

TREASURE COAST REGIONAL PLANNING COUNCIL
INDIAN RIVER - ST. LUCIE - MARTIN - PALM BEACH

May 13, 2013

DRAFT
Subject to Modifications

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 established 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 FECCI, 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.

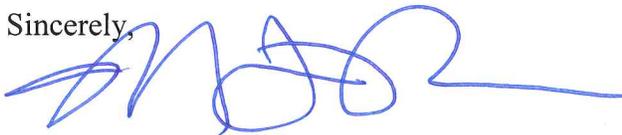
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- Desire for additional pedestrian crossings at grade crossings.
- Desire for multi-use pathway along corridor to facilitate additional bicycle/pedestrian activity through the region to benefit mobility and economic potential.
- Opportunity to advance 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 the 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, Vero Beach) 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