of these things happening in the past is there's been no federal partnership for capital expenses," he said.

Ohio will use federal planning dollars to cover the \$300,000 to \$500,000 cost for the Amtrak study, which should be completed within 18 months. Cost will be key in determining what Ohio does next.

"No question that transportation ... is a critical part of economic development," said Senate President Bill M. Harris, R-Ashland. "Are we in a position to do it? I can't answer that question."

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