



Port's planned rail loop could improve shipping capabilities

By [JAY MILLER](#)

4:30 am, August 30, 2010

Making good on his commitment to expand shipping business through the Port of Cleveland, William Friedman, the new CEO of the Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Port Authority, is pursuing a plan for a \$3.16 million rail loop that would make it easier and less expensive to move cargo from the port's docks by rail.

Mr. Friedman said a foreign steelmaker is looking to abandon its traditional East Coast port of call in favor of a port further inland that would keep its steel slabs on water longer. He said he has had discussions with company representatives, but he would not identify the importer.

"Rail is becoming more important for moving freight" as fuel costs rise, Mr. Friedman told members of the Port Authority's maritime committee earlier this month.

It costs much less to ship by water than by rail or truck. A U.S. Maritime Administration study calculated that 1 gallon of fuel can move 1 ton of cargo 59 miles by truck, 202 miles by train and 514 miles by inland water barge.

Mr. Friedman and his staff plan to meet with representatives from the Ohio Rail Development Commission to see what funds that state agency has for freight rail development. The commission provides grants and loans to improve freight and passenger rail systems in the state.

Port officials also met recently with members of the Northeast Ohio congressional delegation, including Rep. Steve LaTourette, who is a member of the powerful House Appropriations Committee. LaTourette spokeswoman Debbie Setliff said the rail spur was discussed briefly and that the congressman offered his support for the project. Federal money would be a long shot for the project, however, because Congress will be finalizing the budget shortly for the fiscal year that begins Oct. 1.

Stuart Nicholson, a spokesman for the Ohio Rail Development Commission, said his agency has been contacted by Cleveland port officials but detailed discussions have not begun.

The commission is leading the effort to create a Cleveland-Columbus-Cincinnati rail corridor, for which the Obama administration has pledged \$400 million in federal stimulus money. But it also is doling out federal and state dollars for improving Ohio's freight rail system. The commission currently is administering 21 freight projects totaling \$61 million in federal stimulus money, including a similar track improvement project at the Port of Toledo.

The rail loop at the Port of Cleveland would make the transfer from ships to rail easier and allow the port to hold as many as 70 rail cars at a time. CSX and Norfolk Southern each have separate stub lines that cross over to port property. A new loop would extend track to the waterfront docks and connect to both rail carriers' existing lakefront tracks.

While this expansion initially would make the port more attractive for the steel slab importer and the port's traditional finished steel shippers, Mr. Friedman also told *Crain's Cleveland Business* he wants to diversify the cargo coming into the Port of Cleveland.

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