



## **For Immediate Release**

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## **Florida Legislature Calls for Study of High Speed Rail Operations in Florida**

**Treasure Coast Region, Fla.** – In a victory for the citizens of the Treasure Coast region, and based on work by Citizens Against Rail Expansion in Florida (CARE FL) and Indian River and Martin Counties, the Florida Legislature has included language in the state budget directing the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA) to commission a study to examine existing and planned passenger rail operations, including high-speed passenger rail, in Florida. Currently, Florida has no laws or regulations addressing the safety of high speed trains such as the one proposed by All Aboard Florida (AAF).

The study language was proposed by Senator Debbie Mayfield and the Florida Senate following an unprecedented series of deaths and injuries in six separate incidents in which individuals were struck by AAF/Brightline high speed trains currently running between West Palm Beach and Ft. Lauderdale. The language was included despite efforts and politicking by AAF to kill any measure related to rail safety this session.

The AAF/Brightline project proposes to send 32 new 80-110 mile per hour passenger trains, and more and longer FEC freight trains, along the same tracks between Miami and Orlando. The deaths and injuries, which occurred at rail crossings in South Florida, clearly demonstrated the urgent need for safety measures to protect pedestrians and motorists who cross the tracks multiple times a day every day.

“This study will require the hiring of experts to take a hard look at the impacts of high speed rail in Florida and in areas that never previously contemplated trains travelling at 110 miles per hour through densely populated areas,” said Dylan Reingold, Indian River County Attorney. “The study should confirm that pedestrians, children and vehicles are in danger at many of the at-grade crossings.”

“Citizens Against Rail Expansion in Florida is deeply grateful to Senator Debbie Mayfield and Representatives Erin Grall and Mary Lynn Magar for their unwavering commitment to protecting the residents of our community and all Floridians,” said Brent Hanlon, CARE FL Chairman. “This study is a necessary step so when our Legislature meets again, they will understand and act to address the deadly consequences of high speed trains in our communities.”

The AAF/Brightline high speed rail project will significantly increase the number and speed of trains passing through nearly 350 at-grade road crossings along the Florida East Coast Rail corridor, 28 of which are located in Martin County and 31 of which are located in Indian River County, posing more dangers and opportunities for accidents between trains and vehicles or people.

“If done responsibly, the rail study should compel state and federal governments’ to finally meet their regulatory obligations to ensure the safety of the public in and around railroads,” said Ruth Holmes, Martin County Senior Assistant County Attorney.

The study will include the following:

- An overview of the Florida Rail System, including existing and planned passenger rail and high-speed passenger rail operations in the state, and identification of existing and planned passenger rail and high-speed passenger rail stations, corridors, and associated railroad-highway crossings.
- An overview of the jurisdiction of federal, state, and local governments to regulate passenger rail and high-speed passenger rail operations.
- A review of data relating to incidents, including resulting injuries and fatalities, involving passenger rail and high-speed passenger rail operations in this state.
- Recommendations to further enhance passenger rail and high-speed passenger rail safety in this state, including a review of current crossing signalization, grade crossings and separations, corridor protection, public education and awareness, and coordination with local law enforcement and emergency management officials.
- Recommendations to further improve passenger rail and high-speed passenger rail in this state.

According to the language, the final report will be submitted to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives by November 1, 2018.

However, the language authorizing the study now heads to Governor Rick Scott's desk for his approval.

"We urge the Governor to approve this much-needed study to ensure the public's safety," added Hanlon.

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