

County puts up cash for RR battle

By DEUCE NIVEN

Up to \$30,000 pledged by Columbus County Commissioners towards an effort to restore commercial rail service to three area counties might instead spur Carolina Southern Railroad owners to sell its line to someone able to operate it.

Economic Development Director Gary Lanier, asking commissioners for the allocation on behalf of an interstate railroad committee that includes commissioner Buddy Byrd with representatives from Columbus, Horry and Marion counties, said the group believes it needs up to \$100,000 to hire attorneys specializing in railroad law if other efforts to get the railroading after an 18-month absence fail.

The other counties, and municipalities, have all been asked to chip in, Lanier said.

"There is light at the end of the tunnel to get the train up and running," Lanier said.

That light could be realistic negotiations on the part of CSR owner Ken Pippin and potential buyers Lanier said are seriously interested.

Lanier and Byrd hinted at legal pressure that could be put on Pippin to sell.

"You can't just drain that money out for years and not put it back into the system," Byrd said. "There's some might strong language that we have read."

"He can't sit on it," Lanier said. "The

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main thing he's looking for is a handout, and it's not coming."

If the committee has money to press its legal options, Lanier said Pippin will feel the pressure.

"If funding in place, he will get serious about negotiating with certain groups that have made offers to buy the railroad," Lanier said.