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GOVERNOR CRIST APPLAUDS PROPOSED REVIVAL OF AMTRAK-FLORIDA EAST COAST PASSENGER RAIL

~ ~ ~ Passenger train will roll through Treasure Coast for only second time this decade ~ ~ ~

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MIAMI – Governor Charlie Crist today applauded Amtrak’s 326-mile, one-way inspection trip of the Florida East Coast Railway (FEC) from Miami to Jacksonville. The trip will help local and state officials evaluate the feasibility of returning passenger rail service along the Florida East Coast Railway. The inspection trip represents only the second time a passenger train has rolled through the Treasure Coast this decade.

“I want to thank Amtrak and the Florida East Coast Railroad for continuing to expand Florida’s vision of how rail can connect our cities, roads, airports and seaports, and most importantly, create jobs for Floridians,” said Governor Crist. “Inter-city passenger rail is a logical next step, and today’s effort symbolizes how partnerships will help make this vision a reality.”

Later this year, the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) will apply to the Federal Railroad Administration for funding for the project under the new Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act (PRIIA). Federal funding will require a local/state match of 20 percent of the project’s estimated cost of \$268 million.

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Eight new stations are planned at St. Augustine, Daytona Beach, Titusville, Cocoa, Melbourne, Vero Beach, Fort Pierce and Stuart. Major infrastructure improvements needed to implement the service include the construction of tracks to allow for stations, a new connection between FEC and the South Florida Rail corridor in Palm Beach County, and several long passing sidings that would allow trains traveling in opposite directions to pass each other.

Currently, Amtrak serves Florida with three long-distance trains: the Silver Meteor and Silver Star, from New York to Miami via Jacksonville and Orlando, and the daily, non-stop Auto Train, from Lorton, Virginia, to Sanford. All Amtrak trains in Florida are operated exclusively on CSX-owned tracks, except for the Miami-to-West Palm Beach segment, where the State-owned South Florida Rail Corridor is used. Approximately one million passengers traveled on Amtrak trains in Florida last year, with Florida passengers accounting for approximately 60 percent of all Amtrak passengers on these lines.

Since 1998, the FDOT has worked closely with Amtrak and the Florida East Coast Railroad (FEC) to bring passenger rail service to the communities along the east coast of Florida, where passenger rail service was terminated in the mid 1960s. The service, as contemplated, would result in the operation of two round trip trains per day on FEC tracks from Jacksonville to Miami.

According to 2001 estimates, the total cost of the required capital improvements was \$82 million. In 2002, the Florida Department of Transportation committed a \$61-million, one-time capital investment, with the balance coming from Amtrak, FEC and local governments. State funds were planned for capital improvements to the railroad and to build the eight stations along the corridor. As with all long-distance service, Amtrak was expected to assume responsibility for the operation of this service with no operating assistance expected from the State. Due to Congressional loan restrictions placed on Amtrak from 2003 until recently, this project was postponed.

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