

TREASURE COAST REGIONAL PLANNING COUNCIL

MEMORANDUM

To: Council Members AGENDA ITEM 9

From: Staff

Date: September 20, 2013 Council Meeting

Subject: Southeast Florida Passenger Rail Update

Introduction

The purpose of this item is to provide an opportunity for Council to receive an update regarding various activities related to the development and expansion of passenger rail service in the region. There are several initiatives underway, including: 1) Florida East Coast Industries' (FECI) "All Aboard Florida," which proposes new high-speed intercity express service; 2) Tri-Rail, which includes existing commuter rail service as well as proposed new "Tri-Rail Coastal Link" service; and 3) proposed new Amtrak/FEC Corridor intercity passenger rail service. Relevant updates for each project are summarized below.

All Aboard Florida

In 2012, FECI introduced a privately-funded service known as "All Aboard Florida," which proposes new intercity express rail service between downtown Miami and Orlando, with additional stations in downtown Fort Lauderdale and downtown West Palm Beach. FECI is the division of Fortress Investment Group responsible for passenger rail development and Flagler Development, which handles the company's real estate interests. FEC Railroad (FECR) is a separate division of Fortress Investment Group responsible for the rail operations and freight, among other responsibilities.

Council has received separate briefings from FECI on the project at the March and September Council meetings. FECI has indicated the project will include sixteen daily round-trip trains, totaling 32 additional trains on the corridor, with construction anticipated to begin in 2014 and service following in 2016. FECI has indicated the All Aboard Florida service will operate at speeds up to 79 MPH south of West Palm Beach, up to 110 MPH between West Palm Beach and Cocoa, and up to 125 MPH from Cocoa to Orlando. The company has indicated the project will be privately funded, including the potential inclusion of a "Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Fund" loan, which would be administered through the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA).

To date, FECI is continuing to advance the All Aboard Florida project. The project is being planned and evaluated in three sections: a southern portion from Miami to West Palm Beach, a

northern portion from West Palm Beach to Cocoa, and an east/west portion from Cocoa to Orlando International Airport. The company has already completed preliminary planning and environmental documentation for the southern portion of the project, and work is currently underway to complete similar documentation for the northern portion. The company has also secured a lease from the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) to construct new railroad infrastructure along State Road 528 for the east/west portion.

There are several significant project-related issues that have emerged as part of the regional dialogue surrounding the project. Each is summarized briefly below.

- Grade Crossing Improvements

FECI has indicated it plans to double-track the FEC rail corridor from Miami to Cocoa to accommodate the proposed project. This rail infrastructure will require modifications to existing roadway grade crossings, potentially including the installation of new safety infrastructure (e.g., additional crossing gates, lights, signage). In Fall 2013, FDOT has indicated it will conduct “diagnostic field reviews” for the approximately 320 grade crossings that exist between Cocoa and Miami to confirm existing conditions and determine the need for additional safety infrastructure. This work will be coordinated with FECI as well as the FRA and local governments. By early 2014, FDOT anticipates completion of these field reviews as well as recommendations for safety improvements at grade crossings to accommodate the proposed All Aboard Florida project. This information will also be utilized to develop cost estimates for any necessary improvements. Discussions with FRA representatives indicate the requirement for the higher-speed portion of the corridor (from West Palm Beach to Cocoa) to be designed as a “sealed corridor,” which typically requires a higher degree of safety infrastructure. Additional clarification regarding these requirements has been requested from FRA.

Each grade crossing is subject to a “grade crossing agreement” between the FECR and the public (or private) authority controlling the roadway. These agreements tend to assign the capital and operating/maintenance costs of grade crossing infrastructure to the authorities responsible for the roadways. As requested by the Palm Beach Metropolitan Planning Organization, Council staff is seeking potential non-local sources of funding that can be used to help fund safety improvements in the grade crossings along the corridor. FECI has also been requested to assist in funding safety improvements at grade crossings. Additional regional discussions regarding funding and strategies to address grade crossing improvements are anticipated through 2014.

- Quiet Zones

The FEC rail corridor traverses densely developed portions of the region, including communities with substantial residential populations. Federal law requires train horns to be sounded as trains approach grade crossings, which increases safety but creates adverse noise impacts, especially in residential communities. To alleviate the requirement for sounding train horns, “quiet zones” may be established at the initiative of public authorities that control roadways crossing a rail corridor. Public authorities are responsible for

evaluating subject grade crossings, either individually or within groupings of crossings, to determine safety ratings and the potential need for additional safety infrastructure to enable the establishment of quiet zones.

Many local governments in the region have expressed interest in establishing quiet zones commensurate with the construction of improvements for the All Aboard Florida project. To increase knowledge of quiet zone requirements and procedures, Council staff facilitated a Quiet Zone Technical Training Workshop with the FRA in August. Participants included officials and staff from local governments, FDOT, FECR, and metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs). FDOT has indicated it will develop generalized planning-level cost estimates for quiet zone infrastructure in the Fall of 2013. Subsequently, following the diagnostic field reviews described above, additional field reviews may be necessary to determine the need for additional infrastructure, if any, to enable the establishment of quiet zones. Council staff is also working with other transportation and planning agencies to identify potential funding sources, including state and federal grant and program sources, to help address the cost of quiet zones.

- Marine Navigational Impacts

For the All Aboard Florida project, FECI proposes to double-track the entire FEC rail corridor from Miami to Cocoa, including all railroad bridges with the exception of the rail bridge crossing the St. Lucie River. Within the region, the FEC rail corridor includes two significant trestle bridges that have generated concerns regarding marine navigation: the Loxahatchee River bridge in Jupiter/Tequesta and the St. Lucie River bridge in Stuart. Similar marine navigational concerns have also been raised regarding the New River bridge in Fort Lauderdale. Council staff is coordinating two multi-agency workshops with FECI and stakeholders to identify bridge-related concerns and evaluate options as part of the All Aboard Florida project. Additional workshops are anticipated as the project continues to advance.

Tri-Rail Coastal Link

Operated by the South Florida Regional Transportation Authority (SFRTA), the Tri-Rail commuter rail system provides passenger rail service between Palm Beach, Broward, and Miami-Dade counties. The current service operates on the South Florida Rail Corridor (formerly CSX) between 45th Street in Mangonia Park and Hialeah, with service extending to Miami International Airport in Spring 2014. An expansion of Tri-Rail onto the FEC rail corridor, named the “Tri-Rail Coastal Link,” has been the subject of regional evaluations since 2004. Given the rapid pace of the FECI’s All Aboard Florida project and the potential to realize efficiencies among the two projects, the relevant regional transportation and planning agencies adopted a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in May 2013 to expedite the public project and enable public/private negotiations to commence in June 2013. The parties to the MOU include SFRTA, FDOT, the three MPOs, Southeast Florida Transportation Council (comprised of the three MPOs), and the two regional planning councils.

Extensive planning, financial analysis, and engineering work on the Tri-Rail Coastal Link project is currently underway, and the project is nearing the end of its “preliminary project development” phase. Potential Coastal Link service concepts include the extension of service from Jupiter to downtown Miami on the FEC rail corridor. The Coastal Link project team is working collaboratively with FECI and FECR to maximize the efficiency of the rail corridor and minimize the need for additional infrastructure where possible. Three rail CSX/FEC rail interconnections are envisioned, in West Palm Beach, Pompano, and Miami, to allow the new service to be integrated with the current Tri-Rail service. An array of financial options to construct and operate/maintain the service will be evaluated this fall, some of which may require legislative approval for their implementation.

A series of formal project updates will be presented in late 2013 to each of the MOU partner governing boards, including a presentation to Council anticipated in December. With concurrence from the three MPOs, the project is scheduled to advance into a “Project Development” phase in early 2014, which will enable it to be considered for funding through the Federal Transit Administration. In addition, Council may be requested to consider supporting proposed legislative actions that could enable the implementation of new or modified financial mechanisms to advance the project.

Amtrak/FEC Corridor Project

For decades, Amtrak has maintained a strong interest in providing a new intercity passenger service route along the FEC rail corridor, from Jacksonville to Miami. The Amtrak/FEC Corridor project, which was developed by FDOT with assistance from Council staff in 2008, proposes to establish daily roundtrip service with eight new stations in St. Augustine, Daytona Beach, Titusville, Cocoa, Melbourne, Vero Beach, Fort Pierce, and Stuart. Based on earlier project cost estimates, the project has been assigned \$118 Million in the FDOT five-year work program, with funds available in the current fiscal year.

Several significant infrastructure improvements that are included in the overall project have been advanced in the past year.

- Miami International Airport (MIA): FDOT and Amtrak are working together to determine the necessary rail station infrastructure to accommodate Amtrak trains within the Miami Intermodal Center, which is located at MIA. Completion of these improvements is anticipated in 2014.
- FDOT recently received \$13,750,000 in Federal funding through the TIGER grant program, which provides matching funds for “Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery” for the “South Florida Freight & Passenger Rail Enhancement” project. The TIGER funds will match funding from FDOT, SFRTA, and the FEC and CSX railroads. Two key CSX/FEC rail interconnections will be funded through this grant, including the Northwood Connection in West Palm Beach and the Iris Connection in Miami. Both of these rail interconnections provide freight utility improvements to enable more efficient and integrated freight mobility in the region. In addition, both projects will provide passenger

rail benefits, and the Northwood Connection is a core component of the proposed Amtrak/FEC Corridor service.

- As part of the All Aboard Florida project, FECI has indicated it will install “positive train control” on the FEC rail corridor from Jacksonville to Miami, which is a Federally required, state-of-the-art engineering enhancement to improve safety on rail corridors that share passenger and freight service.

These rail infrastructure improvements will significantly reduce the costs of the proposed Amtrak/FEC Corridor project and advance the project’s readiness for implementation. Updated cost estimates and a potential implementation timeframe are anticipated in early 2014.

Recommendation

For informational purposes only.