

# The Columbus Dispatch

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## Shipping on track

### Rickenbacker terminal part of better rail route to the East Coast

By Marla Matzer Rose THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Trains are nothing new in central Ohio, but they are poised to play a bigger role in the area's economy.

Beginning today, Norfolk Southern will use the revamped Heartland Corridor line, taking advantage of what the company calls the "single biggest railroad engineering project in modern history." It included enlarging tunnels through mountains and raising bridges in other places.

### Heartland Corridor

The Heartland Corridor is Norfolk Southern's three-year, \$191 million project to upgrade the rail route between Norfolk, Va., and the Midwest by modifying 28 tunnels to accommodate double-stack containers. The new route saves up to 250 miles and a day or more of travel time. Norfolk Southern is now completing double-stack upgrades on a route extension between Columbus and Cincinnati, expected to open in early 2011.



The \$191 million project will expand the possibilities for shipping from central Ohio to points east and south, as well as to the growing port of Norfolk, Va.

The corridor allows trains to travel between the port of Norfolk, Va., and Columbus in 25 hours with shipping containers stacked two high.

Norfolk Southern's point of connection in Columbus is the 2-year-old, \$63 million Rickenbacker intermodal terminal, which serves as a point where goods can be transferred from trains to trucks or vice versa. Like the Heartland Corridor, it was paid for with a combination of public and private funds.

The corridor will serve the growing demand for goods to be imported and exported through East Coast ports, said Jeff Heller, group vice president of international intermodal for Norfolk Southern.

“In the last 10 years, more and more cargo wants to come in from the East Coast rather than the West Coast, which has long had good connections to Columbus,” Heller said. He said the reasons for this include the proximity of the East Coast to more of the U.S. population and the migration of overseas manufacturing to India and away from Asia.

Other reasons include congestion and labor issues with West Coast ports, said Michael Knemeyer, associate professor of logistics at Ohio State University’s Fisher College of Business.

The project is an investment in the future and one that local development officials hope will be an engine of economic growth for decades to come. In addition to serving local companies such as Limited Brands, Big Lots, Cardinal Health and Honda, whose businesses are dependent on efficient transportation, ease of transport is also a big factor in attracting jobs and businesses, said Steve Tugend, vice president of government relations for the Columbus Chamber.

“Access to markets is one of the key factors in where a company will locate,” Tugend said. He emphasized that goods will flow both ways — with local companies exporting as well as importing — with the hope that the increased activity will help create well-paying jobs and attract logistics companies that manage the flow of goods and increasingly use high-tech methods to perform that work.

The Columbus Regional Airport Authority in particular stands to benefit, as the largest single landholder in the Rickenbacker area. It contributed the land for the Rickenbacker intermodal terminal and plans eventually to turn the property over to Norfolk Southern in a land swap.

In addition to Rickenbacker airport, the authority controls hundreds of acres nearby — some of which have already been developed with warehouses — in partnership with Duke Realty and Capitol Square Ltd., owned by The Dispatch Printing Company, publisher of The Dispatch.

“Our overall goal is the establishment of Rickenbacker as a global gateway for shipping,” said David Whitaker, vice president of business development for the airport authority. “That should benefit the airport and all companies that own land in the area. The rising tide floats all boats.”

At present, cargo shipping remains significantly down from pre-recession levels, but railroad executives say they’re confident demand will come back.

“Two years ago, we were at capacity every day,” said Chris Jeselnik, district manager for Norfolk Southern. “When (demand) comes back, it’ll be easy to meet it now.”

The Heartland Corridor is part of an overall trend toward increasing freight capacity on the nation’s rail systems. Norfolk Southern has two other similar projects in the works in the South and Midwest, valued at about \$4.8 billion.

Ohio is also part of expansion plans by CSX, which still is seeking to piece together the necessary funds to start work on its National Gateway project connecting several Middle Atlantic ports to the Midwest with double-stack capability by 2015.

“Traditionally, rail companies were late to make these kinds of investments,” said OSU’s Knemeyer. “But with the increased focus on doing things in a more sustainable way combined with the economies of shipping by rail, that’s driving demand for rail transportation as an important part of intermodal shipping.”

Another benefit of shipping by rail is that it could reduce some truck traffic, although trucks still commonly handle freight at some point in its travels. One train hauling 280 to 300 shipping boxes does the work of 280 to 300 trucks on the road, Heller said.

“We may be a little slower,” Heller said, “but we can factor that into what we charge. Rail shipping satisfies the needs for efficiency and environmental friendliness. Plus,” Heller added, “we’re not building new highways anymore.”

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A crane operator moves containers at the Norfolk Southern rail yard at the Rickenbacker intermodal terminal. The terminal serves as the Columbus point of connection on the expanded Heartland Corridor line.



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Chris Jeselnik points out features of the Norfolk Southern rail yard at the Rickenbacker intermodal terminal.