

# Memo

Date: April 14, 2014  
To: Stuart City Commissioners  
From: Mayor Troy A. McDonald  
Subject: All Aboard Florida

\*\*\*\*\*

As we all know Florida East Coast Industries has proposed and is in the process of returning passenger rail to the FEC railroad line. We also know the FEC railroad line goes through the heart of downtown Stuart.

The proposal includes the addition of 32 high-speed trains every day through Stuart. Both the public and the Stuart City Commission have raised concerns about the number and frequency of trains coming through the heart of downtown Stuart on a daily basis. At this time there are no plans for a stop in Stuart or any other city along the Treasure Coast.

The Stuart City Commission over the last several years has identified returning passenger rail service to the FEC railroad line along with a stop in Stuart as a positive outcome. During the discussions and planning for passenger service to return to the FEC railroad line, no one anticipated the large volume of trains (32 additional trains per day) without there being a stop in Stuart.

To date, the Stuart City Commission has taken somewhat of a pragmatic approach to All Aboard Florida (AAF). Our Staff has been attempting to work with AAF to mitigate the negative impacts and to encourage AAF to locate a train station within downtown Stuart. As of the writing of this memo little information has been provided to us as to how the negative impacts created by AAF will be mitigated.

The negative impacts that will be created by AAF include but are not limited to the following:

1. Restriction of boat traffic through the trestle bridge on the St. Lucie River.
2. The potential of the loss of parking spaces in downtown Stuart due to the double tracking of the railroad line.
3. The potential of the loss of parking spaces at Stuart's North Point property and the Harborage on the north side of the river due to double tracking of the railroad line.
4. Increased traffic congestion at Confusion Corner and Sailfish Circle.
5. Pedestrian safety at train crossings especially at Confusion Corner and Sailfish Circle.
6. The possibility of increased response time by First Responders and the possibility of increased transportation time to hospitals.
7. The increased cost of maintaining the upgraded crossings.
8. The reduction of property values in the loss of ad valorem taxes.
9. The lack of a stop in Stuart.

The above list is just a few of the potential negative impacts created by AAF.

Last week I attended the Stuart Martin County chamber of Commerce luncheon where the guest speaker was from AAF. I also received a copy of a Department of Transportation report authored by Frey.

There were many questions leveled at Mr. Roberts from AAF about the negative impacts to our community. His response to the majority of those questions was they will be addressed by the environmental impact statement (EIS). I do not believe we should have to wait until the environmental impact statement is complete to get answers to the many questions we have. I believe AAF already has the answers to many of those questions and is not providing them to us or anyone else.

I also have a concern about the Department of Transportation report authored by Frey. The DOT report addressed concerns about crossing safety. It also failed to

identify the majority of the crossings in Stuart including Confusion Corner and Sailfish Circle. These two crossings are very unusual as they include both traffic circles and a large amount of pedestrian traffic.

I think it is time the City Commission look at taking a harder, more aggressive approach with AAF. There are many questions that need to be answered immediately without waiting for the EIS.

A few of the questions that need to be answered at once are:

1. Where will the double tracking begin and end as it relates to Downtown Stuart?
2. When Parking is impacted by double tracking, will AAF assist in mitigating the loss of those parking spaces?
3. How does AAF plan to ensure boating traffic is not restricted and overly burdened by the Trestle Bridge being locked in the down position?
4. How will pedestrian safety at Confusion Corner and Sailfish Circle be addresses?
5. How much additional freight traffic is anticipated when the widening of the Panama Canal is completed and the additional cargo begins arriving into South Florida Ports?
6. Yes or no, is Stuart, Florida going to get stop?

With the 32 additional passenger trains proposed by AAF and the probability of increased freight traffic due to the widening of the Panama Canal and the expansion of the ports in South Florida, Stuart could be facing a dramatic reduction of both quality of life and economic development.

If AAF is allowed to proceed and the negative impacts are not mitigated completely we could see a reduction of property values and ad valorem taxes generated by those properties adding additional stress to our budget. Furthermore, I am not sure a stop alone will be enough to mitigate many of the negative impacts created by AAF.

It is my opinion the City of Stuart needs to continue to stay engaged as it relates to the mitigation of these negative impacts by doing the following:

1. Engage other communities in the Treasure Coast to determine what their concerns are about AAF and how to best address those concerns.
2. Engage officials in both Broward and Palm Beach counties as it relates to the restriction of Maritime traffic on the New River, Loxahatchee River and the St. Lucie River.
3. When the EIS is released, file an official response to the Federal Railroad Administration.
4. Determine the financial impact to the city of Stuart and demand AAF and State mitigate that impact.
5. Engage the Coast Guard directly as it relates to the Trestle Bridge across the St. Lucie River and what will be done to ensure maritime traffic is not unduly restricted.
6. Prepare a contingency plan for the loss of parking due to double tracking.
7. Contact the Port Authorities in Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach Counties and attempt to determine who much additional freight they anticipate will be going through their Ports.

In conclusion, I am now seeing AAF as an unfunded mandate by a private corporation facilitated by the State of Florida and the Federal Government. I think it is time for the Stuart City Commission to identify and develop it's official position as it relates to All Aboard Florida and how we want to address all of these negative impacts. If we wait until the EIS is complete it may be too late to mitigate many of the negative impacts.