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Railroad upgrade would fast-track development

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GREENCASTLE, Pa. — A major piece of the commercial development puzzle could fall into place for Antrim Township this year if the governor's budget is approved in June.

Pennsylvania Rep. Todd Rock, R-Franklin, said Thursday that Gov. Ed Rendell has proposed a \$45 million allocation to upgrade the Norfolk Southern Railroad from State Line, Pa., to Harrisburg, Pa., essentially moving existing development forward and opening the door for more growth in the township.

Improvements to the Norfolk Southern railroad should unlock business for Atapco, a Maryland developer that owns 200 acres of commercial and industrial land along Interstate 81 near Exit 3, Franklin County Area Development Corporation President Mike Ross said.

Ross said Norfolk Southern plans to improve more than 1,200 miles of railroad, from Memphis, Tenn., to Harrisburg, in an effort to compete with the nation's trucking industry.

There are limited undeveloped areas of Franklin County that are served by rail, Ross said.

Improving the rail system around Exit 3 would give Atapco and future developers another means of marketing property to potential industries, he said.

"For some companies, being rail-served is critical, especially if they want to move materials in and out," he said.

The Greencastle-Antrim Area Development Corp. (GAADC) is optimistic that Atapco will be the first in a line of successful commercial developments in the southern part of Antrim Township.

GAADC President Gary Gembe said his organization is actively working to put other pieces of the puzzle into place at Exit 3, including finishing the Grindstone Hill Road extension.

While the governor hopes the economic potential of the project will entice lawmakers to keep it in the fiscal year 2009 budget, the \$45 million project still needs to pass the legislature before a dime can be pledged, said Michael Smith, a spokesman for the governor's office.

Rock indicated Thursday that the money has a good chance of making it past Republican cuts when he told members of the GAADC that funding should be on the way for Exit 3.

The governor's budget has come under fire locally for some of its line items, most notably the lack of funding for the Scotland School for Veterans Children.

The Pennsylvania General Assembly must pass a budget by June 30.

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