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Train Project Revives Henry Flagler's Line

FEC-Amtrak venture would extend, accelerate passenger service along Florida's East Coast

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Aiming for a piece of \$2.5 billion in federal funding, Florida officials are seeking to restore passenger rail service between Miami and Jacksonville.

The Florida East Coast-Amtrak Corridor Project says it is "shovel ready" to put trains on tracks at speeds of up to 90 mph for half the trip between Jacksonville and Palm Beach.

Extending TriRail's service north of Palm Beach, the FEC-Amtrak line would construct new train stations at Stuart, Fort Pierce, Vero Beach, Melbourne, Cocoa, Titusville, Daytona Beach and St. Augustine as part of a high-speed intercity passenger system.

Kim DeLaney of the Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council in Martin County said the venture will request initial funding of \$268 million from the Federal Railroad Administration in July.

The Florida Department of Transportation has prioritized the project as the state works to interconnect its planned SunRail commuter train in Central Florida and a high-speed line linking Tampa and Orlando. Those projects have received a total of \$3.6 billion in federal grants to begin construction.

DeLaney said restoring accelerated passenger service along Florida's East Coast "would mean improvement for other rail nodes."

"The project has attracted significant statewide support, and our office has received copies of more than 132 resolutions and letters of support from various local governments, business and community organizations, and others," DeLaney said.

An FEC-Amtrak collaboration would resurrect a sizable portion of industrialist Henry Flagler's legendary Florida East Coast line that stretched 450 miles from Jacksonville to Key West in the early 1900s. Passenger service on the line was discontinued in 1968.

The vision of a restored FEC-Amtrak Corridor emerged in 2001, but failed to take shape. Proponents hope the availability of federal funding and synergy with other rail ventures will bring more steam.

A series of public workshops on the proposed new, faster railroad begins May 3 in the eight designated cities.

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