

THE KANSAS CITY STAR.

January 18, 2007

Gardner seeks lawmakers' help securing interchange

By Jim Sullinger and Brad Cooper

Gardner officials asked Johnson County lawmakers on Wednesday for help getting a new interchange on Interstate 35 to serve a planned 1,300-acre freight center there.

Officials from BNSF Railway Co. and the Allen Group, developers of the project southeast of Gardner, called the project the largest economic development effort in Kansas in the last 40 years.

Skip Kalb Jr., the railroad's strategic development director, said the project would generate 13,000 jobs and provide \$2 billion in economic benefit to the state.

"So, what's the problem?" asked Sen. David Wysong, a Mission Hills Republican, after the 40-minute presentation to a meeting of the Johnson County legislative delegation.

"We need an interchange," said Gardner Mayor Carol Lehman. "We want to have it happen as quickly as possible. We don't want trucks driving up and down our city streets."

Steve Forsberg, a BNSF spokesman, said estimates for construction of an interchange range from \$15 million to \$25 million.

Kalb said the railroad hopes to open the freight facility late next year. Officials said the exact location of the interchange hasn't been determined but it would be near 199th Street and I-35.

"You can count on this delegation to advance the progress of this project," said Rep. Arlen Siegfried, an Olathe Republican and chairman of the county delegation.

Gardner will be facing tremendous transportation demands as BNSF moves forward with a 350-acre intermodal hub that will be coupled with a 1,000-acre warehouse and distribution center on the city's western edge.

When the freight center opens in 2008, it could generate roughly 5,900 vehicle trips a day, of which a little more than a third will be trucks.

Traffic is expected to grow to 59,000 vehicle trips a day by the time the center is fully built out in 2025. About 10,000 of those trips will be trucks.

A study indicates the traffic will require an estimated \$66 million in road projects, including the new interchange on Interstate 35. The I-35 interchange at Gardner Road also will need to be modified to handle increasing traffic that will come with the project.