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All Aboard Florida scales back initial run

By [Michael Turnbell](#), Sun Sentinel

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All Aboard Florida's promised Miami-to-Orlando passenger rail service will initially run only between Miami, Fort Lauderdale and West Palm Beach, with trains rolling in late 2016, officials now say.

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The company plans to start building its downtown Fort Lauderdale station and double-tracking its South Florida segment late this summer as it works out the logistics of building the rest of the line to Orlando.

Company president Michael Reininger said the initial service won't compete with Tri-Rail because its trains will only stop in the three downtowns-- an hourlong trip. Tri-Rail makes 16 stops between Miami International Airport and West Palm Beach and takes more than 90 minutes.

"We don't see this at all as a competitor to commuter rail," Reininger said. "It's complementary service."

The company today plans to unveil designs for the \$30 million Fort Lauderdale station, located north of Broward Boulevard near Northwest Second Street.

Renderings show a sleek modern steel and glass structure with a waiting area above the tracks and a bridge connecting passengers to a multistory lobby west of the tracks for ticketing, luggage handling and a lounge.

Other major highlights of the project include:

Building a second track in areas where only a single track exists today, enabling trains to travel faster and pass each other.

Safety upgrades to dozens of crossings that will aid municipalities seeking to silence train horns, with the bulk of the cost picked up by All Aboard Florida.

New technology to limit bridge closures for trains at the New River in Fort Lauderdale.

Coordinating crossing gates with train speeds so gates don't come down sooner than necessary.

Closing Northwest Second Street at the tracks and building a pedestrian bridge linking All Aboard Florida's station with Broward's bus terminal and the planned Wave Streetcar, which will stop a block away.

Plans for the downtown Miami station were announced in June, featuring a 50-foot-tall platform above the streets to connect All Aboard Florida's trains to Metrorail, the bus system and Metromover, the downtown

automated train.

Details for the West Palm Beach station are expected soon.

All Aboard Florida will run 16 trains each way, each day, from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. Fares are expected to be about \$30 to \$36 for a one-way ticket – much higher than Tri-Rail's \$6.90 one-way fare to travel from Miami to West Palm Beach – though officials would not confirm prices.

Reininger said the company's planned improvements, including modernized signals and crossings, will make the Florida East Coast Railway into "safest possible rail corridor in the country."

Having two tracks is key to eliminating a major source of commuter frustration in Fort Lauderdale – slow moving freight trains which occasionally get held up because of a train traveling in the opposite direction. The FEC tracks already are mostly doubletracked between the airport and Northeast 13th Street in Fort Lauderdale, but only a single track exists north and south of there, with the exception of some side tracks.

"There's a 97 percent probability (drivers will) never encounter one of our trains," Reininger said. "If you are one of the three percent, the sum duration of that encounter will be around 45 seconds."

The marine industry is outraged that boats will face more waits for bridge openings as trains crisscross the New River.

But Reininger said upgrades to the bridge would allow it to open and close more efficiently and possibly faster. New technology, he added, will allow the company to schedule trains to pass each other on the bridge at the same time, often in tandem with freight trains already crossing the bridge.

Also a possibility: returning a tender to operate the bridge, which is currently controlled remotely by dispatchers in Jacksonville.

The project's second phase -- from West Palm Beach to Orlando -- is dependent on completion of an environmental study. A growing opposition in the Treasure Coast wants to slow or stop the project because no stops are planned there. Residents also object to the potential backups at crossings and at drawbridges for mariners.

Gov. Rick Scott -- one of the project's biggest supporters -- has asked train backers to slow down the process to allow for more public input.

"As I have traveled the state, I have heard from many Florida families who are concerned about the increased rail traffic and how it will impact their communities," Scott recently wrote to All Aboard Florida and the Federal Railroad Administration.

But all approvals are in hand for the South Florida segment.

The scope of development surrounding the Fort Lauderdale station has officials and activists saying the area's blight could be erased. Hotel rooms, housing, retail, office space and a new courthouse and government center are among the possibilities.

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