

Plans for rail corridor to accommodate wider traffic under way

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Officials of the North Carolina Railroad Company have designed an improved downtown rail corridor that will accommodate oversized freight trains, including those carrying portions of wide-body airplane fuselages.

"Rail service played a very key role in Spirit's decision to locate in Kinston," NCCR President Scott Saylor said of Spirit AeroSystems, which will build a plant for manufacturing aircraft components at the Global TransPark.

The railroad operates an east-west line between Charlotte and Morehead City. Company officials have been working since 2001 to upgrade the portion between Raleigh and Morehead's port to promote economic development along the route.

The upgrades for Kinston include a rail link to Spirit's GTP facilities, and the realignment of a section of downtown track that crosses Blount Street.

That section of track is hemmed in by build-

ings and the century-old historic freight depot, and at 12 feet wide, is the narrowest point along the route. Freight trains, which are getting larger and larger to accommodate more cargo, can barely fit through.

Once the depot and two other buildings are removed, the corridor will be 31-feet wide, said Saylor.

He explained the increased width and height clearance will allow trains carrying Spirit's fuselages, U.S. military tanks and other oversized cargo to move through downtown with ease.

Spirit's fuselage con-

tainers will be 12 feet wide, 20 feet high and 70 feet long, Saylor said, and there is enough room for containers of other dimensions.

Officials have not yet determined where the GTP rail link will connect to the main line, but a facility will be built to allow the transfer of aircraft parts from trucks to the flatbed cars, and vice versa.

"I really appreciate the cooperation of the city and county to improve the railroad over the last few years," said Saylor. "It's proving to be a great investment for economic development."