

# 1.0 Introduction

## ■ 1.1 The Purpose and Role of the Florida Rail System Plan: Overview

The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) is responsible for developing the Florida Rail System Plan to set forth a vision for the future of passenger and freight rail transportation in Florida. According to Florida Statutes, the Rail System Plan must be updated every five years and include an identification of priorities, programs, and funding levels required to meet statewide needs for both passenger rail and freight rail service.<sup>7</sup>

The 2010 Florida Rail System Plan is an update to the 2006 Florida Freight and Passenger Rail Plan and is a key part of an evolving rail planning process in Florida. The 2010 Plan builds upon previous efforts, including the work of the Florida High-Speed Rail Authority and the 2006 Florida Intercity Passenger Rail Vision Plan. In recognition of the role of passenger and freight rail within Florida's overall transportation system, the Florida Rail System Plan is consistent with the 2025 Florida Transportation Plan. This statewide plan identifies goals, objectives, and strategies to guide transportation investment decisions in Florida over a 20-year period. The Plan also is compliant with Federal requirements, including the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act (PRIIA) of 2008 and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 to ensure state eligibility for certain rail funding programs. Appendix A describes how and where minimum requirements under PRIIA are addressed in the 2010 Florida Rail System Plan. A brief overview on minimum requirements for funding eligibility under ARRA is included in Chapter 6 of this report.

The Florida Rail System Plan serves as important input into the update of the Florida Transportation Plan (the 2060 Florida Transportation Plan) scheduled to begin in 2010. Florida's Rail System Plan is one of several key statewide modal planning efforts conducted by FDOT in accordance with the Florida Transportation Plan, including the Strategic Intermodal System Strategic Plan; the Seaport System Plan and Seaport Mission Plan; the Aviation System Plan; and Transit 2020.

Rail planning also is closely connected to and supports Florida's economic, environmental, and community statewide planning framework, including: Metropolitan Planning

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<sup>7</sup> The Florida Rail Plan is required by ss. 341.302(3), Florida Statutes. See Appendix D of this document for the text of this statute.

Organization Long-Range Transportation Plans; Regional Planning Council Strategic Regional Policy Plans; local government comprehensive plans, ongoing regional visioning efforts and community initiatives; transit agency and modal partner development plans; and other private and public rail and freight investment plans.

With the advent of the Strategic Intermodal System and additional funding provided by 2005 Growth Management legislation, the Rail Plan is an effective tool to identify the capital improvements and consensus priorities funding needs to ensure the efficient movement of people and goods by rail. Together these long-range, strategic planning initiatives will help shape and develop a future-oriented, integrated, and multimodal transportation system for the State of Florida.

## ■ 1.2 Elements of the 2010 Florida Rail System Plan

The 2010 Florida Rail System Plan is comprised of two elements; a *Policy Element* and an *Investment Element*.

### **The Policy Element of the 2010 Florida Rail System Plan**

The *Policy Element* which established a policy framework of goals, objectives, and strategies was led by a Rail Stakeholder Advisory Committee, a body with broad representation of a broad range of stakeholders involved in the planning and implementation of the Plan's goals, including representatives from private sector businesses and railroads, public regulatory agencies, complementary transportation modes, economic and environmental interests, as well as private citizens.<sup>8</sup> The committee worked through the summer and fall of 2008 to review trends, conditions, and issues that will influence the development of Florida's rail system in the future and developed consensus recommendations to the Secretary of Transportation on a policy framework that will guide state investments in Florida's rail system through the year 2030. The *Policy Element* was adopted by the Secretary of Transportation in March 2009.

The *Policy Element* documents the goals, objectives, and strategies which together form a policy framework for the investment of limited state resources in Florida's future rail system. This policy framework is organized around the following five goals:

- **Safety and Security:** FDOT should continue to identify and support rail and rail-highway safety improvements and coordinate with appropriate partners to identify and implement security and emergency response plans.

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<sup>8</sup> Organizations represented on the Rail Stakeholder Advisory Committee can be found at the following web site: <http://www.dot.state.fl.us/rail/PlanDevel/RSAC/RSACabout.shtm>.

- **Quality of Life and Environmental Stewardship:** Rail and land use planning should be integrated at the state, regional, and local levels. Further, the environmental benefits of rail should be evaluated and transportation and environmental decisions should be integrated into the statewide, regional, and local planning processes.
- **Maintenance and Preservation:** Maintenance and preservation of rail infrastructure and service and modernization of the rail system should remain a high priority.
- **Mobility and Economic Competitiveness:** Investments in Florida's rail system should support and spur desired economic growth. Florida should invest in rail system capacity improvements to enhance the interstate and intrastate movement of people and goods when public benefit can be demonstrated, and capacity should be preserved for future needs, including the evaluation of all abandoned rail corridors for future rail use.
- **Sustainable Investments:** Public awareness of the need for state and regional investments in rail is an important component of Florida's goal to become increasingly competitive economically and its ability to keep pace with investments in both passenger and freight rail occurring elsewhere in the nation. Opportunities for funding rail projects should be aggressively pursued in cooperation with leaders at the local, regional, state, and national levels. Specifically:
  - The State should capitalize on opportunities at the local, regional, and state levels to capture Federal dollars for rail projects;
  - New and innovative revenue sources and financial tools to fund rail improvements should be identified;
  - Public-private partnerships should be considered when in the public interest; and
  - Funds should be made available to rapidly respond to opportunities.

## **The Investment Element of the 2010 Florida Rail System Plan**

This *Investment Element* of the Florida Rail System Plan builds upon the framework of the *Policy Element* by identifying the **needs** of Florida's rail system and establishing **priorities** for the investment of state funds using the goals, objectives, and strategies of the *Policy Element* as guidance. The *Investment Element* presents detailed information on the future needs of Florida's rail system and sets forth strategic priorities to meet those needs.

## ■ 1.3 Florida Rail System Plan Investment Element Outline

This report documents and analyzes the results and findings gathered during the Phase II – Investment Element of the Florida Rail System Plan. The remainder of this report is outlined as follows:

- **Chapter 2** – Current Freight Rail System and Services in Florida, provides an inventory of the existing operating and recently abandoned freight rail transportation system and services in the State and an analysis of the role of rail transportation within Florida’s surface transportation system (traffic conditions, safety trends, etc.).
- **Chapter 3** – Passenger Rail Services and Initiatives in Florida, describes the State’s passenger rail system and includes a performance evaluation of passenger rail services operating in Florida, including possible improvements in those services and a description of the strategies to achieve those improvements.
- **Chapter 4** – Rail Needs, identifies rail infrastructure issues within the State that reflects consultation with all relevant stakeholders. This Chapter includes an inventory of rail improvements, including capital investments for track upgrades, new facilities, capacity expansion, safety improvements, and industrial access. The Chapter also reviews and identifies major passenger and freight intermodal rail connections and facilities needs within Florida, including at seaports.
- **Chapter 5** – Rail Needs Prioritization, describes the approach for evaluating rail needs projects by goal area and objective using a combination of qualitative and quantitative indicators.
- **Chapter 6** – Financing Florida’s Rail System, discusses existing as well as potential and new funding opportunities to support investing in rail mobility and connectivity for both residents and freight and rail-dependent businesses.