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We're exposing truth about All Aboard Florida's play for public money

A recent guest column published by TCPalm ("[Brightline project offers great potential for our region](#),") repeatedly touted All Aboard Florida as a privately funded venture and accused our organization, Citizens Against Rail Expansion in Florida, of spreading misinformation. Nothing could be further from the truth.

CARE FL proudly stands by our mission to protect the safety, welfare and way of life for the families and businesses in and around our communities. We work toward accomplishing our

common goal by shining light on the discrepancies between the story AAF tells and the facts public records show.

While consistently claiming to be a private venture, All Aboard Florida has sought public subsidies over and over, bouncing back and forth between whatever option is most expedient at the time. It began in 2013 with a more than \$1.1 billion Railroad Rehabilitation & Improvement Financing loan, followed in 2014 by a \$1.75 billion private activity bond allocation, and now in 2017, the company is crawling back to the RRIF loan again.

All Aboard Florida and those who have sipped their Kool-Aid would have you believe these do not count as taxpayer-backed subsidies. But you don't just have to take our word for it. In August 2016, a federal court judge established that the cost of All Aboard Florida's private activity bonds to taxpayers would be up to \$600 million.

To moot that unfavorable ruling, All Aboard Florida withdrew the private activity bond allocation and, since that time, has been seeking a new Department of Transportation subsidy to fund Phase II of its project that will run directly through the Treasure Coast. Recently obtained public records show All Aboard Florida intends to apply for a new Railroad Rehabilitation & Improvement Financing loan.

This new loan application poses many risks to taxpayers. There are no guarantees All Aboard Florida will be able to repay the loan. Based on conclusions from economic experts that All Aboard Florida cannot demonstrate how this project will be financially feasible, repayment always will be in doubt. If All Aboard Florida cannot repay the loan, taxpayers will be on the hook for potentially billions of dollars.

All Aboard Florida's dedication to securing significant public funding confirms what CARE FL has been saying all along — the project cannot be completed without it.

Not only does All Aboard Florida depend on federal taxpayer dollars, but further, would require residents of Treasure Coast communities to bear additional financial burdens and safety risks. County officials are rightfully concerned about the tens of millions of dollars they will be forced to pay for crossing and safety equipment maintenance in perpetuity and the great burden it will place on taxpayers.

When it comes to safety concerns, our region cannot simply be compared apples-to-apples to other areas across the United States that are home to rail systems.

The Treasure Coast currently contains 79 at-grade rail crossings — nearly double the U.S. average. All Aboard Florida's trains would be travelling at speeds up to 110 mph through small,

pedestrian downtowns. And with no stop between West Palm Beach and Orlando, it is hard to fathom how All Aboard Florida would help alleviate any traffic in our area.

Then there is the issue of whole sections of towns being virtually cut off from vital emergency services when trains cross or stop on the tracks. This isn't "unfounded hyperbole," as stated in William R. Coulson's guest column. In March 2015, the Florida East Coast Railway's 90-year-old bridge over the Loxahatchee River malfunctioned, causing a freight train to block all three of Tequesta's railroad crossings for more than 90 minutes. During that time, there was a car crash with injuries. The trip to the hospital that should have taken 5 minutes instead took 47.

CARE FL will continue to hold All Aboard Florida accountable and call attention to their actions and the risk this project poses to our communities and to taxpayers. We thank our local, state and federal leaders for their continued support in this fight and for their commitment to doing what is right and what is best for their constituents and communities.

Brent Hanlon is the chairman of Citizens Against Rail Expansion in Florida.

Interested in Helping?

Winning this fight continues to be up to us! CARE and the residents of the Treasure Coast have the most to lose from this project, and we hope you will continue to oppose AAF by standing with CARE.

To get the latest or to sign up for our monthly updates, please visit our website www.saveourfl.com or you can like our Facebook page. You can also follow us on Twitter.

WE NEED YOUR HELP NOW MORE THAN EVER

Our opposition is positioning themselves to jeopardize our safety and quality of life. We need your donations to protect our citizen's safety and quality of life for the future and our children's future.

We would love to hear from you and if you care to make a contribution we've made it easy – just the donate button below

Donate

Please continue to share these updates with your family, neighbors and friends. There will be additional developments to report on in the coming weeks, so please keep an eye out for our monthly updates and possible calls to action.

Thank you for your continued support.

Together We Can Make A Difference.

Brent P. Hanlon

Chairman, CARE FL