



Florida Department of Transportation

District One

Rail Traffic Evaluation

Frequently Asked Question (FAQ's)

Will the public be allowed to participate in the decision-making process and provide feedback?

The public outreach program developed as part of this study will involve public participation. The initial workshop meeting held on July 10th, presented the project team's plan for the study and provided an overview of the initial concepts and assumptions that will guide the effort. This was an introductory session to set the framework of the study and start the community thinking about opportunities and constraints.

The project team will hold more workshops that will involve more feedback from the community. It is likely that they will take different formats as warranted by project progress. Some events will be informational with informal questions and answers in an open house-style setting. Other sessions will involve a formal presentation and formal question and answer period. The format will depend on whether the meeting is intended to gather information from the public or present the work accomplished since the last information-gathering session.

The study team will also meet with local officials—including both elected officials and technical staff—to discuss issues of particular concern. The project website www.fdotrailtrafficevaluation.com will be updated regularly and includes an email address for use in submitting questions and comments to the FDOT project team.

Addressing Polk County is good, but why not do a statewide rail plan?

The State of Florida Department of Transportation has prepared a statewide rail plan that addresses both passenger and freight rail, the Florida Rail System Plan. The law requires that the plan be updated every two years. 2008 is an update year, and a new plan is being developed. Currently there are Rail Stakeholders meetings scheduled around the state in which an Advisory Committee (consisting of all transportation stakeholders) has been established and are working diligently to produce a statewide plan with public input. For more information, you can go to the Rail Website at <http://www.dot.state.fl.us/rail/plandevol.shtm>, Rail System Plan Development. However, even with the most current updates, the Florida Rail System Plan must address transportation from a statewide perspective and describes local programs in general terms.



The best way to develop a functional and efficient large-scale transportation plan is to focus on manageable segments first, make these segments efficient and effective, and then link the separate segments together to provide regional and then statewide coverage. District 1, which focuses on important local issues, is an integral component of producing a functional statewide rail transit network.

The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), in cooperation with the federal government and local officials in Orange, Seminole, Volusia and Osceola counties and the city of Orlando are advancing the Central Florida Commuter Rail Project while the Tampa Bay Area Regional Transit Authority (TBARTA) is working on transit plan for their region. It is FDOT's goal that in time, these regional systems may be linked up to provide statewide mobility and reduce dependence on automobiles. The study will take into consideration Central Florida's and TBARTA's plans, but the focus will be on Polk County's needs first and foremost. Transit improvements recommended for the Polk County area as part of the District 1 study will be incorporated in a future statewide *Rail System Plan*.

How is this study different from other studies and data collection efforts completed in the past?

Each study that was performed examined transit and transportation options from a different perspective and in many instances included Polk County or parts of Polk County in a regional scheme, but none focused on the linkages within Polk County and how they interact with systems extending out from the county. This study will address these linkages and system interactions.

This study focuses specifically on Polk County and its connectivity to immediately adjacent economic centers. Data is currently being collected and analyzed to assess local transit needs based on sophisticated modeling of current circumstances and anticipated trends in population and employment. This data will serve as inputs in the development of transit alternatives that specifically address the needs of Polk County residents and workers. Public workshops will be held at project milestones to present this data and receive feedback from the community.

What transit options are being considered and will they include new alignments and new technologies?

Transit modes (bus, commuter rail, intercity rail, etc) will be evaluated based on an assessment of ridership demand, capacity for future expansion, and costs. The need for expanded transit services in Polk County will first be quantified, and then alignment and technology options that match that need will be identified.

Expensive capital investments, such as elevating or grade-separating a rail service or busway, or implementing an experimental or new vehicle technology, typically require high levels of ridership demand to support the cost. The study will include technical



analyses of ridership demand, service plan development, and alignment configuration in order to perform the necessary cost-benefit analysis.

Is it possible to operate passenger trains on freight tracks?

Yes, it is possible to operate passenger rail service on tracks that are used by freight trains; in fact, it is being done successfully today in Polk County by Amtrak and CSX, which share the same right of way. However, there are regulations and standards that must be carefully followed.

Before passenger service can begin, existing freight railroad infrastructure that is not already shared by passenger service may need to be upgraded to accommodate the passenger rail vehicles. Infrastructure that is already used by passenger trains, such as the tracks used by Amtrak, may not need upgrades.

There are also coordination agreements that must be worked out between the passenger vehicles and the existing freight operators. The passenger rail operating schedule must also be developed with the freight operators, and agreements must be reached on safety protocol, dispatching, maintenance of the rail infrastructure, and associated issues. The greater the volume of freight traffic, the more complex these arrangements would become.

Why can't Amtrak just provide more service?

This study is limited to intra-Polk County issues and connectivity to immediately adjacent economic centers. Amtrak service is oriented toward long-haul passenger rail, not frequent commuter or local service, which are anticipated to be the focus of the study. However, this study will also consider greater levels of intercity service as part of a comprehensive assessment of transit needs and opportunities. As an operator of intercity service in the study area, Amtrak will be consulted during the study process.

What options are being examined to route freight traffic away from populated areas and protect our natural and recreational resources?

FDOT has committed to a thorough examination of a comprehensive long list of corridors for their rail potential. To be comprehensive, this list includes the full range of available options, including the use of existing and former rail corridors, utility corridors, and new rights of way.

The evaluation will include a comparison of costs and benefits of each corridor on the long list, as well as an assessment of potential impacts, which include quality of life issues affecting populated areas. The use of corridors currently used as trails would have an impact on the amount of public parks and recreation areas in Polk County, on the financial investment made in these corridors, and on the various users of the system. In the objective evaluation of the relative costs, benefits, and impacts of the corridors under



study, FDOT will take into consideration critical environmental, social, and logistical factors as well as feedback from the community regarding their concerns and preferences.

What is being done to reduce rail noise?

Quiet zones can be implemented to reduce noise impacts along railroad corridors. These are locally-sponsored initiatives, but they have been successful in reducing railroad noise impacts in other parts of the county. As the study progresses, the need for and process for identifying quiet zones will be discussed with the affected community as part of the public outreach process.

How much will freight traffic increase in the future in Polk County - both in terms of volume and train length?

A critical part of the analysis is the development of realistic assumptions about future conditions. Forecasts may be affected by many variables, including demographic, market and economic conditions that are beyond anyone's control. Therefore, this analysis will present future conditions analyses for the year 2030 for low, medium and high scenarios.

How are response times for emergency vehicles that have to use the grade crossings being addressed in the analysis?

A detailed analysis of grade crossings on the "S" Line from North Kathleen to West Lake Wales is currently underway. This analysis includes surveys and direct consultation with both emergency service providers and school districts. Dialogue with emergency service providers will remain open and ongoing throughout the life of the study so that the needs and concerns of emergency service responders are accurately represented in the options recommended for future study.