

Officials optimistic about funds for Jax-Miami Amtrak route

BY REBECCA BASU • FLORIDA TODAY •
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State and local officials remain optimistic about prospects of getting an Amtrak train route established along Florida's East Coast despite being passed over for federal **funding** a second time.

The most recent funding request for \$268 million to develop the route was not awarded, though federal officials did award an \$800 million grant for high-speed rail linking Orlando with Tampa.

"It's frustrating the project wasn't funded this time, but rail projects typically take several years before they can be put in motion," said Kim Delaney, growth **management** coordinator for Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council, one of the lead organizers of the Jacksonville-Miami route.

"We're still optimistic because we all know it's a great project many people want along the coast and throughout the state."

The proposed 90 mph Amtrak train would travel along a Jacksonville-Miami route, spanning about 350 miles on Florida's East Coast. Eight stations along the route, including one each in Cocoa, Melbourne and Titusville, are slated. **Funds** would pay for stations, trains and other development costs.

Nazih Haddad, state **Transportation Department** manager for passenger rail development, said the state planned to meet with the federal government soon to identify funding opportunities for the Florida East Coast route.

"We need to fully understand why the project wasn't awarded any funding and what is it that we need to do to get them interested," Haddad said. "The state is still very interested in this project. We need to pursue it."

Haddad said it's possible the project could take a more incremental approach, perhaps starting with limited **service**.

More money could become available next year.

Congress has proposed \$1 billion in the upcoming **budget** for rail projects.

"We'll have to wait and see what Congress does," said Robert Kulat, spokesman with the **Federal Railroad Administration**.



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