



South Florida East Coast Corridor Study News Clip

From: *Miami Herald*, Monday, March 18, 2013
Subject: **Miami-Orlando train service on track to roll in 2015**
Provided by: Jenine Sussman, CommunikatZ
jsussman@communikatZ.com

<http://www.miamiherald.com/2013/03/18/3293733/all-aboard-florida-on-track-for.html>

Miami-Orlando train service on track to roll in 2015

By Alfonso Chardy

Miami has Little Havana, South Beach and Miami Seaquarium. Orlando has Walt Disney World, Universal and SeaWorld. Tourists want to visit both.

As a result, more than 50 million people a year drive or fly between the two. And that's why a Coral Gables-based company, Florida East Coast Industries (FECI), is planning to operate a passenger train service between Miami and Orlando called All Aboard Florida.

"The two-city pair Miami-Orlando is just like the best city pair that you could ask for," said Husein Cumber, FECI's executive vice president for corporate development. "Orlando is the most-visited city in the country and Miami has its airport and ports and many other attractions."

Originally announced in March 2012, All Aboard Florida service was expected to launch in 2014. The start date has been moved back to 2015, Cumber said in a recent interview.

Aside from the delay, the project is on track.

The company's \$1 billion plan features 16 round trips a day from early morning to late evening with stops in Fort Lauderdale and West Palm Beach — with service possibly starting in late 2015. Trains would run hourly and each one-way trip would take about three hours.

Investment-grade ridership studies are complete, Cumber said, and FECI has received environmental approvals for its West Palm Beach-to-Miami segment and acquired land for its West Palm Beach station.

FECI has named a management team with Donald Robinson as president and chief operating officer, and Mike Reininger as president and chief development officer.

But many other issues must be resolved before operations can begin. On the list are engineering and environmental studies, construction of stations and of a rail track between Cocoa and Orlando, and decisions by municipalities along the route to establish so-called "quiet zones," where the engineer is not required to blow the whistle as the train approaches.

Quiet zones are perhaps one of the project's most challenging issues, eliciting emotional reaction among residents who live near the track and demand that the train pass by quietly. Only public authorities such as cities, counties and the state can apply for authorization to build a quiet zone.

"All Aboard Florida is in the process of determining the infrastructure needs for the system and we recognize that public agencies may want to explore opportunities to coordinate the construction of other improvements," Cumber said. "We are willing to explore these ideas while we are still in the initial design phase."

Quiet zones have already been set up along the existing stretch of the track in Miami, Cumber said. The Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council is looking into the possibility, an official said.

Residents in Miami's Buena Vista neighborhood, whose homes face the track, are split on the issue. Some don't want trains using the corridor at all because they're worried about noise at night. But others don't mind.

"It's fine if they resume frequent service on the track," said Wilson Arroyo, who has lived for 60 years in Buena Vista homes near the track. "Before we had a lot of cargo trains and they didn't bother us."

Cargo service on the track was discontinued in 2005 when a storm damaged rail facilities at the port.

Florida East Coast Railway (FEC), an affiliate of FECI, recently upgraded a rail track that links PortMiami to Jacksonville and the Hialeah Rail Yard.

The track was upgraded to accommodate port cargo. Service, which was scheduled to begin in 2012, has yet to start. Bob Ledoux, FEC vice president, said the service is now slated to begin in July. Technical and design issues delayed the original start.

Despite delays, company officials are pressing ahead with other elements of the All Aboard Florida project. Chief among them is selection of the sites where the four train stations will be built.

Where the stations will be built, what services they will offer and how they will look are all part of the company's strategy to offer a "customer experience" aimed at making the Miami-Orlando ride more attractive than a flight or a car trip.

All Aboard Florida stations will not only feature train boarding platforms but also restaurants, coffee shops, retail outlets, Internet access via Wi-Fi and central locations.

The Miami station would rise on land next to the Government Center in downtown Miami, adjacent to the Metrorail-Metromover hub that links to Miami International Airport.

The Orlando station would be built at the future south terminal of Orlando International Airport, Cumber said. In Fort Lauderdale, the station would be built downtown, and in West Palm Beach the site would be at the corner of Evernia Street and Quadrille Boulevard, near the city's two major entertainment districts: CityPlace and Clematis Street.

The track currently runs from Miami to Cocoa Beach. Plans call for extending the track from Cocoa to Orlando along State Road 528, the former Bee Line Expressway.

Miami-Orlando trains will offer business and coach class service, as well as Wi-Fi, food, drinks and other amenities.