

Train station draws attention

Michael C. Juliano, Staff Writer

Published: 10:21 p.m., Friday, July 23, 2010



A view of the new Fairfield Metro Railroad station under construction, off of Kings Highway East in Fairfield, Conn. on Thursday July 22, 2010. Photo: Christian Abraham / Connecticut Post | [Buy This Photo](#)

[Comments \(0\)](#) **0** tweets
[Larger | Smaller](#) **tweet**
[Printable Version](#)
[Email This](#)
[Font](#)

Town officials and area real estate professionals are expecting the new train station on the lower Black Rock Turnpike to be an economic boon to the eastern part of Fairfield.

"It has already spurred substantial new investment in the area, and I would expect activity to build as the economy improves and work on the new station nears completion," said [Mark Barnhart](#), Fairfield's director of community and economic development.

The station, built with \$5.2 million from Wittek Development, \$19.4 million bonded by the state and \$5 million from the town, will cover 33 acres and have 1,500 parking spaces, a commuter footbridge and access road.

Called the [Fairfield Metro Center](#), it will be completed by late 2011 after years of delay because of lack of funding, and has led to a "significant increase" in the number of tours held for prospective tenants for office buildings at 777 Commerce Drive and 1375 Kings Highway, said [Ross Ogden](#), investment manager for [Abbey Road Advisors](#), which owns both properties.

"We're certainly seeing leasing activity on the rise," he said, adding that next year's arrival of a Whole Foods Market on nearby Grasmere Avenue will further boost the area's attractiveness to tenants. "We're pretty

optimistic across the board that the area, which has been primarily industrial, will become more retail."

The new station should "re-gentrify" the area, said [Patricia Ritchie](#), president and chief executive officer of the [Fairfield Chamber of Commerce](#).

The 62,000-square-foot edifice with three floors at 777 Commerce Drive has four existing tenants with room for a fifth in a 6,000-square-foot space on the second floor, while 1375 Kings Highway, with 30,000 square feet on three floors, is home to three major tenants including [Competitive Technologies Inc.](#), a medical device marketer, and has space for a few smaller offices.

Close proximity to the train station is a huge plus for the buildings, said [Alan Bates](#), a partner with Abbey Road Advisors.

"It puts the properties into a new dimension by putting them in direct line to New York City or New Haven," he said.

New York City-based [HUB International Northeast Ltd.](#) recently moved its office to 777 Commerce Drive for that reason, said [Jeffrey Rubin](#), its senior vice president.

"To have the ability to jump on the train and make it back the same day is important," he said.