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COLUMBUS BUSINESS FIRST

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Delayed intermodal terminal near Rickenbacker on track to open

Business First of Columbus - by [Adrian Burns](#) Business First

Norfolk Southern Corp.'s long-awaited intermodal cargo terminal near Rickenbacker International Airport is set to open March 3, none too soon for those dealing with the railroad's overburdened Discovery Park yard off Alum Creek Drive south of Columbus.

The \$63 million facility, which will make it much easier to transfer cargo containers between trains and tractor trailers, will allow Norfolk Southern to shut down Discovery Park and shift operations to the larger, modern facility.

The 75 employees at Discovery Park are expected to move to the Rickenbacker-area terminal by March 10. No new jobs are expected initially.

Construction on the 175-acre terminal got under way in September 2006 after holdups in funding and by regulators delayed the start of development by a year.

Meanwhile, Norfolk Southern was moving about 200,000 containers a year through a Discovery Park facility designed to accommodate 125,000 containers. That meant cargo transfers weren't always smooth, said company spokesman Bill Harris.

"We were operating way over capacity, and it was one of those things where we just found a way," he said.

The Rickenbacker-area yard, which is equipped to handle 250,000 container transfers annually but could be expanded to handle 400,000, is expected to yield quicker, more efficient service that will give the railroad's customers more for their money, Harris said.

"Service quality will improve substantially," he said.

Whether that will translate into more business is unknown, Harris said, because customers who were turned away - or turned off - because of overcrowding at Discovery Park have settled into other shipping arrangements.



Courtesy Norfolk Southern

Intermodal yards like this one above make it easier to transfer cargo containers between trains and tractor trailers. Norfolk Southern's facility at Rickenbacker is expected to help spur the region's effort to build up its logistics industry.

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"It's a question of bringing them back," he said. "They may have an account with someone else to handle cargo a different way, and it takes awhile for that (contract) to come up."

Though Discovery Park will be shuttered, Norfolk Southern owns much of the land underneath it and will consider other uses for the property, Harris said.

Attracting business

Opening of the intermodal yard at Rickenbacker is significant because it heralds what some area leaders expect could be a blossoming logistics and shipping industry in Central Ohio. Columbus enjoys a geographic location is close proximity to major East Coast and Midwest cities, but it needs high-capacity facilities to make the most of its potential as a logistics center, said Stu Nicholson, a spokesman for the **Ohio Rail Development Commission**.

"When you consider that container freight is the fastest-growing commodity being hauled, it really shows you why an intermodal like Rickenbacker is so important," he said.

Central Ohio is entering uncharted territory with the addition of a major intermodal hub, said Jim Clark, senior vice president in Columbus for **Duke Realty Corp.**, a co-developer of the 1,300-acre Rickenbacker Global Logistics Park. He said it's unclear when more distributors or other logistics-related businesses will be attracted to a 420-acre portion of the Global Logistics Park being pitched for its proximity to the transfer yard.

"There is no playbook we can go to where we open an intermodal and become this inland port and then get X amount of square feet per year," he said. "We just don't know."

So far the only logistics company at the park is **Hyperlogistics Group Inc.**, a distribution business from Lockbourne.

As the intermodal yard begins operations, corporate decision-makers are likely to examine its efficiency and cost-effectiveness before approving construction of facilities in the area, Clark said.

"They'll watch from afar, and then we'll start to see demand trail the intermodal opening by six to 12 months," he said.

The opening of the intermodal yard is widely considered as a boost for development near Rickenbacker, but other help will come in 2010 with the expected completion of the Heartland Corridor, a high-capacity rail line between Columbus and the Port of Virginia around Norfolk.

"Rickenbacker and the Heartland Corridor," Nicholson said, "are inextricably linked."

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