Introduction

The purpose of this item is to provide an update regarding the Brightline/Virgin Trains USA construction, quiet zones, and station development in the Treasure Coast Region and beyond.

Brightline/Virgin Trains USA

Brightline/Virgin Trains USA (Brightline) began operating its passenger rail service on the Florida East Coast Railway (FEC) in January 2018 in its Phase 1 segment (West Palm Beach to Miami), initially operating between West Palm Beach and Fort Lauderdale and expanding to include service to its Miami station in May 2018. Brightline currently operates 34 trains daily between 5:00 a.m. and 10:45 p.m. (generally hourly service with trains on the half-hour during the afternoon rush hour). Brightline’s Phase 2 will extend service to a newly built station at Orlando International Airport (OIA). Activities related to construction, quiet zones, and station development are summarized below.

Corridor Construction

In June 2019, Brightline began construction of its Phase 2 segment, between West Palm Beach and OIA. Four construction zones have been identified, including three north/south segments (West Palm Beach to Martin County, Martin and St. Lucie County, and Indian River County to Brevard County) and one east/west segment along SR 528 (Brevard and Orange County, including OIA). Brightline has assembled construction teams with managers for each phase to streamline communication and enable each segment to proceed independently.

Construction on the east/west segment began in the summer of 2019 and will begin on the West Palm Beach to Martin County segment in late 2019. Construction will begin on the Martin and St. Lucie County segment in early 2020, with the Indian River and Brevard County segment following in mid 2020, when the entire corridor will be under construction. Completion of all construction activity is anticipated in the middle of 2022 when Brightline anticipates it will begin revenue service into its OIA station.
Brightline representatives indicate that the company has been coordinating directly with local governments regarding construction updates and has established direct points of contact within each. To improve public awareness of construction activities, the company will utilize digital message boards several weeks prior to planned grade crossing closures and coordinate maintenance of traffic operations with local governments. The company has indicated there will be no construction activities that would close two adjacent crossings at any time. Further, Brightline indicates it has collected data from local government regarding planned events (e.g., downtown festivals, air shows), and it will shift construction schedules where possible to minimize traffic impacts. The company also will be posting construction schedules and updates on its website, www.gobrightline.com.

Quiet Zones

As of the summer of 2019, quiet zone designations were completed for all interested jurisdictions in Phase 1, resulting in a continuous quiet zone from West Palm Beach south to the Miami-Central station. For Phase 2, Brightline representatives stated that planned construction activities include building all infrastructure necessary to enable local governments to establish quiet zones if so desired.

Infill Stations

In addition to the three primary stations in Phase 1 (West Palm Beach, Fort Lauderdale, and Miami), Brightline has identified several potential “infill station” locations. According to company representatives, active negotiations are underway with the cities of Aventura and Boca Raton, with preliminary discussions underway for potential stations at Fort Lauderdale/Hollywood International Airport and PortMiami. In addition, Brightline development teams have begun site-selection surveys and initiated preliminary discussions for potential station locations in Stuart or Fort Pierce. Brightline previously identified two potential Cocoa station sites, with final decisions expected after Orlando service begins. Although other potential station locations have been discussed in public meetings (including Palm Beach Gardens), Brightline representatives indicate there are currently no active discussions to add additional infill stations in Phase 1 at this time.

West of the OIA station, active negotiations are underway for additional stations in Orange County (to interconnect with the SunRail station), at Walt Disney World, and in Tampa. While there are no current discussions, future service to Jacksonville would presumably include potential stations in Daytona Beach, St. Augustine, and Jacksonville. A conceptual map illustrating various station locations is included as attached.

Miami-Central Station / Tri-Rail

Pursuant to a public/private partnership agreement between Brightline, the South Florida Regional Transportation Authority (SFRTA), and an array of other governmental entities in Miami-Dade County, a Tri-Rail station has now been completed within the Brightline Miami-Central Station to enable Tri-Rail service into downtown Miami. Prior to Tri-Rail’s initiation of service into Miami-Central, both Brightline and SFRTA must complete the installation and certification of Positive Train Control (PTC), which is a federally required electronic
communications and automatic braking system to improve safety and monitoring of passenger and freight trains operating together on rail corridors.

Brightline’s PTC installation is underway, with certification anticipated in 2020. Tri-Rail has completed its PTC system on the South Florida Rail Corridor where they currently operate, and the agency will begin its PTC certification on the FEC rail corridor once Brightline’s PTC system has been certified. Given these timeframes, Tri-Rail service into the Miami-Central station is anticipated in late 2020.

Recommendation

For information purposes only.

Council Action – September 20, 2019

Council received a presentation from Dr. Kim DeLaney, Director of Strategic Development and Policy, Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council.

Attachment
Southeast & Central Florida: Passenger Rail Systems & Concepts