

## The train fans' plight

By Sara Smith

"Columbus is the largest metro city in the L.S. without any intercity rail service."

From his office on the 15th floor of the LeVeque Tower, Stu Nicholson, the public information officer for the Ohio Rail Development Commission, has a commanding view of the trains that pass through Columbus.

In the middle of an impassioned recitation of the reasons Columbus should be reconnected to other cities by passenger train, he stopped to exclaim that he saw one below—an honest-to-God passenger train passing right through town.

But he quickly corrected himself.

"It's just the Barnum & Bailey circus train," he said, the enthusiasm draining from his voice. "Never mind."

Nicholson and his fellow advocates pitch Columbus rail service with a can-do spirit that for decades has been unsupported by reality. This city hasn't been served by passenger trains since 1979.

But with oil prices setting records and congestion on freeways increasing, hope springs anew among the train guys that they can convince public officials to back their Ohio Hub Plan.

The plan calls for the linking of Columbus to Cleveland and Cincinnati—and the rest of the country—by high-speed train.

"Columbus is the missing link," said Dominic Liberatore, executive director of AllAboardOhio, a non-profit rail advocacy organization. "Columbus is the largest metro city in the U.S. without any intercity rail service."

Liberatore said it isn't a lack of interest in trains but a lack of organized public support that has kept Columbus trainless all these years. But he's confident that will change.

"I believe it's fairly likely we'll see a train in Columbus," Liberatore said. "We'll see service in Columbus in four to six years."

AllAboardOhio hosted its second annual legislative summit yesterday. Train enthusiasts from Cincinnati, Dayton and Cleveland were offered transportation to Columbus— via chartered bus.

But hope springs eternal, and Nicholson keeps gazing out his window at the rusty, coal-filled freight trains with visions of passenger trains dancing in his head.

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