

On the Road: Gov. Crist kicks off Amtrak train on FEC rail line



Submitted by [Larry Hannan](#) on May 1, 2010 - 9:29am



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MIAMI - Declaring that "it just makes sense" Gov. Charlie Crist endorsed efforts to bring Amtrak passenger rail service to the Florida East Coast rail line Saturday morning.

"This would benefit everyone from the college student that wants to go home for the weekend to the senior citizen that wants to visit friends in another city," said Crist, who spoke in front of an Amtrak train about a block away from American Airlines Arena where the Miami Heat play.

This train is now heading north towards Jacksonville, stopping in West Palm Beach, Stuart, Fort Pierce, Vero Beach, Melbourne, Cocoa, Titusville, Daytona Beach and St. Augustine before arriving in Jacksonville.

Local officials are expected to meet the train at each stop.

While posing for pictures with Amtrak employees Crist said he took an Amtrak train from Washington D.C. to Philadelphia about six weeks ago.

"It was superb. I'd love to have something like that in Florida," said Crist, who expressed regret he couldn't take the train to Jacksonville.

The governor considered going, but needs to get to Pensacola to get an update on the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

Florida has Amtrak service on the CSX tracks from Miami to Jacksonville. But that train runs through central Florida and takes 9-11 hours. Amtrak officials have said a train from Miami to Jacksonville on the FEC tracks, which roughly parallels Interstate 95 on the east coast, could complete a trip in six hours.

Michael Blaylock, executive director of the Jacksonville Transportation Authority, is one of the officials taking the train to Jacksonville. Blaylock said the Amtrak test run was a good sign.

JTA hopes to move the Amtrak station from its current location on Clifford Lane downtown to the Prime Osborn Convention Center. Amtrak officials toured the convention center on Thursday before coming down to Miami, said Blaylock.

"Amtrak came to visit us and I think that's a very good sign," said Blaylock, who estimates it will cost about \$40 million in upgrades to the FEC tracks in Jacksonville before train service could happen.

The state expects it to cost about \$268 million to bring Amtrak to FEC. FEC will also want the state legislature to exempt it from any lawsuits filed because of Amtrak accidents on FEC tracks.

Blaylock wants to turn the Prime Osborn into a regional transportation center, with the convention center moving somewhere else, at a cost of about \$180 million. That will take years, but Blaylock said it was possible Amtrak could still move to the convention center while it is being used for its present purpose.

"Our plan is to do this in phases and we're flexible on what phase comes first," he said.us

This transportation center would house Amtrak, bus services, the Skyway, and possibly commuter rail. JTA is still seeking money to do this.

Update: Thanks to the caller who alerted me to the fact I'd originally written "the train is now heading south towards Jacksonville." That paragraph has been changed to hide my inability to tell north from south.

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