

Waterside Village All Aboard Florida Report
September 25, 2013

On September 19, I attended a meeting of the Palm Beach County Municipal Planning Organization (MPO). This group, consisting of county government employees and various local elected officials is responsible for all transportation planning and programming in Palm Beach County. Each urban area in the United States has an MPO which acts as a liaison between local communities, their citizens, and the state departments of transportation (DOTs).

During this meeting, a status report for the All Aboard Florida Project was given. As you will recall, The Florida East Coast Railway (FEC) whose tracks are adjacent to our community, has begun planning and construction on a High Speed Passenger Rail that eventually will connect Miami and Orlando. The current timetable will make it possible, beginning in 2015, to travel from Miami to Orlando in three hours, and eventually will connect to Tampa and Jacksonville. In addition, the Tri-Rail, our local commuter rail service, hopes to run their trains on the FEC tracks to allow commuters to access the urban centers in southeast Florida more easily than the present Tri-Rail location on the CSX tracks, just west of I-95.

Presently, the number of trains, all freight, using the FEC tracks each day is approximately 14-18. After the All Aboard Florida Project becomes fully operational, an additional 36 trains per day will pass by Waterside. They will be short, less than 1000 feet, fast moving (79 mph) and will close the Miner Road and Lantana crossings for about 1 minute every 20 minutes.

In addition to that inconvenience and the additional dust and dirt the trains will cause, our development as well as municipalities all along the FEC tracks are very concerned about the train horns, presently required to be sounded (Federal Railway Administration safety rules) at every crossing for 10-20 seconds. This would adversely affect the quality of life of every person along the railway right of way.

After months of lobbying by myself and other concerned citizens, the elected officials responsible for protecting their constituents from unwanted intrusions into their lives by this private transportation venture, have made headway in attempting to mitigate the noise pollution of the horns.

A quiet zone, a section of railway track where horns do not need to be sounded, has been determined to be a solution to the noise problem. It will be necessary to qualify for quiet zone status by adding safety features to each crossing (more and better gates, median barriers, better and updated signaling changes and a host of other possible improvements). This would allow the horns to be silenced and still meet the necessary Federal safety regulations.

Each municipality (or county) that requests a quiet zone must at their own cost, do an engineering evaluation of the crossings, submit a plan for the required safety improvements, install the necessary equipment as well as pay for future maintenance and repairs to those crossings.

At the meeting, the MPO designated \$500,000 to study the various crossings in Palm Beach County to identify the required changes to each and the cost involved. Also, the FEC has accepted some responsibility in paying for part of the changes, which will improve the infrastructure of the all crossings to bring them up to minimum safety levels so the additional cost of quiet zone improvements will be significantly reduced.

So, at the present time, it appears all parties have agreed that quiet zones and no train horns would be the best things for everyone. What is left is to determine the cost of the improvements and find funding for them. Federal grants, state transportation funds, municipality assessments and other possible solutions are all on the table.

For the first time I am cautiously optimistic that this project will not cause the severe lessening of the quality of life here at Waterside (and all along the track) as well as the negative property value effect I once feared.

The battle is not over, and there may be rough spots ahead if funding sources do not materialize, or engineering studies find some crossings unable to be changed sufficiently to meet quiet zone standards. But for the present, issues have taken a positive change in direction.

Over the next several months, I will continue to attend meetings with Hypoluxo officials as well as other governmental officials to try to keep them focused on the devastating affect train noise would have on residents in Palm Beach County.

Sincerely,

Mike Shane