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TREASURE COAST REGIONAL PLANNING COUNCIL

M E M O R A N D U M

To: Council Members AGENDA ITEM 10

From: Staff

Date: May 17, 2013 Council Meeting

Subject: All Aboard Florida Project Update

Introduction

The purpose of this item is two-fold: 1) to provide an update to Council regarding the Florida East Coast Industries (FECI) All Aboard Florida (AAF) project, which proposes to introduce express intercity passenger rail service between Miami and Orlando on the FEC rail corridor; and 2) review and approve a draft letter from the Council on what should be considered in the scope of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), which is being coordinated by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA). In the past several months, the AAF project has advanced significantly regarding environmental permitting, station planning, and public outreach. Each of these project components is discussed below.

The AAF project proposes a privately funded, express passenger rail service between Central and Southeast Florida. The project includes four stations in its initial phase: downtown Miami, downtown Fort Lauderdale, downtown West Palm Beach, and Orlando International Airport. The company has indicated additional stations could be developed over time after the service becomes established, depending on ridership demand, the potential for transit oriented development, and other factors. The project will be constructed in the FEC-owned rail corridor from Miami to Cocoa (approximately 200 miles), and the company is currently negotiating an access agreement with the State of Florida to accommodate the project along S.R. 528 (Beachline Expressway) on the approximately 30-mile segment from Cocoa to Orlando International Airport. Project representatives have indicated the service would include sixteen daily round-trip trains, totaling 32 trains per day, with service anticipated to begin in late 2015. The express, higher-speed nature of the service is designed to produce a travel time below three hours from Miami to Orlando and below two hours from West Palm Beach to Orlando.

Environmental Permitting

Given the considerable length of the AAF, FECI has separated the project into two phases for the planning, engineering, and environmental work: a southern approximately 66-mile segment from Miami to West Palm Beach, and a northern approximately 200-mile segment from West Palm Beach to Orlando. For the southern portion, FECI completed an Environmental Assessment

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in late 2012, receiving an approval (termed a Finding of No Significant Impact) from the FRA in January 2013. Project representatives indicate the company is beginning early engineering work on the southern segment later this year.

For the northern segment from West Palm Beach to Orlando, FECI has begun the environmental permitting process, including the development of an EIS, which includes a more rigorous environmental assessment than the environmental assessment to the south. The corridor improvements south of West Palm Beach will occur in the existing FEC rail corridor, where railroad tracks formally existed; however, the northern segment includes new rail construction along S.R. 528. To facilitate public input, the FRA hosted a series of public scoping meetings in early May to confirm the relevant issues will be addressed in the development of the EIS. In meetings with agencies, local governments, citizens, and others, Council has become aware of the extensive support for the project as well as a number of issues and concerns. Accordingly, given a public comment deadline of May 15, Council staff provided the attached draft letter to the FRA to encourage the EIS to maintain a broad scope. Project representatives anticipate environmental permitting on the northern segment to be completed by mid-2014, with construction beginning in late 2014.

Station Planning

The AAF project proposes four stations in its initial phase of service. The company has begun working with local governments and agencies in Miami, Fort Lauderdale, and West Palm Beach regarding preliminary station planning activities. FECI has indicated the need for 1000 foot platforms in each station location, designed to also accommodate Tri-Rail trains as well as other potential trains in the future. In the City of West Palm Beach, the proposed station location, which is roughly midway between Clematis Street and Okeechobee Boulevard (and CityPlace), includes the potential closure of existing grade crossings at Datura and Evernia Streets, which has generated concerns regarding mobility and access. Increased station planning activity is anticipated later this year.

Public Outreach

FECI project representatives have been conducting presentations and one-on-one briefings with local governments and agency staff, elected officials, and others throughout the region in the past year. The company has expanded its staff to include additional expertise and provide greater access for public outreach. Working with FECI, Council staff has helped coordinate meetings with agencies, local governments, and individuals in the region, and this facilitation role is anticipated to increase as the project is advanced.

Regarding the potential for the Tri-Rail Coastal Link commuter rail service, the Memorandum of Understanding for the commuter service identifies the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) and South Florida Regional Transportation Authority (SRTA) to act as the designated public negotiation team. Accordingly, preliminary discussions between FECI, FDOT, and SFRTA have begun regarding access fees, infrastructure improvements, and related issues. With the adoption of the MOU by May 2013, formal negotiations are anticipated to begin in June 2013. This timing is noteworthy, as there is potential for some or all improvements needed for

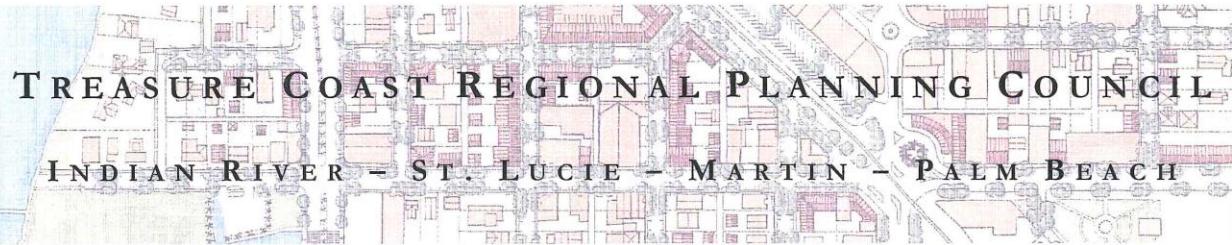
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the Tri-Rail Coastal Link service could be designed and constructed in conjunction with the AAF improvements.

Recommendation

Council should review and approve the draft Environmental Impact Statement scoping letter and authorize its transmittal to the Federal Railroad Administration.

Attachment



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Ms. Catherine Dobbs
Transportation Industry Analyst, Office of Railroad Policy and Development
Federal Railroad Administration
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Subject: All Aboard Florida Environmental Impact Statement

Dear Ms. Dobbs:

Restoration of passenger rail service on the Florida East Coast (FEC) rail corridor has been a top priority of the Treasure Coast Region for decades. The original FEC rail line and its stations were the key organizing element for Florida's historic development pattern along its east coast. Each of the historic stations became the economic engine for dozens of small and large cities that evolved along the corridor. Since passenger rail service was abandoned in 1968, increased automobile usage and an expanding roadway network has decanted population and economic energy away from the coastal cities and confounded multi-modal alternatives. The All Aboard Florida project, recently proposed by Florida East Coast Industries (FECI), presents a much needed alternative for today's auto-dominated transportation system and a new economic development driver for many of the Region's cities and towns.

It is important to emphasize the importance of FECI's All Aboard Florida project in the context of the multi-modal transportation system for Southeast Florida. This critical north/south link will include immediate connections and improved access to new western population centers and cities via the local transit systems in each county as well as other local premium transit, including MetroRail, MetroMover, the West Palm Beach downtown trolley, and pending Fort Lauderdale "Wave" streetcar. Further, the All Aboard Florida project will include passenger rail infrastructure improvements that can enable other passenger rail initiatives, such as commuter rail and intercity passenger rail, that will further expand the Region's multi-modal network and help improve the Region's mobility and economic competitiveness.

The All Aboard Florida project proposes three stations in Southeast Florida--downtown Miami, downtown Fort Lauderdale, and downtown West Palm Beach. Each of stations would complement ongoing redevelopment efforts within these communities, accelerating transit-

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oriented development and improving land use/transportation relationships. In addition to strengthening existing central business districts, each of these potential station areas also has a strong track record for infill housing in the past several decades, resulting in a mix of uses that corresponds well to transit use. Accordingly, expanded transit service, such as All Aboard Florida, will also promote trip capture and remove cars from the roadway network, thereby increasing mobility and reducing carbon emissions. The balance of the corridor, from West Palm Beach to Cocoa, also traverses existing historic downtowns that would benefit from additional All Aboard Florida stations or other ancillary passenger rail development that could occur in the corridor in the future.

The project includes the installation of an additional railroad track from Miami to Orlando, as well as double-track improvements to existing bridges along the corridor, which will require grade crossing improvements and other infrastructure. The corridor traverses areas supporting a variety of residential neighborhoods, mixed-use communities and a robust marine industry. Accordingly, the project may present impacts to these existing assets, due to increased train frequencies and bridge closures that may warrant the installation of additional operational and safety infrastructure and establishment of “quiet zones” by local governments. These activities will require close coordination between FECI, the private sector and the local governments and agencies representing these residents and businesses, especially those related to the Region’s marine industry.

Based on input from local governments, agencies, property owners, businesses, and citizens, the following issues should be considered in the scoping of the Environmental Impact Statement for the project:

- Potential impacts upon residential neighborhoods and local government budgets due to increased train volumes that may require increased safety improvements and the installation of “quiet zones” by local governments.
- Increased closings of railroad bridges, which may present impacts to the marine industry and flow of goods and cargo in the Region.
- Bridge improvements, including double-tracking, especially for the bridges in Fort Lauderdale (New River Bridge) and Stuart (Roosevelt Bridge – trestle bridge), which may cause land-based and other transportation impacts. Additional bridge closing and potential reductions in bridge clearances could impact transport and operations of marine vessels and have economic impacts on the marine industries.
- Grade crossing improvements, including those to roadways and pedestrian improvements, that may present increased costs to local governments to maintain these crossings for mobility and the provision of emergency services.
- The use of attractive or creative alternatives to the potential installation of fencing to prevent inappropriate pedestrian access at mid-points between grade crossings.

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- Desire for additional pedestrian crossings at grade crossings.
- Desire for multi-use pathway along corridor to facilitate additional bicycle/pedestrian activity through the region to benefit mobility and economic potential.
- Opportunity to advance other passenger rail initiatives in the corridor, including commuter rail service (e.g., Tri-Rail) as well as intercity passenger rail service (e.g., Amtrak), which could expand the economic benefits of the project and help offset its impacts.
- Inclusion of conduit along corridor to accommodate broadband fiber infrastructure for local government, educational and institutional access, communications, and economic development purposes.
- Potential closure of grade crossings to accommodate station platform in West Palm Beach, which could negatively impact mobility and access in the downtown.
- Potential inclusion of additional All Aboard Florida stations between West Palm Beach and Cocoa (e.g., Stuart, Fort Pierce) to expand access and add benefits of new passenger connections.

Council supports the expansion of passenger rail systems in the Region, and All Aboard Florida presents a significant opportunity to expand mobility and the economic potential of the Region. Council appreciates the consideration of these additional issues in the scope of the pending EIS. If you need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

Michael J. Busha, AICP
Executive Director

MJB/KD:kd