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NSB rally Saturday: Amtrak passenger service here would be economic engine

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By **HENRY FREDERICK** (/USERS/HENRY-FREDERICK)

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NSBNEWS.net EXCLUSIVE COVERAGE



NSBNEWS.net photos by Henry Frederick and NSBNEWS.net video by Jeanette DiCara.

Some 50 supporters of the return of Amtrak passenger service with a stop in New Smyrna Beach showed their support 2:45 p.m. Saturday with a train passing through from Miami to Jacksonville with stops in Daytona Beach and St. Augustine, along the way, with a host of state officialdom on board. In the video, Deb Denys, an organizer of the rally and a candidate for the S.E. Volusia seat on the Volusia County Council, and T.C. Wilder, whose dad worked for the rail service many years ago, talk up support.



NEW SMYRNA BEACH -- The loud horn sound 50 train revelers heard Saturday across the street from the boarded up Dunn Lumber building at the corner of West Canal Street and U.S. 1 was an Amtrak passenger engine. Or as these folks like to think of it: An economic engine.



NSBNEWS.net photo by Henry Frederick.

New Smyrna Beach City Commissioner Jack Grasty (white hat, blue shirt) is among the supporters, as is local architect Jay Pendergast, far left in light blue shirt, involved in civic and community causes.

Saturday's passenger train run, the first on Florida East Coast Railroad tracks since 1968, was a test run from Miami to Jacksonville, with stops along designated first-choice locales such as Daytona Beach and St. Augustine, but other municipalities such as New Smyrna Beach hope that they will be included eventually, should the rail service become a reality.

The cost statewide to build train stations at the primary spots such as Daytona Beach, Titusville, Cocoa, Melbourne, Vero Beach, Fort Pierce and Stuart, is expected to cost \$268 million.

Even Jacksonville would have to spend \$40 million, according to the Florida Times-Union of Jacksonville. While other smaller communities like New Smyrna Beach would also have to rebuild stations torn down decades ago, there is federal money available, according to Amtrak and government leaders.



NSBNEWS.net photo by Henry Frederick.

Amtrak officials wave as they pass through the West Canal crossover on their way from Miami to Jacksonville.

The Saturday run was a symbolic run with Amtrak senior staff and transportation

officials from throughout Florida aboard. Also boarding from Daytona Beach with a planned exit in St. Augustine was Canal Street merchant Flare Elliott, who has lobbied the New Smyrna Beach City Commission heavily in recent months for its support of rail service.

And although New Smyrna Beach officials have not committed any money yet, leaders here said if New Smyrna Beach is given a shot, the municipal support will be there.



NSBNEWS.net photo by Jeanette DiCara.

Passenger train supporters say the return of the service would vastly improve downtown New Smyrna Beach.

"We need this," City Commissioner Jack Grasty said. "If we can get a little more clout, maybe we can get a stop."

Grasty sees that clout in the form of Congresswoman Suzanne Kosmas, D-New Smyrna Beach.

Jay Pendergast, a local architect involved in community and civic activities, said the economic engine theme is paramount. The four corners of Canal and U.S. has languished over the last several decades, and even with millions pumped into the Canal Street area through Community Redevelopment Agency funds over the last quarter-century, the railroad was always the driving force.



NSBNEWS.net photo by Jeanette DiCara.

Madden Adams, 6, of New Smyrna Beach, points to the oncoming Amtrak train.

"It was nice that 50 people turned out because this is an important economic driver," Pendergast said.

Not only would it mean stronger commerce here, but through mass transit, New Smyrna Beach would have a stronger link to other cities and, of course, the railroad infrastructure is already in place, he added.