



DAVID DECH

Executive Director,
South Florida Regional Transportation Authority

David Dech is the executive director of the South Florida Regional Transportation Authority / Tri-Rail. An executive with 30 years in the rail industry, Dech has management experience in both freight and commuter rail service, including commuter rail operations, field operations, system and division level leadership, leading public-private partnerships, and negotiating and managing contracts with host and tenant railroads. Dech was chosen to oversee the SFRTA at a pivotal time for the agency, as it prepared to expand Tri-Rail service into Downtown Miami; he brings experience in designing, constructing and opening rail yards.

David Dech is a self-motivated, self-starter with a willingness to listen to the people who perform the work as the key to the success of any project. He operates with the guiding principle that all people in an organization are entitled to be treated with dignity and respect.

A frequent guest and strong supporter of the South Florida and Treasure Coast Regional Planning Councils, David recently was hired as the third president and general manager of the Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District, effective March 16, 2026. Please join the Council Board and staff in wishing David and his family every success in his new position with gratitude for the great work he, his staff, and SFRTA Board have advanced over his brief tenure of less than four years. We will miss him and his leadership!

PARTIAL LIST OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS

August 2022 – February 2026

Service Expansion & Ridership Growth

- Successfully led the expansion of Tri-Rail into downtown Miami, culminating in the launch of service to MiamiCentral Station in January 2024 through a landmark partnership with Florida East Coast Railway and Brightline.
- Expanded service levels dramatically:
 - Weekday trains increased from 50 to 76
 - Weekend trains increased from 30 to 53
- Introduced Tri-Rail express service between West Palm Beach and MiamiCentral, reducing travel time by more than 30 minutes.
- Achieved full ridership recovery post-pandemic, with Tri-Rail reaching:
 - 4.4 million riders in 2024
 - More than 4.5 million rides in calendar year 2025, the highest in system history.
- Set new weekend and special-event ridership records with highest Saturday during Tri-Rail's 2024 Rail Fun Day and Lake Worth Beach Street Painting Festival, and highest Sunday during Ultra Music 2024, with special train service added to accommodate concertgoers.



Capital Investment & Federal Funding

- Secured \$71.7 million to replace 30% of the passenger fleet, leveraging over \$200 million in total investment with matching funds.
- Advanced major infrastructure planning, including:
 - Northern Layover and Maintenance Facility design in Riviera Beach.
 - Feasibility study of the Proposed Tri-Rail Extension to West Palm Beach Veterans Affairs Medical Center.
- Completed 12 crossing rehab projects, 15 signal upgrade projects and 11 Onsite Signal Safety Improvement (OSSI) upgrade projects.
- Ordered seven new Siemens Charger locomotives to modernize the fleet.

Safety, Security & Operations

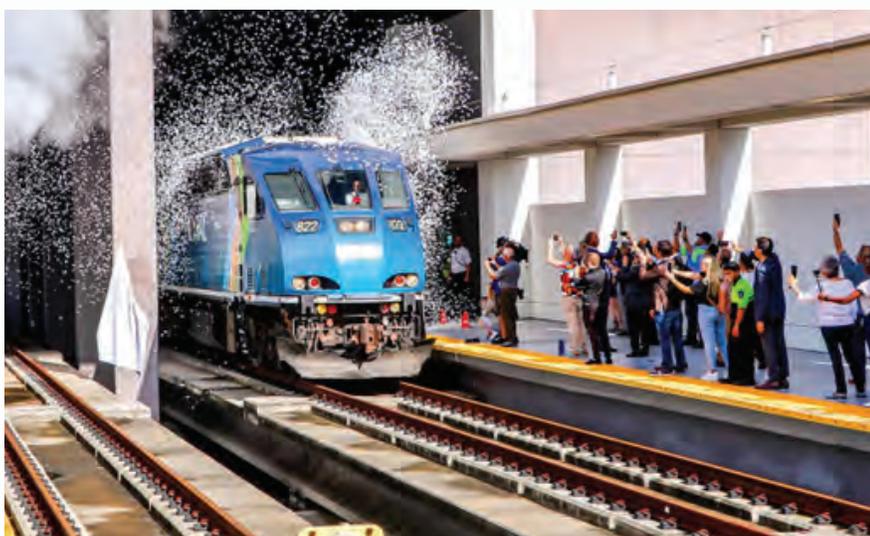
- Oversaw completion of all federally required safety and operating plans.
- Earned the TSA Gold Standard Award in 2026, marking SFRTA's second time receiving the honor.
- Completed extensive corridor and maintenance-of-way improvements, including rail replacement, signal upgrades, crossing rehabilitations, and vegetation management.
- Coordinated multi-agency emergency response efforts, earning recognition from the Palm Beach County Board of County Commissioners.

Regional Collaboration & Innovation

- Established three advisory committees to strengthen coordination with county partners on operations, budgeting, and capital projects.
- Launched SoFloGO, a first-of-its-kind regional mobility app integrating trip planning and fare payment across Tri-Rail, Palm Tran, Broward County Transit, and Miami-Dade Transit.
- Expanded partnerships with local governments, transit agencies, and community organizations, including workforce job fair and community benefit programs in Overtown.

Financial Stewardship & Governance

- Maintained strong financial oversight, earning continued recognition from the Government Finance Officers Association for budgeting and financial reporting excellence.
- Managed 74 active contracts valued at \$1.4 billion, while advancing new procurements and maintaining project delivery.
- Delivered the agency's first Strategic Plan, along with updated Transit Development, 5-Year Strategic, and 20-Year Capital Plans.



SFRTA (Tri-Rail) Miami
Central Station Inauguration
(January 13, 2024)

BUSINESS

Outgoing Tri-Rail chief: 'We're in a good place' to recapture funding, serve more commuters



David Dech, outgoing executive director of Tri-Rail's governing body, the South Florida Regional Transportation Authority, says the agency is actively seeking ways to ease the cost burden on the state of Florida and three counties served by the commuter line. (Carline Jean/South Florida Sun Sentinel)



By **DAVID LYONS** | South Florida Sun Sentinel

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In 2022, after veteran railroader David Dech took his new job as executive director of the South Florida Regional Transportation Authority, he and his wife elected to take a Tri-Rail train from the commuter line's headquarters in Pompano Beach to the airport.

"It was July," he recalled. "It was very warm in the [rail] car. There was a pungent odor in the car. You couldn't see out the windows. The windows were all fogged up. There was a fellow in a hospital gown sitting on the end of the platform."

Later, Dech would find the existing 18 stations in Palm Beach, Broward and Miami-Dade counties — from north of West Palm Beach to Miami International Airport — "were in need of real TLC." The rail corridor that Tri-Rail shares with Amtrak and the CSX freight railroad west of Interstate 95 was lined with trash and homeless camps.

These days, the [outgoing executive](#) told the South Florida Sun Sentinel, Tri-Rail is a rail line he'd "put up against any railroad in the country."

"Over the last three years we've changed 850 windows. We've replaced air conditioning — sometimes more than once on the cars," he said. "We have cleaners at both ends. Top to bottom on the railroad we've cleaned the garbage out and worked with the counties on relocating homeless camps.

"Today the cars ride better. They're not perfect. They're old. We re-wrapped them, we changed the windows, we changed the air conditioners, we replaced the bathrooms in the cab cars.

"I'm just exceptionally proud of the efforts between our team and our contractors to really turn this railroad and make it into where I think I can put this railroad up against any railroad in the country," he said. "It's a good-looking railroad. It's clean. Stations are cleaner, we've increased security, we've increased fare collections."

Tri-Rail also completed an extension project that allows regional rail riders to travel to and from downtown Miami at Brightline's MiamiCentral station.

"We're in a good place," Dech said on Thursday, after saluting the start of the rail authority's first [Transit Oriented Development](#) project called Link at Boca, adjacent to Tri-Rail's station in Boca Raton.

Two SFRTA board members have told the Sun Sentinel that a national search is likely for Dech's replacement. An interim appointee will be named to fill the post immediately after Dech departs in March.

Dech is leaving for a new job to run a 90-mile commuter line that serves a string of cities from South Bend, Ind., to Chicago. His resignation is set for mid-March. The move, Dech said, will position him to maximize his railroad retirement benefits.

"I'm not going to better weather, that's for sure," he said. "This opportunity came up and they don't come up often."



David Dech, outgoing executive director of Tri-Rail's governing body, the South Florida Regional Transportation Authority, says the agency is actively seeking ways to ease the cost burden on the state of Florida and three counties served by the commuter line. One way is to foster Transit Oriented Development projects such as the one launched at the rail line's Boca Raton station. (Carline Jean/South Florida Sun Sentinel)

In fact, there are only 28 commuter rail systems in the U.S., according to Tri-Rail's website. And the "South Shore" line operated by the Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District is one with which Dech, an Ohio native, became familiar as an engineer for CSX.

"Up there — that's where I started running trains," Dech said.

In the meantime, he has continued to spearhead Tri-Rail's lobbying effort in Tallahassee to restore a multi-million dollar annual subsidy cut by the state last year, a move that left Tri-Rail with the prospect of running out of money by the summer of 2027.

"I feel really good with the conversations I've been having in the counties and the state level," Dech said. "We're really in as good a place as we can possibly be going forward."

Started in January 1989 as a public utility to ease burgeoning traffic on I-95, Tri-Rail operates mostly on subsidies from the state and the three counties it serves.

A veteran of the giant CSX freight railroad and a transit system in Austin, Texas, Dech joined Tri-Rail and embarked on multiple tasks that included activating the extension to downtown Miami, and literally cleaning up a railroad operation not known for stellar customer service.

Last year, his third full year, Tri-Rail served more than [4.5 million passengers](#), a system record.

During his visits to state lawmakers, he's made that figure a top-of-mind point while walking the halls of the Legislature. The railroad has also signed a deal for seven new locomotives, and intends to replace "about a third of our coaches."

“The reception in Tallahassee for us has been warm,” he said. “There is very strong support from elected officials in this area. There is active support in Tallahassee. I don’t know what’s said behind closed doors. From what I see there is great support for rail in Florida.”

Value proposition

The trash and aging rail cars and engines aside, Tri-Rail’s reputation as a reliable mode of inter-county transportation has not always been favorable among the millions of commuters who cross over county lines.

“I think once people come down and understand we had 4.5 million people ride this train last year, and when you start thinking about that, you start putting it in perspective,” Dech said, “You really have to sit on I-95 and then come over here and ride the train to understand the real value.”

He asserted that elected officials who have ridden the train ride it again.

“They’re advocates,” he said. “I don’t think there is any more room to expand I-95, so you’ve got to do something. The answer is to put more people on the train.”

But many critics have argued that trains that do not turn a profit probably shouldn’t run at all.

“That’s a misconception nationwide — not just the public here,” Dech said. “I’ve heard people say if they can’t pay for themselves don’t run it. That would eliminate 99.9% of the railroads in the world. Because there is not a public railroad — a passenger railroad — in the world outside of, probably, Japan that turns a profit.

“They’re all subsidized by the government — it’s just a matter of at what level,” Dech added. “When you look at police and fire departments and utilities like that, they’re not expected to make a profit. But they are necessary. This is a necessary product that we have here.”

Acting like a business

Still, the critics’ arguments were not lost on either Dech or the South Florida Regional Transportation Authority board, which consists of elected local politicians from each county, as well as private sector and community leaders.

Since last year, they have opted to find ways to show the Florida Department of Transportation and county governments that Tri-Rail is capable of acting like a business with an eye toward easing costs to the taxpayer.

Among other things, Tri-Rail cut service that was sparsely used, such as late-night trains to and from the Miami airport. The board also voted to [end rideshare partnerships](#) that it determined had delivered nominal numbers of passengers to and from Tri-Rail stations.

On the revenue side, the board this month will be weighing ticket price [increases for fares](#) that have not been raised since 2019.

As for Thursday's groundbreaking of the "[Link at Boca](#)," a mixed-use development at Tri-Rail's station in Boca Raton, Dech acknowledged the revenue flow in leasing dollars to Tri-Rail will be helpful.

"It's not going to hurt," he said. "We'll get rents from this for the next 99 years. The people who live here will have very quick and easy access to the station."

Moreover, the retail element of the project "makes it a destination."

"It's going to be one more reason to use the train," Dech said. "Individually these [projects] are small slices. But when you start putting them together ... Boynton Beach will probably be next. We have some properties down south."

"We want to demonstrate to everybody we are willing and able to get these things done," he added. "I don't think you are going to be able to strictly fund the railroad on TODs."



During a nearly four-year run as executive director of Tri-Rail's governing authority, David Dech said the rail line cleaned up its operating act, which led to record ridership of more than 4.5 million passengers last year. (Mike Stocker/South Florida Sun Sentinel file)

But the greater SFRTA goal, he said, is to ease the expenses covered by the local and state governments.

"What we can do is have cost sharing between the state and the counties," he said. "Our job now is to try to generate as much as we can to lessen the burden on the counties and the state."

"Every bit that we can do, whether it be advertising, whether it be rents and TODs [Transit Oriented Development] ... makes it easier for them," he said. "We feel like we have skin in the game as well."

The ultimate bottom line

The reason Tri-Rail started in the first place was to serve as a relief outlet for I-95.

Even if a daily motorist has no intention of riding a train or a bus, Dech said, “you want every person around you to ride that bus or train.”

“I don’t think anyone wants to see an additional 4.5 million people on I-95,” he added. “I hope we don’t play chicken long enough to get there. That would be horrible for everybody.”

“This is a really rare occasion where our success benefits everybody,” he added.

Full circle

In Indiana, Dech expects to face familiar issues akin to an aging railroad.

“We’re going to start working on new equipment,” he said.

There will be trips to Indianapolis, the state capital, to lobby for funds for a rail operation whose heritage can be traced to the early 1900s.

“It’s a little romantic for me to kind of take it full circle and finish off where I started,” he said.

But there will be something new for Dech to learn. Along the South Shore Line, the trains are powered by electric engines.