



MEMORANDUM

AGENDA ITEM #VII.A

DATE: JANUARY 23, 2017
TO: COUNCIL MEMBERS
FROM: STAFF
SUBJECT: ATTENDANCE FORM, CORRESPONDENCE, AND ARTICLES

Recommendation

Information only.

2016 ATTENDANCE RECORD

Ex Officio Members	1/4	2/1	3/7	4/4	5/2	6/6	7/11	8/8	9/12	11/14	12/5
CORRY, Laura South Florida Water Management District	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	CC	P	*
HUYNH, DAT Florida Dept. of Transportation	D	D	D	P	P	P	D	D	P	D	P
MARTELL, Roberto Mayor, Town of Medley Department of Economic Development	A	A	*	P	P	*	P	P	*	*	P
SMITH, Jennifer Florida Dept. of Environmental Protection	-	-	-	-	P	CC	A	A	CC	A	A

P = Present

A = Absent

D = Designee Present

* = Excused Absence

- = Not Yet Appointed

CC = Via Conference Call

Sunny Isles Beach Community Newspapers

NOVEMBER 21, 2016

communitynewspapers.com

VOL. 34, NO. 47

The Northeast Corridor Train is on its Way

BY XAVIER SUAREZ

Miami-Dade County Commissioner



Of the six Miami-Dade Metropolitan Planning Organization's SMART rail corridors, the first, and arguably the most important to relieve north-south highway congestion, is now on its way. The Northeast corridor can be open for commuters as early as next year by using the FEC's All Aboard Florida's ("Brightline") rail tracks.

Adding a passenger line to the FEC freight tracks connecting Miami to Orlando has been in the works for at least two decades. The FEC, which is now a publicly held company (Fortress being the holding company that owns it), has fought tooth and nail to keep a spur in place that connects its existing north-south freight line with the Port of Miami. Thankfully, it is relatively easy to add a passenger track to the existing freight track (what is called "double-tracking").

FEC wasted no time implementing a passenger line. However the portion of the Brightline project linking Palm Beach to Orlando is currently immersed in legal difficulties stemming from local opposition. Luckily, the legal battle will not hinder the opening of the southern portion of the Brightline service from

Miami to Palm Beach that is set to open in the summer of 2017.

In principle, FEC has already committed to allowing the county to purchase access rights to its Brightline passenger rail for a commuter train that will link downtown and Aventura, stopping at each municipality along the route. For us in Miami-Dade County, that means we will soon have the Northeast corridor - a passenger rail, built and outfitted at almost no cost to the taxpayer, connecting downtown to Aventura on the north edge of our county. With a new passenger rail in place and vehicles that are immediately available from Tri-Rail, all that is required is agreeing with FEC on track access fees for the use of their brand new track.

Moreover, the various cities along the route (Miami, North Miami, North Miami Beach and Aventura) will be expected to build their own stops or terminals which can range from as little as a platform to whatever they and any private sector partners want to build. Conversations have already been had with the mayors of those cities, and they are not only supportive, but excited.

The current scenario is a major victory for those of us who have long yearned for passenger service along the FEC line. For the better part of my five years as commissioner, I have also served as a member of the South Florida Regional Council. In

that capacity, I battled to ensure that commuter rail service on the Northeast corridor would begin in tandem with the Brightline service

The only question now is what price to set for the use of the Brightline track. In that connection, I am confident that we can emulate what Commissioners Hardemon and Suarez did when they negotiated a perpetual easement for a similar length of track connecting downtown Miami west to Tri-Rail's Hialeah stop. That right was acquired in perpetuity, for a mere one million dollars.

Once FEC completes its Brightline construction, the cost required to open a commuter train to Aventura would be negligible, involving minimum infrastructure costs as needed to accommodate the commuter trains. With all of this in place, it's easy to see that the fares can be set as low as desired to incentive mass transit along what is now a costly, crowded and dangerous car ride on I-95.

For 14 years since the passage of the half-cent sales tax, we have been clamoring to "give us the rail." Now that we have the rail, we need to start clamoring to make it truly public by having the same kinds of fares that are being paid by trolley or Metromover users downtown - that is to say - zero.