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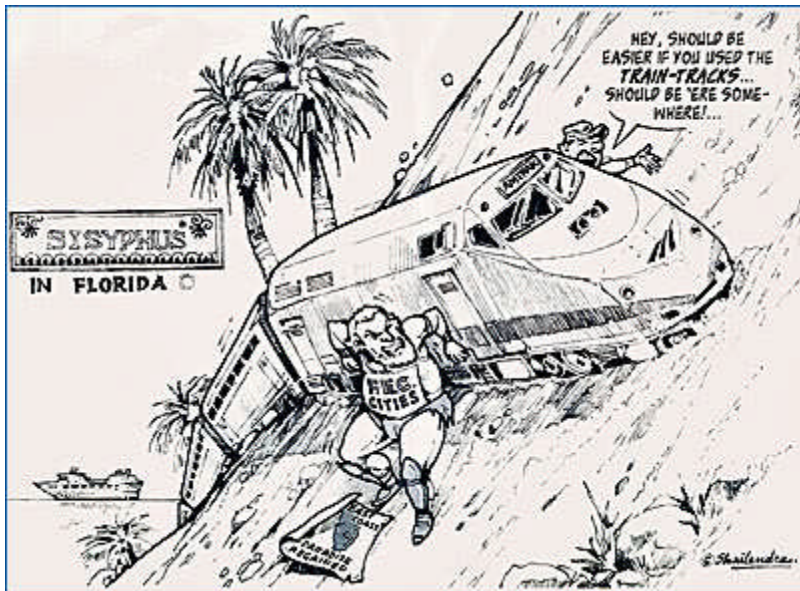
May 4, 2010



In a cartoon that really says it all, Florida's east coast cities are depicted trying to move an Amtrak train up-the-hill by brute force — while the conductor quips, "Should be easier if you used the train-tracks ... should be 'ere somewhere!"

The cartoon character, which represents FEC towns like St. Augustine, Daytona Beach Titusville, Cocoa and Melbourne, is portrayed as the mythological Sisyphus; who was punished by being cursed to roll a huge boulder up a hill — only to watch it roll back down, and to repeat this throughout eternity.

The FEC tracks, which today are only used to transport freight, once carried railroad passengers from Miami to Jacksonville with stops along the way in towns like West Palm Beach and St. Augustine where Henry Flagler wanted to fill his luxury resort hotels.



That was in the late 1800's, and, still today, hoteliers in America's oldest historic city want to sell beds. Granted, cars get people to St. Augustine — but gridlock and congestion, particularly downtown where many streets were laid out in the 1500's and 1600's, make awkward navigation for visiting vacationers.

Sisyphus, like the FEC cities in the cartoon, also promoted navigation and commerce, however, for his trickery, Sisyphus was bound to an eternity of frustration — and it appears that east coast towns like St. Augustine could regain the benefits of passenger rail travel.

In order to accomplish this vital task, our local, county and state officials must educate themselves on the issues and they must show unified support for the restoration of Amtrak - FEC corridor train service.

We don't control the disposition of federal stimulus funds on a local level. However, last night, when city commissioners met in St. Augustine Beach and the vice-chairman of the board of county commissioners, Ken Bryan, throw up their hands when asked why they didn't participate in last weekend's Amtrak evaluation event, are we presenting an informed, unified and interested appearance to our partners and showing the appropriate level of support for a project that would bring jobs, visitors and vacationers back into our community?

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May 2010

S M T W T F S

[1](#)

[2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [5](#) 6 7 8

9 10 11 12 13 14 15

16 17 18 19 20 21 22

23 24 25 26 27 28 29

30 31

[« Apr](#)


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- [Featured](#) (2)
- [Government](#) (480)
- [Local Events](#) (420)
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