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Time's at hand to support passenger rail for St. Augustine

Posted: May 8, 2010 - 12:10am



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As hope for expanded passenger rail service builds along Florida's East Coast, the nation celebrates National Train Day today. It's an official celebration created by Amtrak to mark the 141st anniversary of transcontinental service in the United States.

Who doesn't love watching trains go by unless they are caught in a traffic tie up at a railroad crossing? Trains whisk along tracks through

woodlands and fields and slow to a crawl on Main Street USA. They cross narrow bridges designed only for their tracks and slowly move through tunnels in mountains in parts north of us.

Tuesday night we are having our own version of Train Day at St. Augustine's City Hall. The Florida Department of Transportation, in conjunction with the Federal Railroad Administration, will hold a workshop on returning passenger service over the Florida East Coast Railway from Jacksonville to West Palm Beach and then to Miami via CSX rails.

It's fitting that St. Augustine is in this proposed rail system. FEC was started in St. Augustine more than a century ago by Henry M. Flagler. His railroad opened Florida's east coast to development and tourism in the late 19th century.

This 21st century grass roots effort began in Melbourne several years ago among coastal regional planning councils. It is in the hunt for \$260-million-plus in federal stimulus dollars to boost business and tourism opportunities. Daytona Beach, Melbourne, Cocoa, Titusville, Vero Beach, Fort Pierce and Stuart are the other seven proposed stops.

Imagine the possibilities not just inside Florida but to parts elsewhere; New York, Washington, Chicago, Los Angeles.

Modern railway passenger service ended here more than 40 years ago but this proposed service could bring it back by 2012. That's a year ahead of the start of St. Augustine's two-year 450th birthday celebration. The draw of the 450th, coupled with passenger rail service right to St. Augustine, would be a huge boost to the \$700 million tourists already spend here.

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We welcome state and federal officials for this workshop. It behooves our community to turn out to hear about our future in passenger rail service. Our community is not shy when it comes to speaking up about how special projects shape our future. Be a voice for our future Tuesday night. All aboard.

If you go

The workshop is at City Hall, 75 King St., in the Alcazar Room where the St. Augustine City Commission meets. Project information will be available at 6 p.m. A formal presentation will begin at 6:30 p.m., followed by an informal question-and-answer session.

Written comments will be accepted up to 10 days after the workshop. Comments should be addressed to Gregor Senger, FDOT Project Manager, via e-mail at gregor.senger@dot.state.fl.us, by mail to him at FDOT District Four, 3400 West Commercial Boulevard, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33309, or by phone, toll-free, (866) 336-8435, ext. 4141.

On the Web

www2.dot.state.fl.us/publicsyndication/publicmeetings.aspx

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Amtrak special a huge success.

By [fec32yrs](#) | 05/08/10 - 12:19



The Amtrak passenger special that ran last week was a huge success. All involved came away with a feeling of now is the time to bring back passenger service on Florida's east coast.

Two things that need to be tweaked though:

1. Bunnell put on by far the best showing and support for service, after Stuart, even though the train did not stop there down or back. When knowledge of their turnout reached the train via communication from trackside information conduits the train DID take the time to at least slow down through Bunnell as a token of appreciation for their turnout which included an American flag lined RofW, 150 plus people, and the Mayor and city officers on raised platforms surrounded by fire trucks, etc. As county seat of Flagler, and surrounding Palm Coast's burgeoning population growth a station at best, or at least a flag stop would bridge the gap between Saint Augustine and Daytona.

2. Forget about going CSX from West Palm Beach to Miami. Run the train right on down the east coast to downtown Miami where it belongs. Those wanting to disembark for Tri-rail could theoretically be transported to Tri-rail from a stop at West Palms 3rd street across the old water plant rail bed by tram to CSX's station. This railway (FEC) runs through the heart of every downtown from West Palm south and is the



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most logical route to drop off people as close to those downtowns as possible.

Here's to hoping it all works out.

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[Efficient Railway System via St. Augustine](#)

By [CommodoreKlaus](#) | 05/09/10 - 10:11



Regular train service between Jacksonville and Miami with a nice train station/stop in St. Augustine would certainly boost tourism here. The railway operators should first consult successful European railway operators to gain experience, knowledge and know-how to make it convenient for passengers , efficient and profitable for the Florida system.

Commodore Klaus Baumann

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[Amtrak the pre-cursor to your health care system](#)

By [rancov](#) | 05/09/10 - 11:53



It has lost over 22 billion in the last 20 years. The subsidy per passenger for some routes is over \$ 460.00 (from Amtrak itself

<http://bobmccarty.com/2009/10/28/amtraks-per-passenger-subsidy/>)

Technology has killed the passenger rail system. Only the bureaucrats and those in denial refuse to acknowledge it. Fine, want rail traffic, let the passengers pay for it, not the taxpayers. Good luck finding people willing to pay \$ 1200 round trip Miami to New York and willing to take 36 hours to get there to boot.

I love trains too but I do not expect the taxpayers to pay for it. But there are plenty of tourist destinations where you can relive the fantasy without taxpayer subsidy.

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[There may be an argument for](#)

By [lonnya](#) | 05/12/10 - 11:58



There may be an argument for passenger rail service, but not the kind we offer today or by 2012. It is an economic loser without modern high speed (I mean bullet) trains that can compete cost effectively and with comfort, convenience and travel time. That means a huge investment in equipment, track and infrastructure. Until then its a boondoggle. The automobile, intra and interstate highways, air and even buses are more viable than old cumbersome slow passenger trains. Super high density short commuter train routes yes - but this longer distance travel - is not going to work with the technology we are using.

Invite the Japanese to show us how before we go crazy on this.

Dare I say it -- it hurts but here it comes --- rancov is right!

"Loyal Opposition" does not include Sedition or Treason

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