



The Abrams Agenda

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Palm Beach County Commissioner
Steven Abrams

No More Train Horns and More....

As a South Florida Regional Transportation Authority (SFRTA) board member for the past 6 years, one of my top priorities has been regional mobility. There are some new and exciting projects in the works that will provide transportation options for local residents and the millions of tourists who visit the region. It is expected that South Florida's population will increase by over 3 million over the next two decades. With the existing road system reaching capacity and the need for alternative transportation options, there are some new projects in the works.

Background

There are two main rail corridors running through Palm Beach County: the CSX (now called the South Florida Rail Corridor) where Tri-Rail offers commuter service) and the Florida East Coast (FEC) Railway (currently used by freight trains). The Tri-Rail commuter trains travel along the CSX tracks which run parallel to I-95. Tri-Rail operates seven days a week, serving the fifth largest urbanized area in the nation. Services include about 50 commuter trains transporting approximately 15,000 passengers on weekdays from Miami to West Palm Beach (Magnolia Park).



One of the busiest Tri-Rail stations is in Boca Raton, serving approximately 62,000 riders monthly. These Tri-Rail trains will continue to operate on the CSX tracks, even when new services on other tracks are offered. The FEC corridor, located further east, will soon have new passenger train service in addition to the freight trains.

Coastal Link

One of the new projects is the Coastal Link, to be operated by Tri-Rail, that will provide passenger service on the eastern FEC tracks along an 85-mile stretch and connect historic downtowns between Miami and Jupiter, with many stops along the way. The Coastal Link is projected to generate an extensive range of benefits for coastal towns throughout Palm Beach County, such as new transit-oriented development, job creation and greater mobility for residents and visitors.

Brightline

Brightline, which is operated by All Aboard Florida, is a higher-speed train service with fewer stations that will travel from West Palm Beach to Miami beginning in 2017, with service to Orlando later. The new modern trains will transport riders from West Palm Beach to Fort Lauderdale in approximately 30 minutes, and another 30 minutes to Miami. Construction of the station in West Palm Beach is nearing completion now. The Brightline trains will use the FEC railways.

Quiet Zones

Brightline will be adding a second track to the FEC line and making major improvements to 178 crossings between Miami and West Palm Beach. These upgrades include the installation of adequate safety structures to create quiet zones that eliminate requirements for train horns. The crossings will be level with the roadway and equipped with warning devices such as gates, flashing lights, bells, roadway striping and signage. The quiet zones will apply to freight trains too!

How does it work? About 30 seconds before a train arrives at a crossing, warning devices activate, and traffic on the roadway stops to let the train pass. The entire cycle including closing of gates, a train passing and reopening of gates, will take less than 60 seconds for the new passenger trains.

As a result of the work on these intersections, you may have recently experienced some closings at numerous railroad crossings throughout the county, but the good news is that pretty soon you won't be hearing train horns anymore!

BCC Briefs

At the November 1, 2016, Board of County Commissioners meeting, the board took the following action:

Financially Assisted Agencies – amended the contract for provision of financial assistance with the Mental Health Association of Palm Beach County for the period of Oct. 1, 2016, through Sept. 30, 2017. Funding was increased by \$93,177 for a total of \$274,977 to provide referral services to clients seeking help with behavioral health concerns. The board also approved a waiver of conflict of interest for Pam Gionfriddo, CEO of the Mental Health Association of Palm Beach County who is a member of the Citizens Advisory Committee on Health and Human Services.

Jobs – granted an exception to the county's job growth incentive agreement with GARDA USA, Inc.,

forgiving the job advertising requirement regarding the availability of new positions within the company through ads in countywide, Hispanic and minority news venues and sending the job descriptions to CareerSource and the West Career Center.

Hazardous materials – approved on preliminary reading and to advertise for public hearing on November 22 amendments to the Hazardous Materials Response Ordinance. The ordinance is being revised to provide that uniform policies and procedures in Resolution 2013-0193 will apply to the Hazardous Materials Oversight Committee and to clarify cost recovery provisions.

Fire Rescue – approved on preliminary reading and to advertise for public hearing on November 22 amendments to the boundaries of the Fire Rescue municipal services taxing unit (MSTU) to include the recently incorporated city of Westlake. The board also approved a restated agreement with NAPA for FDO/Fleet Management on-site integrated inventory management services to include Fire Rescue support services at an estimated annual cost of \$4,479,600.

TraumaHawk – approved an interlocal agreement with the Health Care District of Palm Beach County for aeromedical emergency medical services. The 10-year agreement provides the terms under which the county provides emergency medical personnel to staff the Health Care District's TraumaHawk air ambulance service.

Transit Village – approved a one-year time extension beyond August 13, 2017, to allow the developer of Transit Village, LLC to obtain building permits and complete closing on the Wedge property near downtown West Palm Beach. In August 2012, the board approved the sale by the county of certain interests in the Wedge property for \$3.6 million. This is a complicated transaction with many layers of required government approvals.

Baseball stadium – received a very positive update on construction of a new Major League Baseball stadium and recreation complex on Haverhill Road south of 45th Street in West Palm Beach. Developers said the project is on schedule for a February 28, 2017, Spring Training grand opening.

Portofino Apartments – approved a State Housing Initiatives Partnership (SHIP) program funding award in the amount of \$494,000 to Portofino Apartments, Ltd. for rehabilitation of the 270-unit multifamily rental development located in Palm Springs. These are state grant funds that require no local match.

Lifespace Communities – adopted a resolution approving the issuance of up to \$40 million in Palm Beach County health facilities revenue bonds for Lifespace Communities, Inc. Some of the funding will be used to finance and refinance improvements at Abbey Delray, a life-care retirement development on Lawson Blvd. in Delray Beach. No county funds nor its taxing power, faith or credit are involved.

Family leave – directed staff to research possibly providing paid family leave benefits to county employees for the birth of a child, adopting a child or taking in a foster child.



If you have any questions or require assistance, please contact my office at 561-355-2204 or email at sabrams@pbcgov.org.

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