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## TODAY'S NEWS

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# Team driving new commuter rail will engineer a fare hike

By LOU ORTIZ

Tri-Rail commuters should expect a bump up in fares when the South Florida East Coast Corridor commuter rail line gets rolling, officials said.

"We will probably increase fares," said Steven Abrams, chairman of the South Florida Regional Transportation Authority. "People understand paying a little more if there is a new service offered."

The proposed commuter service linking Palm Beach, Broward and Miami-Dade counties would run more than 50 trains daily, with stops in 22 stations along the way. The cities include Miami, Fort Lauderdale, West Palm Beach, Boynton Beach, Delray Beach, Deerfield Beach, Pompano Beach and Jupiter.

"We would mesh the two systems," he said. "We are working to integrate the systems so they would not compete. They would be complementary."

Mr. Abrams said cities along the route of the proposed South Florida East Coast Corridor rail runs will be asked to contribute to the project's financing.

"A key component is some funding from the cities where there will be station stops," he said.

Mr. Abrams said the daily eastern commuter corridor project would also seek funding from the federal government, but just as important would be generating revenue from mixed-use developments—retail, office space and residential—at stations along the route that can handle such projects.

"Mixed-use development on the Eastern Corridor would be a real value for the station sites," he said, "for all the cities along the way."

But Mr. Abrams said development might not be conducive for some stations along the route. That would depend on the availability of land, among other things.

Mixed-use developments are also being eyed for increased Tri-Rail revenue along the western tri-county routes—Palm Beach, Broward and Miami-Dade—from Mangonia Park to Hialeah station.

"At the Boca [Raton] station, there is a large piece of vacant land that would be good for housing and retail," Mr. Abrams said. "It would add economic value. Riders could go to the bank or have a cup of coffee."

He said a developer is interested in investing in a mixed-use project at the Tri-Rail station in West Palm Beach.

"The goal there is to work to augment our station with mixed-use development," Mr. Abrams said. "One is underway in West Palm Beach and another is in Boca Raton that I would like to jump start."

"These are long-term developments," he said. "There is developer interest in West Palm Beach, Boca and others in Broward."

Tri-Rail summer ridership is about 13,000 on weekdays. During the winter visitor season and when students are back in school, weekday ridership totals about 15,000.

Mr. Abrams said the start-up of the

east corridor project is an immediate goal.

"My priority is to start train service on the eastern track," said Mr. Abrams, adding that all that is needed is to "finalize a workable plan."

A timetable to operate would follow a huddle and agreement on a plan among the players, including the Florida Department of Transportation, the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) and the South Florida East Corridor.

"But we want to present possibilities to them," Mr. Abrams said. "We have the capability of administering train service on the eastern track without disruption or adding more bureaucracy. We've developed a plan that would provide service through all the downtowns."

"The RTA once had a very elaborate and costly plan to put service on the eastern line," he said. "We found a way to simplify it and now it's time to implement it."

Once completed, the project is expected to relieve congestion in the downtowns of the cities and enhance east-west and north-south connections.

Those connections include all modes of transportation alternatives, from Tri-Rail and Metrorail and tri-county bus services to interstate rail from Miami, Fort Lauderdale and West Palm Beach to Orlando, a private development by All Aboard Florida.

The All Aboard Florida service is designed for tourists and business

travelers. The 240-mile Orlando service is 100% privately funded, with completion expected in 2014.

During a July meeting of the Miami-Dade County Metropolitan Planning Organization, All Aboard Florida executives said the bullet-train type service is surging forward.

Tracks are already laid for 200 of the 240 miles for the project, which might eventually connect Jacksonville and Tampa, Eric D. Swanson, an executive with All Aboard Florida, told planning organization members. The Orlando to Miami leg, with stops in Fort Lauderdale and West Palm Beach, would be rolling by the end of 2014. The train is expected to reach top speeds of 100 to 125 mph.

"This will not displace freight or the east coast corridor," Mr. Swanson said. "We're not going in any location that rail doesn't go now."

"The trains will be the best locomotives that exist today," he said. "They will be quieter than the old ones."

Mr. Swanson said the project would create 1,200 construction jobs and 400 permanent jobs, along with thousands of indirect jobs in tourism and in other developments.

The project is expected to increase tourist trade in South Florida, with many of the 50 million people who annually visit Orlando having an easier way to get to the Miami area than the four-hour car ride or traveling by air.

"This is a 100% private operation," he said. "We're not asking for any government money. We have hired architects. We're going full speed ahead."