

County  
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# IDA Interested In Rail Line

By MARK SPANG

BUFFALO — With the federal government ready to cut off funds to the railway that connects Cattaraugus County businesses with the Buffalo market, Erie County is interested in buying the 30.8-mile track.

The Erie County Industrial Development Agency "is just starting to get involved" in the railroad problem, IDA Business Consultant Daniel Bicz said this morning. But he added, "The big question is: where do we get the money?"

State Transportation Commissioner William C. Hennessy warned Tuesday that federal subsidies that have kept 13 small New York rail operations going since 1976 will run out in two years. The Gowanda to Buffalo Creek Junction railway is one of the 13 for which the state Department of Transportation is seeking buyers. They are currently run by the large Conrail network.

Robert Dingman, operator of the railroad that connects Salamanca, Cattaraugus, Dayton and Gowanda, told The Post-Journal yesterday that he would like to acquire the rights to operate on the track that connects Gowanda to Buffalo.

Bicz said Dingman approached the Erie County IDA and asked if it would be interested in buying the track and then consider allowing him to operate his railroad company on it.

Dingman worked out a similar arrangement with the Cattaraugus County Industrial Development Agency last summer. The county IDA purchased the Salamanca to Gowanda track that was abandoned by the defunct Erie-Lackawanna Railroad. Dingman was then granted the rights to operate his New York and Lake Erie Railroad Co. on the tracks.

Bicz points out, however, that Cattaraugus County received \$315,000 of the total \$682,145 cost of the railroad from the Appalachian Regional Commission. Erie County is not in the Appalachian Region and does not qualify for this kind of grant. The other sources of funds used to purchase the tracks in Cattaraugus County included \$388,145 from the state Department of Transportation and \$79,000 from the county budget.

"It is too early in the ball game to tell. Right now we just don't have the money," Bicz commented. He added that about a dozen Erie County businesses ship on the Gowanda to Buffalo lines. The Erie County IDA will discuss the railroad at its meeting Friday. Bicz also said a seminar on the problem may be scheduled in March.