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We deserve intermodal benefits

By Kurt Kloebler

Intermodal.

The word is still pretty foreign to most, although it is gaining recognition every day in Kansas City, and intermodals will be here before we know it.

The Centerpoint-KCS Intermodal Center at the former Richards-Gebaur Memorial Airport will be the first to open. In Gardner in southern Johnson County, another intermodal is planned by Burlington Northern-Santa Fe and The Allen Group.

An intermodal is a center where trains bring in containers. Those containers are then either offloaded directly onto semi-trucks or taken to distribution centers at or near the site. The distribution centers are usually occupied by retail companies that sort and distribute the product via trains and trucks.

Intermodals are generally huge developments. Both sites will be just short of 1,000 acres and will be home to millions of square feet of warehouse space.

Gardner has seen far more opposition than the Centerpoint development.

One reason is this area of Kansas City needs economic development. Intermodals generally employ thousands of people and generally pay a fair wage. Often, ancillary retail development springs up around intermodal facilities.

There are negative aspects of intermodals, including

environmental impacts from diesel exhaust, and wear and tear on highways.

The main argument in Gardner has been that the intermodal would change the quiet suburb into something different, cause health problems and lower property values.

The worry at Centerpoint is not the same. Many people on this side of the state line see benefits in the project. If you couple Centerpoint with the Three Trails development, you have two significant economic engines that will supply jobs and tax revenue.

For too long, other parts of the metro area have seen economic engines rev up. Johnson County has seen Sprint and numerous other developments. Wyandotte County has watched with absolute joy at the success of Kansas Speedway and Village West. Downtown now has the Sprint Center and Power and Light District. The northland will get a huge bump if the Bombardier plant is built.

So while there are certainly ways to limit the harm that can come from an intermodal, the future for south Kansas City should be much brighter because of what intermodal could bring to the area.

In just a few years, the citizens here may finally see things picking up, and, frankly, they deserve it.

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