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BNSF picks development partner for intermodal hub near Gardner

By RANDOLPH HEASTER

BNSF Railway Co. has found a partner to develop a massive, rail-truck freight center near Gardner.

The Allen Group, a San Diego-based industrial development firm, has entered into an agreement with BNSF to develop the proposed 1,000-acre logistics hub, the railroad said today.

The railroad and The Allen Group will work to develop and draw tenants to the facility, which is expected to be operational by late 2008. BNSF said it has already purchased nearly 800 acres for the hub and has options to buy the rest of the property.

Upon receiving approvals from public authorities, BNSF said it expected construction of the facility to begin next year.

The Allen Group specializes in developing rail-served industrial parks and office properties. The logistics hub envisioned by BNSF near Gardner is similar to hubs the railroad operates near Chicago and Fort Worth. The intermodal hub, in which goods are transported by truck and rail, is surrounded by warehouses and distribution centers, creating shipping efficiencies.

"We believe The Allen Group has the development skills and experience to help a new BNSF Logistics Park put the Kansas City region on the international map," Vann Cunningham, BNSF's assistant vice president of economic development, said in a statement.

Matt Rose, chairman and chief executive of BNSF Railway, said in Lawrence last month that the proposed hub is expected to create 7,000 jobs directly and as many as 12,000 new jobs overall in Johnson County. The project's total investment is expected to exceed \$1 billion, including about \$200 million by BNSF, according to Rose.

On Nov. 7, Gardner residents will vote on whether to annex the property where the logistics hub is planned. While Rose has said BNSF hopes an annexation is approved, the railroad plans on proceeding with the project regardless of the vote's outcome.

The Star's Brad Cooper contributed to this report.

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