**State lawmakers OK rail oversight commission for Springfield**

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State lawmakers on Thursday approved a Springfield rail consolidation oversight commission that community leaders pushed as a way to give more teeth to a diversity agreement connected with the project.

Sen. Andy Manar, D-Bunker Hill, and Rep. Sue Scherer, D-Decatur, introduced twin bills earlier this year in the Senate and House. The Senate approved the measure in May, and the House did so Thursday. [House Bill 3765](http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/billstatus.asp?DocNum=3765&GAID=13&GA=99&DocTypeID=HB&LegID=89975&SessionID=88) now awaits Gov. Bruce Rauner's signature.

The bipartisan oversight commission will be composed of Springfield residents appointed by legislative leaders, the governor, Springfield's mayor and the Sangamon County state's attorney.

The panel is expected to meet at least quarterly and issue an annual report.

The oversight idea came about last year during a meeting on the city's east side as community leaders expressed concern that some parts of a community benefits agreement weren't being honored.

The agreement, reached last year by the city, the county, the Faith Coalition for the Common Good and the state, calls for 30 percent of the jobs created by the long-term rail consolidation project to go to minorities, women and low-income people.

The agreement also calls for assistance to be given to people displaced by the consolidation and for giving nearby residents input on the planning.

The Rev. T. Ray McJunkins is president and co-founder of the Faith Coalition, which has been urging creation of an enforcement mechanism for the community benefits agreement because he said it was "like pulling teeth" to get information about minority hiring and other aspects of the rail consolidation project.

"All of us are excited about it," McJunkins said Thursday of the commission. "Unfortunately, once we got into the project, we had trouble getting reports on the status of who has been hired, who's been doing the work."

Scherer in a statement recognized the collaboration of local entities, specifically the Faith Coalition and the Springfield branch of the NAACP, for pushing the need for more oversight on the project.

"Local workers need opportunities for local employment, and there needs to be a light shined on the process to make sure this happens," Scherer said in the statement.

The 10th Street project calls for relocating all of Springfield's rail traffic from the Third Street tracks to 10th Street. The project is expected to cost roughly $315 million, is being completed in phases and is not yet fully funded. Construction of a Carpenter Street underpass is the first phase, and plans call for underpasses at Ash and Laurel streets to make up the second phase.

Manar said in a prepared statement that the commission will be a "public, centralized group" that, in part, focuses on whether state and federal goals for minority participation in the project are met. "We have a responsibility to ensure that the workers and businesses benefiting from this project represent the neighborhoods impacted by the construction," Manar said.