

Train station plan back on its rails?

■ City station rehab project is bedeviled by Amtrak's phasing details, but local officials say construction could start in 2008.

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A decade after the initial study and four years after the project was launched, the estimated \$10 million renovation and improvement of Lancaster City's Amtrak station appeared last month to be stuck and rusting to the rails.

Now, officials said Tuesday,

they believe the long-delayed project can move forward.

"If we can get to bid late this year, construction can start in spring 2008," said Christopher Neumann, Lancaster County's former chief transportation planner and now a consultant to the county.

Plans call for increased parking, a separate waiting area for bus passengers, shops,

restaurants, new Amtrak offices, upgrades to the nearly 80-year-old station's heating and air conditioning systems and realignment of the station driveway to meet North Duke Street.

Neumann told members of the county's Transportation Coordinating Committee at their monthly meeting that he and Rich Esposito, Amtrak's district manager, have met to find a way around remaining obstacles.

Another meeting, with Amtrak, state Transportation Department and county officials

is slated for next week at the station.

The meetings follow frustration voiced by transportation committee members last month and a subsequent letter sent to Amtrak that committed funding for the project was in jeopardy.

At TTAC's December meeting, PennDOT Program Manager Terry Adams said a letter to Amtrak attempting to iron out details in bid documents was met with a fresh list of 17 conditions from the national

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passenger rail service.

"It's just gotten totally, totally out of hand," Adams said.

He noted that in the eight years the station improvement plans had been before the transportation officials, the cost has grown from \$6 million to a projected \$12 million.

He blamed Amtrak for complicating the process, saying it would be the rail service that would be the ultimate ben-

eficiary of the upgrades that it was not paying for.

"We're renovating and gold plating their station," Adams said.

Amtrak's Esposito, who did not attend the December meeting, said Tuesday that the frustration was taken back to as many Amtrak officials as possible.

He told the committee that Amtrak's concerns were with the details. The rail service has more than 100 employees based at the Lancaster station. Esposito said Amtrak officials were concerned that station operations would not be impeded during the renova-

tions.

Neumann said architect Cooper Carry, of Atlanta, had planned to leave the construction schedule to the contractors. Amtrak wanted some control in the phasing of the construction schedule in order to preserve its operations there, Neumann said.

"Working out that phasing plan is critical," Neumann said.

If construction bids are secured late this year, Neumann said, the renovations could be complete in late 2009.

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