

TREASURE COAST REGIONAL PLANNING COUNCIL

MEMORANDUM

To: Council Members

AGENDA ITEM 11

From: Staff

Date: June 19, 2015 Council Meeting

Subject: All Aboard Florida Update

Introduction

The purpose of this item is to provide an update regarding activities related to the Florida East Coast Industries' (FECI) proposed All Aboard Florida (AAF) project. The project is intended to provide new high-speed intercity express service between Miami and Orlando on the Florida East Coast (FEC) rail corridor. Pursuant to the company's application for a Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Financing loan, the Federal Railroad Administration is processing an environmental impact statement.

Background

In 2012, FECI introduced the AAF project, which proposes new intercity express rail service between downtown Miami and Orlando, with additional stations in downtown Fort Lauderdale and downtown West Palm Beach. The project has been the subject of extensive Council, local government, and public discussion since its announcement. As currently proposed, the project would provide sixteen daily round-trip trains, totaling 32 additional trains on the corridor with maximum speeds of 79 MPH south of West Palm Beach, 110 MPH between West Palm Beach and Cocoa, and 125 MPH from Cocoa to Orlando. The company has indicated the FEC rail corridor will continue to carry freight service through Florida East Coast Railroad, which is projected to increase over time. Although the rail corridor is privately owned, it is included in the Florida Department of Transportation Strategic Intermodal System, which prioritizes it for statewide transportation funding to advance economic competitiveness and quality of life.

General Project Updates

- In June 2015, the Martin County Property Appraiser released a research paper titled "Measuring the Short-Term, Perceived Impacts of the All Aboard Florida Project Announcement on Residential Property Values in Martin County, FL." Prepared by a Florida Atlantic University professor, the paper examines the short-term perceived impacts of the AAF announcement on residential property values. The report indicates the AAF announcement had the greatest negative impact on the sales price of smaller homes (less than

1,532 square feet) within 1,000 feet of the FEC rail line. The report is available on the Martin County Property Appraiser's website at www.mcpropertyappraiser.com.

- On June 10, 2015, in response to a lawsuit filed by Martin and Indian River counties to temporarily block the issuance of private-activity bonds by the Florida Development Finance Corporation (FDFC), the U.S. District Court found in favor of AAF. The FDFC has not yet scheduled their board meeting when final approval for the issuance of AAF bonds will be considered. The U.S. Department of Transportation authorization for the bonds requires they be issued by July 1, 2015. However, funds may not be expended on the project until completion of the final environmental impact statement process, which remains outstanding and without a defined timeframe.

Conclusion

The proposed AAF service represents a unique opportunity to expand the utilization of a private freight corridor for economic benefit and mobility. However, the project as currently designed provides only one station in the region, which is located in the City of West Palm Beach. There is also an increasing level of concern being raised by local governments and the public regarding a range of issues. Council staff will continue to respond to requests for public information and outreach in an effort to expand Council's and the public's knowledge of project-related issues and concerns.

Recommendation

For informational purposes only.