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Potential train station sites down to 2

Daytona city commissioners get final say at June 16 meeting

By **EILEEN ZAFFIRO**, Staff Writer

June 8, 2010 12:05 AM

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DAYTONA BEACH -- It's going to take at least another four months before it becomes more clear if a new Amtrak passenger train line will be running from Jacksonville to Miami.

But that hasn't stopped some people from arguing already over where the best spot would be for a station in Daytona Beach.

On one side are those lobbying for a site north of International Speedway Boulevard, a few blocks from Mary McLeod Bethune Boulevard. On the other side are those who want a spot south of International Speedway Boulevard near Magnolia Avenue.

The two sites, just a few blocks from one another, are both just east of the railroad tracks.

At a public meeting beginning at 5 p.m. Wednesday at City Hall, one of those two locations is going to be chosen as the recommendation to city commissioners, who'll have the final say at their June 16 meeting.

Downtown businessman and property owner Jack White hopes everyone can take a step back and remember the bigger goal.

"I support getting Amtrak in Daytona Beach," White said. "We're still not sure we're going to get a station here. We should be supporting getting rail in Daytona Beach, not fighting where it'll be."

It wouldn't be the "end all" for the site that's chosen, nor the "death knell" for the one passed up, White said.

"We need rail back, period," he said.

Bethune-Cookman University President Trudie Kibbe Reed would love to see an Amtrak station return the business district around her school to the bustling hub it once was. But she also agrees with White.

"I applaud either location," Reed said. "It's the most progressive and wonderful idea I've heard since I've been in Florida."

There had been an Amtrak station in Daytona Beach at the Magnolia Avenue site until the 1960s. If several pieces fall into place, there will be a station in Daytona Beach again, as well as seven other cities from Jacksonville to Miami.

The proposed service would provide two southbound and two northbound trains per day.

The 350-mile line running through 11 counties could become a reality by the fall of 2013 if all goes as those working to restore the service hope.

One of the biggest hurdles will be securing funding for the \$268 million project. An application for \$210 million in federal dollars will be submitted in a little more than a month, and the application will include station sites.

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Florida should get an answer on its grant application this fall, but even if the money comes through, the state Legislature will also have to support the project.

Cities up and down the I-95 corridor don't have to be sold, and some -- including Bunnell and New Smyrna Beach -- are disappointed they're not being included.

The Daytona Regional Chamber of Commerce hasn't taken sides on the location of the Daytona station, but that hasn't stopped people lobbying for their preference, said Jim Cameron, vice president of government relations.

"The chamber wants the best for the community altogether," Cameron said. "We're excited. This will mean redevelopment. We foresee additional retail shops going around a station like this. It would be a great opportunity."

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