



SUNRAIL:

The Train is Moving

By Thornton J. Williams, Williams McMillian PA

On November 3, 2011, the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) completed the purchase of the 61-mile SunRail commuter rail corridor owned by CSX. Additionally, CSX also announced the same day, an increased infrastructure investment in Florida to \$500 million over the next eight years.

With the purchase of the corridor, the state's contractors will begin to manage and maintain the 61-mile corridor including signal and track maintenance. FDOT Secretary Ananth Prasad, PE stated, "[This] purchase is another important step in the process to bring SunRail commuter rail to Central Florida. All along the way, the Department has worked closely with federal, state, local and private partners to help achieve the vision to deliver the most effective and efficient commuter rail system in the country."

FDOT will pay for the operations and maintenance (O & M) of the system for the first seven years of the operations, after which the system will be turned over to the Central Florida Commuter Rail Commission. The Commission will assume all responsibilities of O & M and pay for the full operation of the SunRail system for year eight and beyond. In turn, the local communities will pay for all costs of the system beyond what the revenues from the system can sustain.

The first phase of SunRail runs 31-miles and will serve 12 stations, linking DeBary to Sand Lake Road in Orange County, Orlando. This segment includes stations in DeBary; Sanford, Lake Mary, Longwood, Altamonte Springs, Maitland, Winter Park, Florida Hospital, LYNX Central Station, Church Street, Orlando Health/Amtrak and Sand Lake Road. By 2016, extended service is planned for stations at Meadow Woods, Osceola Parkway, Kissimmee Amtrak and Poinciana Industrial Park, as well as

a new northern terminus at the DeLand Amtrak station.

On January 27, 2012, construction of the \$357.2 Million Phase I of the SunRail commuter rail officially began, marking the beginning of a new chapter in transportation in Orlando and Central Florida. Secretary Ananth Prasad, Congressman John Mica, Congresswoman Corinne Brown and Federal Transit Administration Regional Administrator Dr. Yvette Taylor joined local funding partners and several hundred supporters at a ground breaking ceremony at the future home of the SunRail station in Altamonte Springs to signal the start of construction of the SunRail commuter rail project in Central Florida.

Service for Phase I is expected to begin in early 2014. The funding plan provides 50 percent federal funding, 25 percent state funding and 25 percent local funding from Volusia, Seminole, Orange and Osceola counties and the City of Orlando for the entire 61-mile project. The federal government is contributing its 50% of the cost through a \$178.6 Million dollar grant announced by Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood in July 2011, with the remainder \$178.6 million dollar amount being shared equally between the state and local authorities.

Likewise, Phase I of SunRail will also include the double-tracking of the former CSX line, signal improvements, stations and construction of an operations control center. In turn, MotivePower is to supply seven diesel locomotives for \$17.5 Million and Bombardier will provide 14 push-pull BiLevel coaches for \$30 Million.

Phase II will serve 5 additional stations, north to DeLand and south to Poinciana.

When SunRail service begins, trains will run every half-hour during peak hours and every two hours during off-peak times on weekdays only. As the system matures, FDOT already has done an environmental analysis that would allow local officials to increase the frequency of trains to every 15 minutes during peak hours and every hour during off-peak times, as well as expand service to weekends. However, that's not expected to happen for at least 20 years or more, and then only in response to community demand for more frequent service. In turn, it is estimated that ridership fees for SunRail riders will consist of an average fare of \$2.50 for travel within one county and \$1 per additional county.

The 61-mile commuter rail line with 17 station stops is estimated to generate over 13,000 new jobs, bringing over \$1.5 billion in economic benefits to the region. Additionally, there has been discussion regarding transit-oriented development opportunities at each of the SunRail Phase I station sites. Estimates regarding Transit Oriented Development associated with SunRail have been put at 245,000 new jobs and over \$7 billion in economic benefits.

The SunRail project includes a number of private sector participants who have made commitments to invest hundreds of millions of dollars in developing areas around the stations and along the corridor, including:

- Walt Disney World has committed to partially subsidize Commuter Bus Transit Service throughout Central Florida to its property.
- In exchange for the purchase of rail track, CSX has committed to investments in railways all over the state. These investments will support other infrastructure such as helping

make Florida's ports more accessible for trade.

- Florida Hospital has committed to pay \$3.5 million for its own rail stop and to market and subsidize ridership for all its 17,000 employees.
- Tupperware Brands Corporation has committed to donate 10 acres of land to serve as the site for the proposed Osceola Parkway station and to establish a shuttle service to carry employees and others to encourage ridership.
- Rida Development Corporation will invest in Transit Oriented Development at Downtown Orlando's Central SunRail stop.
- Ustler Development Inc., will redevelop the old Amway Arena, 68-acre site in the heart of downtown Orlando.
- Orange Crown Holdings will invest in Transit-Oriented Development adjoining the City of Longwood's SunRail station.
- Avatar Properties Inc. will maximize development of Industrial Park which has station close to Park's businesses in Osceola County.
- SeaWorld Orlando will offer shuttle bus service for employees who will use SunRail.
- Orlando Magic will relocate corporate headquarters to Downtown Orlando near Church Street Station stop.

In conclusion, there is no doubt that the SunRail train is moving. The next big challenge once SunRail is in service will be to ensure SunRail's success by finding ways to secure consistent ridership. SunRail is expected to carry as many passengers as one lane of I-4 during peak hours. ■

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