

# Passenger Rail Workshop Minutes



April 27, 2022



1:30 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.



## Participants

### Committee Voting Members

Gregory Stuart | Broward MPO (Chair)  
Greg Slay | Capital Region TPA  
D’Juan Harris | Charlotte County-Punta  
Gorda MPO  
Beth Alden | Hillsborough TPO (Vice-Chair)  
Gary Huttman | MetroPlan Orlando  
Rob Balmes | Ocala/Marion County TPO  
Valerie Neilson | Palm Beach TPA  
David Hutchinson | Sarasota/Manatee MPO  
Peter Buchwald | St. Lucie TPO

### Committee Alternate Members

Scott Philips | Collier MPO  
Elizabeth Watkins | Hillsborough TPO  
Ricardo Vazquez | Martin MPO  
Alex Trauger | MetroPlan Orlando  
Kevin Walford | Miami-Dade TPO  
Carl Mikyska | Pasco County MPO  
Ryan Brown | Sarasota/Manatee MPO

### Friends of the Committee

Scott Koons | Gainesville MTPO  
Ron Gogoi | Lee County MPO  
Parag Agrawal | Polk TPO  
Steven Bostel | Space Coast TPO

### MPOAC Staff

Mark Reichert | MPOAC  
Lisa Stone | MPOAC

### Other MPO Participants

Paul Flavien | Broward MPO  
Gary Kramer | Emerald Coast RC  
Whit Blanton | Forward Pinellas  
Robert Esposito | Hernando/Citrus MPO  
Don Scott | Lee County MPO

Grég Gabriel | Palm Beach TPA  
Scott Ferry | Pasco County MPO

### FDOT Participants

Alison Stettner | FDOT  
Erika Thompson | FDOT  
Daniel Ochoa | FDOT  
Holly Cohen | FDOT  
Jennifer Fortunas | FDOT  
Victoria Williams | FDOT

### FHWA Participants

Cathy Kendall | FHWA

### FRA Participants

Ryan Arbuckle | FRA  
Randy Brown | FRA

### Amtrak Participants

Jeff Gerlach | Amtrak  
Todd Stennis | Amtrak

### Elected Officials

Comm. Sandy Johnson | City of Lighthouse  
Point  
Comm. Kimberly Overman | Hillsborough  
County  
Comm. Christina Fitzpatrick | Pasco County

### Other Participants

Mike Williamson | Cambridge Systematics  
Erin Lasala | Cambridge Systematics  
Todd Brauer | Whitehouse Group  
Tom Brandenstein | Whitehouse Group  
Nicholas Torres | Whitehouse Group

## DISCUSSION ITEMS

1. **Beth Alden** (Committee Vice Chair) opened the workshop and welcomed everyone present.
2. **Nicholas Torres** gave the introduction to the Passenger Rail Workshop. He provided an overview of the workshop schedule, which included initial feedback from the registration survey, presentations from the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), and Amtrak, and a breakout activity for voting on potential actions the Committee could include as part of regular business.
  - a. The registration survey included open-ended questions to gauge the Committee's interests in new funding opportunities from the FRA, how the MPOAC should interact with the FDOT, and what is the most crucial role of the Committee:
    - i. There is significant interest in the Federal Railroad Administration's (FRA) new corridor identification program and what new funding opportunities are available through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) / Bilateral Infrastructure Law (BIL) to expand passenger rail services in Florida.
    - ii. The MPOAC should engage FDOT in a collaborative process and promote viable local and regional efforts to expand passenger rail services in Florida, including developing a priority list program like the Freight Priorities Program (FPP).
    - iii. The Committee should represent a unified voice and advocate on behalf of Florida MPOs to FDOT for prioritizing rail projects and partnering with FDOT to develop statewide freight and rail planning activities.
  - b. The registration survey asked participants to rank themes identified in the Best Practices & Activities in Promoting the Expansion of Passenger Rail Systems Report that would help inform potential activities for the Committee and help update the Committee's mission and vision:
    1. Prioritization;
    2. Collaboration;
    3. Advocacy;
    4. Funding;
    5. Safety; and,
    6. Efficient Administration.
3. **Nicholas Torres** introduced **Ryan Arbuckle**, FRA Senior Industrial Economist, to present an overview of the IIJA/BIL, including new and existing FRA grant programs and eligibility requirements, and a calendar for FRA Corridor ID Program milestones:
  - a. **Ryan Arbuckle** introduced **Randy Brown** to the Committee as the southeast region project manager for FRA.
  - b. New FRA grant program opportunities under the IIJA/BIL include:
    - i. Railroad Crossing Elimination—\$3 billion (\$600 million annually) to promote highway-rail or pathway-rail grade crossing improvement projects that focus on improving the safety and mobility of people and goods.
    - ii. Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail—\$36 billion (\$7.2 billion annually) to fund capital projects that reduce the state of good repair backlog, improve performance, or expand or establish new intercity

- passenger rail service, including privately operated intercity passenger rail service if an eligible applicant is involved.
- iii. Interstate Rail Compacts—\$15 million (\$3 million annually) to fund interstate rail compacts’ administrative costs and conduct railroad systems planning, promote intercity passenger rail operations, and prepare grant applications.
- c. FRA discussed milestone events for the remainder of the 2022 calendar year:
    - i. April 2022 – Railroad Crossing Elimination Program listening sessions;
    - ii. April/May 2022 – Benefit-Cost Analysis Educational webinar;
    - iii. May 2022 – Corridor Identification and Development Program Framework document published;
    - iv. May/June 2022 – FY 2021 CRISI selections announced;
    - v. June 2022 – FY 2022 Railroad Crossing Elimination Program Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) announced;
    - vi. June 2022 – Northeast Corridor Project Inventory Notice for Comment published
    - vii. August 2022 – FY 2022 CRISI NOFO announced;
    - viii. August/September 2022 – FY 21 Federal-State Partnership selections announced;
    - ix. October 2022 – FY 22 Federal-State Partnership (National) NOFO announced;
    - x. November 2022 – Northeast Corridor Project Inventory published; and,
    - xi. December 2022 – FY 22 Federal-State Partnership (Northeast Corridor) NOFO announced.
  - d. FRA discussed statutory deadlines and considerations related to developing a pipeline of projects for the Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail’s Corridor Identification Program:
    - i. For each selected proposal, FRA must partner with the entity that submitted the proposal to prepare or update an existing Service Development Plan (SDP), which must include a “corridor project inventory”; and,
    - ii. Establish a prioritized “pipeline” of projects that may be implemented with funding provided under FRA’s (and potentially other Federal) capital investment financial assistance programs.
    - iii. Eligibility includes both short-distance (under 750 miles) services, increasing the frequency of long-distance service, and restoring service over any route formerly operated by Amtrak.
    - iv. FRA must establish the Corridor Identification Program within 180 days from the enactment of the IIJA.
    - v. The first Congressional report on the project pipeline is due by May 14, 2023.
  - e. FRA provided the following contact information to the Committee:
    - i. **Ryan Arbuckle**, Senior Industry Economist – [ryan.arbuckle@dot.gov](mailto:ryan.arbuckle@dot.gov)
    - ii. **Randy Brown**, Project Manager, Southeast Region – [randall.brown@dot.gov](mailto:randall.brown@dot.gov)
    - iii. FRA Governmental Affairs – [FRAGA@dot.gov](mailto:FRAGA@dot.gov)
    - iv. FRA Public Affairs – [FRAPA@dot.gov](mailto:FRAPA@dot.gov)

4. **Nicholas Torres** introduced **Holly Cohen**, FDOT Freight and Rail Planning Administrator, to present on the regional listening sessions conducted by FDOT as part of the public outreach phase of the update to the State Rail Plan:
  - a. Connections to new destinations or modes, more frequent and reliable service, and first/last-mile connections to transit were the top results for live polling on what would encourage passenger rail use.
  - b. Common themes for passenger rail included education/awareness, a partnership between FDOT, railroads, and local jurisdictions, safety, funding, convenience and speed, specific routes and station suggestions, rail corridor preservation for expansion and capacity, technology, connectivity, accessibility, and consistency and frequency of service.
  - c. FDOT plans to complete the Rail System Plan update by December 2022 and concurrently develop a statewide passenger rail strategy. The strategy will incorporate lessons learned from how FDOT previously addressed passenger rail.
  - d. FDOT will hold a statewide webinar (date to be determined) for a detailed breakdown of the regional listening sessions that will showcase unique and localized themes, inform the draft passenger rail strategy, and provide input on how FDOT prioritizes passenger rail projects.
  - e. FDOT provided the following next steps contact information to the Committee:
    - i. Send additional comments to [RAIL@dot.state.fl.us](mailto:RAIL@dot.state.fl.us) and [fdot.transit@dot.state.fl.us](mailto:fdot.transit@dot.state.fl.us)
    - ii. Continue the conversation at [FDOT.gov/rail/plans/railplan](http://FDOT.gov/rail/plans/railplan)
5. **Nicholas Torres** introduced **Jeff Gerlach**, Senior Director of Planning at Amtrak, to present on Options for Expanding Amtrak Service in Florida, including Amtrak's Connect Us vision for growing passenger rail service to currently unserved and underserved communities across America.
  - a. Amtrak's mission, in practice, is to provide retail and commercial transportation across three service lines (state-supported, long-distance, and Northeast Corridor), operate and maintain critical rail infrastructure used by Amtrak and other railroads, and operate or fund adjacent enterprises, including contract commuter services (e.g., Metrolink, a bus network that connects to Amtrak routes (thruway), charter trains, etc.).
  - b. Amtrak operates three once-daily long-distance routes that serve Florida:
    - i. The *Silver Star* (Miami to New York City via Tampa, Orlando, and CSX's "S-Line" (goes through Columbia, SC));
    - ii. The *Silver Meteor* (Miami to New York City via Orlando and CSX's "A-Line" (goes through Savannah, GA, and Charleston, SC)); and,
    - iii. The *Auto Train* (Sanford to Lorton, VA (DC area)).
    - iv. The *Sunset Limited* previously connected Orlando with Los Angeles, CA, but service east of New Orleans, LA, was suspended following Hurricane Katrina in 2005.
    - v. Amtrak does not currently operate any State-Supported corridor routes in Florida.
  - c. Amtrak's Connect Us is a vision for growing rail service in currently unserved and underserved communities across the US, in close partnership with states and other stakeholders:

- i. The proposal calls for expanding service in dozens of high-potential “corridors” along relatively densely populated clusters of communities less than 500 miles from end to end.
  - ii. Service expansions would operate as elements of Amtrak’s State-Supported Service, meaning Amtrak would typically provide the equipment and crews but operate by the sponsoring states’ wishes.
  - iii. Long-term operating losses (if any) would largely be covered by the relevant states; however, Amtrak is seeking significant new federal support for the up-front capital costs and early-year operating costs associated with service expansions.
- d. Possible new intercity Florida routes as part of Amtrak Connect Us include:
- i. New dedicated corridor rail service linking Florida metro areas along three routes:
    - 1. Tampa – Orlando – Jacksonville
      - a. Two daily roundtrip trains between Jacksonville and Tampa
      - b. Four daily roundtrip trains between Sanford, Orlando, and Tampa
    - 2. Tampa – Miami (three daily roundtrip trains)
    - 3. Sanford – Orlando – Miami (two daily roundtrip trains)
  - ii. New corridor trains would be complemented by continued operation of all current long-distance trains.
  - iii. New proposed new stations include:
    - 1. Northwest Jacksonville (Duval County);
    - 2. Orange Park (Clay County, FL);
    - 3. Orlando International Airport (Orange County); and,
    - 4. Miami Intermodal (Miami-Dade County).
- e. Possible new long-distance configurations include:
- i. Option 1
    - 1. The route of the NYC-Tampa-Miami *Silver Star* remains unchanged.
    - 2. The NYC – Miami *Silver Meteor* reroutes to the Florida East Coast Railway, returning to its present route in West Palm Beach and shortens the NYC – Miami trips times by over two hours.
  - ii. Option 2 – split the *Silver Meteor*, and *Silver Star* trains in Jacksonville, separate Jacksonville-Orlando-Tampa and Jacksonville-Daytona-Miami trains to continue to/from Central/South Florida terminals.
  - iii. The *Auto Train* remains unchanged in both options.
- f. Amtrak noted they do not see an opportunity for dedicated rail infrastructure between central Florida and Tampa; however, other expansion opportunities in Florida could utilize existing freight railroad ROW as freight lines consolidate their operations on the “S Line” between Tampa and Jacksonville, which could support not only corridor expansion, but potentially an expansion of regional commuter rail services like SunRail:
- i. Amtrak will pursue opportunities for co-investment with freight railroads to infill railroad ROW with new passenger rail services, including intercity and commuter rail.



- ii. Currently, Amtrak does not have a direct cost estimate for SunRail expansion to Tampa but has cost estimates for infrastructure improvements that would support SunRail expansion to Tampa by investing in the “A-Line” between Orlando and Tampa.
- g. Amtrak responded to a question about restoring service on the *Sunset Limited* between Pensacola, Tallahassee, and Jacksonville that was closed following Hurricane Katrina in 2005:
  - i. Amtrak attempted to restore service but was confronted by the host railroad (CSX) with a high cost to reinstitute that service.
  - ii. Amtrak expressed interest in continuing conversations with stakeholders for interest and support of restoring service on the *Sunset Limited*.
  - iii. The railroad between Pensacola and Jacksonville has been transferred from CSX Class I freight railroad to a regional shortline, which presents a potential opportunity for change in ownership and eventual service restoration.
  - iv. FRA’s new dedicated funding for restoring previously operated Amtrak lines might expedite restoration if the line is deemed viable, if Amtrak, the host railroad (CSX), and the State of Florida can agree on a joint capital partnership.
- h. Amtrak provided the following contact information to the Committee:
  - i. **Jeff Gerlach**, Senior Director, Planning – [jeff.gerlach@amtrak.com](mailto:jeff.gerlach@amtrak.com)
  - ii. **Todd Stennis**, Senior Manager, Government Affairs-South – [tl.stennis@amtrak.com](mailto:tl.stennis@amtrak.com)
- 6. The Committee participated in a breakout session activity to vote on and rank potential actions the Committee could take on as part of its regular business based on actions identified in the Best Practices & Activities in Promoting the Expansion of Passenger Rail Systems Report, the results identified:
  - a. Prioritization
    - i. Develop a passenger rail needs list (35 percent)
    - ii. Create a rail vision to inform state and metropolitan planning efforts (33 percent)
    - iii. Develop criteria for locating new or modifying existing passenger rail stations (32 percent)
  - b. Collaboration
    - i. Collaborate with federal and state partners on new funding opportunities (42 percent)
    - ii. Partner with rail owners and operators to identify pathways for expanding passenger rail services (32 percent)
    - iii. Assess existing shared-use agreements for opportunities to leverage cost-sharing (26 percent)
  - c. Advocacy
    - i. Build strategic partnerships between public rail authorities and private railroads (40 percent)
    - ii. Develop clear goals for expanding passenger rail (33 percent)
    - iii. Be a forum for championing local passenger rail needs (27 percent)
  - d. Funding

- i. Target rail improvements that support economic development and job growth (40 percent)
    - ii. Fund the acquisition of abandoned railroad ROW (35 percent)
    - iii. Evaluate applications for competitive grant funding (26 percent)
  - e. Safety (practices for Highway-Railway Grade Crossing Action Plans)
    - i. Adjust risk formulas to maximize funding opportunities (26 percent)
    - ii. Supplement Section 130 Highway-Railway Crossing Program funding with state dollars (23 percent)
    - iii. Incorporate benefit-cost evaluations into methodology (21 percent)
    - iv. Accelerate project execution (17 percent)
    - v. Invest the state's planning dollars in inventory improvement (14 percent)
  - f. Efficient Administration
    - i. Integrate required plans (40 percent)
    - ii. Create an independent authority (36 percent)
    - iii. Hire an executive director (24 percent)
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## ACTION ITEMS

1. Update the Committee's mission and vision statements with the input gained from the Passenger Rail Workshop, including the workshop registration ranking of themes and the live voting of potential Committee business actions by the October 27-28 meeting.
2. Develop criteria for identifying passenger rail needs from the MPOs, including intercity and commuter rail.
3. Coordinate with FDOT as part of the State Rail System Plan update to include an input of MPO passenger rail needs for intercity and commuter rail.
4. Expand partnership opportunities to understand better funding avenues with FDOT, FRA, Amtrak, regional transit agencies, and private operators.