

April 3, 2008

State Senate approves aid for intermodal hub

By Scott Rothschild

Topeka — A giant shipment and distribution hub planned for southwest Johnson County is getting financial help from the Kansas Legislature.

The Senate on Wednesday endorsed a proposal to issue \$49 million in bonds for the 1,000-acre facility that will be built by BNSF Railway and The Allen Group near Gardner.

Officials say the intermodal freight hub is projected to have a \$1.7 billion economic benefit to the state, creating 13,000 direct and indirect jobs during the next 20 years.

Under the plan, trains coming from Pacific ports would be unloaded at the site, with the goods transferred to trucks to carry cargo elsewhere.

It will become one of the major distribution centers in the Midwest with thousands of trucks traveling in and out every day, officials say.

The bond proceeds will be used to improve roads and other infrastructure.

The measure was adopted 34-4 and now goes to the House for consideration.

“This is a real bargain for the jobs, the tax base and economic activity this can create for the state of Kansas,” said state Sen. Jim Barone, D-Frontenac.

But state Sen. Marci Francisco, D-Lawrence, was one of the four who voted against the measure.

She said she was concerned the hub could have a negative effect on distribution centers in Lawrence and Ottawa. But state Sen. Karin Brownlee, R-Olathe, said she believed the hub would enhance economic opportunities in the region.

The measure was supported in committee by Gardner City Council and various Johnson County governmental entities and economic development groups.

But it was opposed by a Gardner citizens group and the Gardner-Edgerton school district. School officials say population growth from the project will require new schools while tax abatements granted the project by the city of Gardner will cut district revenues.