

TREASURE COAST REGIONAL PLANNING COUNCIL

MEMORANDUM

To: Council Members

AGENDA ITEM 12

From: Staff

Date: March 18, 2016 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 (FRA) 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 miles per hour (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

Quiet Zones

Palm Beach County municipalities in the AAF Phase 1 segment from West Palm Beach to Boca Raton are proceeding with local evaluations to consider the establishment of quiet zones. On March 16, 2016, FRA staff has scheduled an informal quiet zone work session with local governments in the Phase 1 segment to review documentation and provide assistance as needed.

FRA staff has indicated they will be available to participate in additional work sessions with local governments in the AAF Phase 2 corridor once the project construction schedule becomes established.

To date, the cities of Lake Worth and Delray Beach have published Notices of Intent (NOI) to establish quiet zones encompassing their respective city limits. It is anticipated the remaining local governments will likely publish NOIs by the Summer of 2016 to enable the entire Phase 1 segment to be designed as a continuous quiet zone commensurate with the planned completion of construction in the Fall of 2016.

Marine Navigation

In its review of the AAF project, Council has consistently raised concerns regarding marine navigational conditions at the Loxahatchee and St. Lucie River FEC railroad bridges. The bridges are antiquated, with a need for updated machinery and infrastructure to enable faster and more consistent operations. In addition, the bridges are low with limited vertical clearance when they are in the down position, which creates conflict for boaters and first responders.

To improve navigation at the bridges, AAF has identified a set of potential improvements for modernization. In addition to replacement of bridge machinery and electrical components, the bridges could be structurally rehabilitated with modification and replacement of bridge spans. The results from the improvements could include increased vertical clearance, faster and more reliable drawbridge operations, and reduced total down-time during railroad operations.

Although no bridge funding is included in the AAF project budget, the bridge reconstruction project could be an appropriate candidate for funding through the federal Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant program, which is designed for large-scale, regional infrastructure projects. The deadline for the next round of TIGER grant applications is April 29 2016. Preliminary discussions have occurred with the Jupiter Inlet District and Florida Inland Navigational District, as both agencies could partner with AAF to enable the bridge reconstruction and necessary dredging. George Gentile, Jupiter Inlet District Chair, will provide additional information at the Council meeting regarding this potential project.

AAF Required Grade Crossing Improvements

Pursuant to the December 11, 2015 Council meeting discussion regarding which grade crossing improvements will be installed and paid for by AAF, Council submitted a Freedom of Information Act request to the FRA for relevant correspondence between FRA and AAF. To date, no additional documentation has been provided by FRA to address this request.

Recommendation

For information only.