

Jim Studiale, Lakeland City Planner

Speaking to Rail Stakeholder Advisory Committee – Tampa on 7/30/08

This morning's discussion has been enlightening and I thank you for allowing public comment.

In the past year I have gotten up to speed on rail infrastructure and rail planning efforts by necessity –

And having learned a lot about rail infrastructure, a few things are clear to me:

1. The rail corridors that run through the hearts of our cities are valuable as passenger corridors (especially in the new – post-cheap gas era).
2. To gain access or ownership of these primarily passenger corridors the private rail companies need and deserve public support in enhancing and creating “super freight rail” corridors – These freight corridors are also in the public's interest because of the steady rapid growth in rail freight that serves all Floridians.
3. There is a substantial inventory of old rail corridors that should be identified and retained to succeed in accomplishing #1 and #2.

Florida is well positioned to have great passenger freight rail infrastructure that gives us quality of life advantages over other states and with our economic strength can let us avoid the sprawling California pattern of growth that we all want to avoid in our state. It is as important, if not more important, than any other smart growth strategy or infrastructure investment we can make.

I want to congratulate FDOT or whoever created this Stakeholders Group – for this is the right way to openly set Policy and Parameters for Florida's Rail Investments. (I would again encourage that local government have a seat at the table.)

A few years back an early study analyzing cost and impacts of the CSX/FDOT Rail Proposal repeatedly documented serious impacts to Lakeland and formally recommended that Lakeland be brought to the table as the next step. Central FDOT ignored that recommendation, and because of that at the 11th hour, we have this debacle and only then because we began screaming and fighting to dig up the information on our own and learn with each new document how serious the impacts may be.

Lakeland is a smart well-run City with a service area of 250,000 people. We are a model for effective Growth Management and Downtown Redevelopment in Florida.

- a. We support commuter rail and have been meeting with Orlando to discuss our common interests. But Lakeland will suffer very substantial impacts due to the concentration of freight on the 11 miles of track that bisect our urban area and is the confluence of the “S” and “A” Rail Lines between the southbound track that intersects running east from Lakeland to Auburndale.
- b. But Lakeland refuses to be collateral damage in the effort to initiate commuter rail in Orlando (and the lack of good rail planning).

We hope to begin discussing with Central Office soon on how we can implement the big picture for Florida’s Rail Infrastructure – but not suffer 36, 45 or 56 Freight Trains per day as those early studies documented.

We in Lakeland have been invested for decades in our Future City. We built our own Amtrak/Commuter Rail Station years ago because we too have planned on transit improvements for our city.

Concentrating Florida’s freight trains a few miles west of Orlando hurts us and it also precludes the future capacity for passenger rail on this same rail line requiring an additional relocation of Freight trains a second time if Tampa Bay cities are also to be served with passenger rail. FDOT should initiate a master plan that considers all of the I-4 corridor as a Region and not an incremental approach that serves one metro area at a cost to the entire region!

I ask that FDOT be willing to resolve this debacle and perhaps this Group consider that larger issue to further transit for all of us.

THANK YOU