



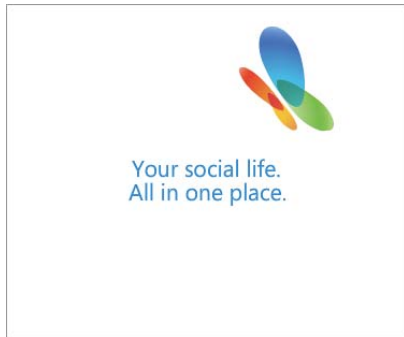
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Put train station at '60s FEC location

Posted: June 27, 2010 - 12:01am



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St. Augustine City Commissioners on Monday are expected to recommend the former Florida East Coast Railway station north of the city as the Amtrak site for a possible new route.

The route was developed by cities along the FEC line from Jacksonville to Miami. The plan is to have stops that will draw business and visitor travel. New stops would include St. Augustine, Daytona Beach, Titusville, Melbourne, Fort Pierce, Vero Beach, Cocoa and Stuart. Existing stations

include Jacksonville, West Palm Beach, Delray Beach, Fort Lauderdale, Hollywood and Miami.

Amtrak wants the new cities along the line to make the station location decisions now so they can be included in the Florida Department of Transportation application for \$268 million in stimulus funds. The route, expected to start in 2013, lost out earlier this year to the high-speed rail from Orlando to Tampa. Officials of the proposal are confident the new route will win approval especially with the more defined plan and actual station sites selected.

The city's first choice for a station was at Carrera Street and U.S. 1, within walking distance of downtown. But that one didn't work because there is no building and too much work would have to be done in too short a time. The former FEC station seemed the better location because there is a building, the 1960s-era railway station, that will only require renovation not full construction.

But the city shouldn't get too comfortable as the Airport Authority's executive director says the station belongs at the airport, a longtime goal of the airport authority to have a multimodal operation. Airport Authority Executive Director Ed Wuellner told The Record he intends to talk to both the state and Amtrak before the final decision is made. But Kim Delaney, Treasure Coast Planning Council's growth management coordinator, says the site is too far away from downtown. It is five miles. The FEC site is three miles away.

The new route is supposed to make the stops convenient to cities to benefit businesses and tourism.

We supported this project since its inception because with the oil crisis and highways becoming more clogged with traffic, the train seems to be a logical alternative.

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There is no question that St. Johns County commuters to Jacksonville and Daytona Beach would benefit. And if the route comes to fruition, a second station will be likely. While we understand the airport's position as a transportation hub and applaud their aggressive plan for growth and expansion, we believe the proposed location is reasonable. The building is already up and that will save some time and money in this continuing economic downturn. We've yet to see the full implementation of the airport's plans. The airport is growing and a multimodal transportation hub is a wise move for the future but not yet. We hope the Airport Authority will get behind the city's proposal.

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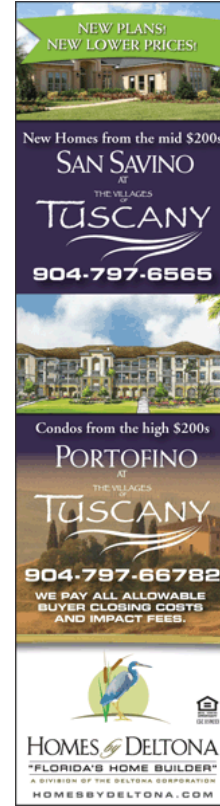
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