



# MEMORANDUM

AGENDA ITEM #7

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DATE: OCTOBER 20, 2017

TO: COUNCIL MEMBERS

FROM: STAFF

SUBJECT: U.S. HIGHWAY 27 MULTI-MODAL CORRIDOR PROJECT UPDATE

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## Introduction

The purpose of this item is to provide the Councils with information related to prior planning efforts and current discussions about an alternative freight rail route using the U.S. Highway 27 corridor.

## Background and Analysis

In 2013, the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) completed a Planning and Conceptual Engineering (PACE) study regarding utilization of the U.S. Highway 27 corridor between Miami and Lake Okeechobee to accommodate rail in addition to the current roadway. The study identified that a number of factors would drive the need for adding the rail mode:

1. A desire to shift existing freight rail traffic from the east coast to the new corridor
2. Increased intermodal traffic at PortMiami
3. Shifting freight from trucks to rail to improve efficiency, reduce congestion, and achieve environmental benefits
4. The construction of new Intermodal Logistics Center(s) (ILC) near Lake Okeechobee

A number of routes were studied and the most feasible was identified as connecting with the Florida East Coast Railway (FEC) west of Hialeah, running along U.S. Highway 27 to South Bay, and connecting to the existing South Central Florida Express (SCXF) / FEC tracks which run along the south side of the lake. To the west, the SCXF tracks connect to CSX in Sebring, and to the east the tracks connect with the FEC mainline in Ft. Pierce. The study estimated the cost of adding railroad tracks to a project to widen the U.S. Highway 27 roadway to be an additional approximately \$490 million and concluded that there are no fatal engineering or environmental flaws in the concept and that it is feasible.

On February 28, 2017, Council staff convened a meeting of representatives of Martin County, the Port of Palm Beach, the Palm Beach Metropolitan Planning Organization, the FEC Railway, and other interested parties to revisit the results of the study and explore the possibilities of running railroad tracks along U.S. Highway 27 between Miami, South Bay, and beyond to Orlando. The group learned that such a route could:

1. Serve to relieve congestion at the three ports in southeast Florida (PortMiami, Port Everglades, and Port of Palm Beach – all served by FEC), which may reach a crisis point in 10 years;
2. Allow the diversion of up to 80 percent of the freight traffic off of the coastal route of the FEC; and
3. Improve the efficiency of freight movements into and out of the entire southeast portion of the state.

The group also learned that FEC would be willing to undertake the construction of the line, if funding was provided, and that they would be willing to operate the line. There was a consensus that the idea is worth pursuing and that a stakeholder group should be constituted similar to what FDOT has done with the U.S. Highway 27 corridor north of Lake Okeechobee.

Since then, Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council (TCRPC) staff has conducted additional stakeholder meetings with similar findings. These included presentations to TCRPC Council on April 21, 2017 and July 21, 2017; a meeting at the South Florida Regional Planning Council (SFRPC) offices on June 12, 2017; and presentations to various existing stakeholder groups such as the Treasure Coast CEDS Committee on July 13<sup>th</sup>, MPOAC Freight Committee and Governing Board on July 19<sup>th</sup>, the Palm Beach County BDB Logistics Task Force on September 6<sup>th</sup>, and the Miami-Dade TPO FTAC on October 11<sup>th</sup>.

At the SFRPC / TCRPC stakeholder meeting held on June 12, 2017 in Hollywood, the concept was generally well received. Additional conversation and details are needed to better understand potential impacts to the Miami-Dade, Broward, and Monroe counties and their respective ports and airports.

TCRPC staff is scheduled to present to the Martin County Board of County Commissioners on October 24<sup>th</sup> and is rescheduling Irma-cancelled presentations with the Southeast Regional Transportation Technical Advisory Committee and Southeast Florida Transportation Council for later this year. A recent teleconference with FDOT's Central office in Tallahassee suggests a continuation of these activities in coordination with FDOT is an appropriate course of action.

### Conclusion

The project would have a positive impact regionally because of these potential benefits:

1. Reducing freight traffic through the population centers of the coast between Ft. Pierce and Miami
2. Freeing up capacity on the FEC for commuter passenger trains
3. Diverting truck traffic from U.S. Highway 27, I-95, and the Turnpike
4. Supporting economic development and job creation for the distressed communities along the south, east, and west sides of Lake Okeechobee

In addition, FDOT should be encouraged to undertake a Project Development and Environment study for the U.S. Highway 27 Multimodal Corridor which, at a minimum, examines an extended project between PortMiami and the I-4 Corridor.

### Recommendation

Authorize the chairs of the Treasure Coast and South Florida Regional Planning Councils to encourage the Florida Department of Transportation to undertake a Project Development and Environment study for the U.S. Highway 27 Multimodal Corridor which, at a minimum, examines an extended project between the Port of Miami and the I-4 Corridor.

Attachments

US 27 Multi-Modal Corridor Update  
Meeting Summary  
February 28, 2017

At the request of Martin County Commissioner Ed Fielding, on February 28, 2017, Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council staff convened a meeting between representatives of the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), the Florida East Coast Railway (FEC), the Port of Palm Beach, the Palm Beach Metropolitan Planning Organization, Martin County, and staff of Congressman Brian Mast to discuss prior planning efforts and the future potential of utilizing the US 27 corridor to construct a rail line to move freight out of the congested coastal corridors in Southeast Florida and enhance import and export activity and distribution logistics.

The group learned that an extensive FDOT study found that utilizing the US 27 roadway corridor to also accommodate a rail line is feasible and can be moved forward to further engineering study, design and permitting if desired (and funded).

The group also learned that the Florida East Coast Railway recognizes that continued growth in freight traffic and the emergence of long distance, intrastate, and commuter passenger rail travel on their railroad has impacts on the communities it traverses and diversion of much of the freight movements to a new western corridor would address some of these impacts.

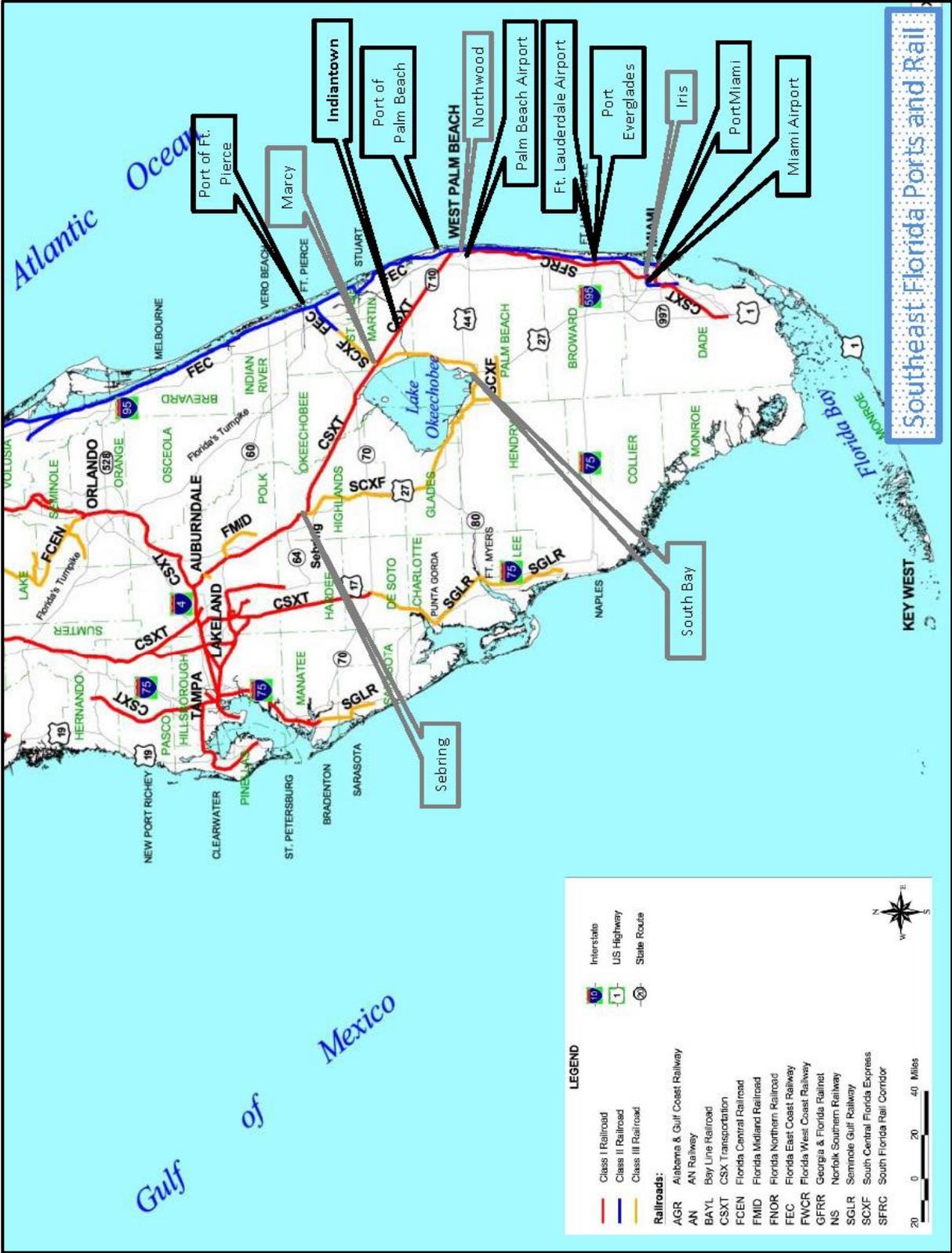
Port of Palm Beach staff shared that all 3 of the major ports in Southeast Florida (Port of Palm Beach, Port Everglades, and PortMiami) are running out of space to accommodate future growth efficiently and may be at a crossroads in 10 years. In addition, the freight operations at Miami International Airport are also running out of space. Given the time scale of the necessary projects to address this (new transportation routes, intermodal logistics centers, etc.), work needs to be moving forward now. A copy of Port Director Almira's paper on this topic is attached.

Congressman Mast's staff informed the group of the significant infrastructure spending promised by the President and suggested involvement of Congresswoman Frankel's office in these discussions as well.

A concept of running a rail line from the west side of Miami (near the FEC's Hialeah Yard) along US 27 up to the area along the south side of Lake Okeechobee, then to an Intermodal Logistics Center (and potential airport) in Indiantown, and then on to existing rails to the Orlando-Tampa corridor was discussed. Such an arrangement would accommodate freight traveling into Southeast Florida for distribution and for export as well as freight arriving from the ports for local consumption or national distribution.

The participants agreed that gathering more stakeholders and interested parties together to further explore the possibilities and benefits (local, regional and statewide) of a US 27 rail line, as well as reaching out to economic development staff in the area, would be necessary in order to move the project forward.

# Regional Map



# Concept

