

State Aid Needed For Railroad Face Lift

By TINA MARSH

The New York and Lake Erie Railroad needs the state's assistance to rehabilitate its 50 miles of track in Cattaraugus County, according to the railroad's operator, Robert Dingman of Gowanda.

The railroad needs "all we can get," Dingman said this morning. He noted the company's most recent plans to ask for assistance have taken two tacks:

The first, which would cost \$4.2 million, would enable the railroad to upgrade its tracks, allowing freight traffic to increase its speed from 10 mph to 25 mph.

The second, which would not allow the railroad to upgrade its freight speed, is a \$500,000 plan which would enable the railroad to replace ties and improve the track bed and the highway crossings.

"The branch-line program requested for '85-'86 does not meet the critical needs of branch lines across the state," Dingman said, noting there are 900 miles of such track in the state and only \$3.67 million designated for its

rehabilitation.

He said his railroad, which hauls freight in Cattaraugus, South Dayton, Cherry Creek and Gowanda and offers passenger tours in Gowanda, South Dayton and Salamanca, has not been rehabilitated since he took it over in 1978. He said many miles of the state's other tracks have been rehabilitated.

"If New York State wants to maintain service in Cattaraugus, in Hamburg, in Ithaca — which are not located on mainlines — New York State has got to provide more branch-line assistance," he said.

Dingman said that without such assistance, companies which use his railroad would have to turn to trucks to haul their freight. Those companies include feed mills in South Dayton, Cherry Creek, and Conewango Valley, as well as a fertilizer company, an overhead-door manufacturer, a lollipop-stick plant and an evaporated milk plant.

He said the increasing needs of the small railroad stem from cutbacks in

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federal assistance. He said the state probably would have to help independent operators maintain their lines if it wanted to preserve the service.

Dingman said preserving small railroads would save highway money, explaining: "I think a few dollars spent on a branch line is probably a savings on the amount of money spent on secondary highways if you threw all that tonnage on them." He noted each freight car carries the equivalent of three or four truckloads of freight.

According to Jim Lockwood, an aide to Assembly Majority Leader Daniel B. Walsh, D-Franklinville, all of the money in the branch-line-assistance funds has been allocated for the current fiscal year. Any grants then, he said, would have to come during the next fiscal year, which begins April 1.

However, Lockwood said, the competition for the funds is fairly stiff. Bush Industries officials also are seeking \$1.6 million from the same fund for their expansion project in Jamestown, he noted.