

THE SCHOOL BOARD OF MARTIN COUNTY, FLORIDA

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November 25, 2014

VIA E-MAIL John.Winkle@dot.gov
and MAIL

Mr. John Winkle
Federal Railroad Administration
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, D.C. 20590

RE: All Aboard Florida – Martin County – Impact on School District

Dear Mr. Winkle:

I am the Superintendent for the Martin County School District and I am writing to express concerns our School Board has about the potential challenges and impacts that the All Aboard Florida project may bring to our District. We do not believe that our specific concerns were addressed in the September 2014 Environmental Impact Statement prepared by the Federal Railroad Administration. We understand that the opportunity to submit public comment ends on Dec. 3, 2014.

The All Aboard Florida project raises concerns of safety and economic impact to the Martin County School District. Over 18,000 students travel to and from public schools in Martin County by school bus, by car, on bicycles, or on foot.

Our District has 110 school buses in its fleet with 71 bus routes that transport over 8,000 students every school day (180 days each year). Additionally, District buses transport students on 12-15 field trips each day, to extended day programs, summer school, and sports events. Our school buses currently cross the FEC railroad tracks 350 times every school day.

We understand that there are currently 30 freight trains that navigate the FEC line daily, which already cause delays to our bus routes, and that the All Aboard Florida project anticipates an additional 32 passenger trains per day moving through the county at speeds from 70 to 110 miles per hour.

As such, we request that you consider our safety and economic concerns, summarized here:

Safety

- Pedestrian safety – We understand that only 10 of the 28 crossings across railroad lines in Martin County include pedestrian crossings. Given the high speed of the All Aboard Florida project, we are concerned about the safety of pedestrians, including students walking/bicycling to and from their schools and are required to cross the railroad tracks.
- Driver safety – Similarly, we are concerned for parents and other caregivers who drive their students to and from school, crossing the tracks multiple times per day. The School District, which is the second largest employer in the county, is also concerned for its employees who must cross the tracks multiple times every day to and from work, as well as for administrators who frequently visit school sites; itinerant

Laurie J. Gaylord, Superintendent

School Board Members: Michael DiTerlizzi • Tina McSoley • Rebecca Negron • Marsha Powers • Christia Li Roberts

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teachers and therapists who visit multiple schools per day; volunteers who donate their time to help our students, teachers, and schools; and vendors who deliver services and goods to all of our schools and District facilities.

- Speed of trains and length of buses – The speed of the trains will impact how quickly the safety devices are activated. Our average school bus is approximately 40 feet long and is required to negotiate a complete stop at all railroad crossings. A bus does not accelerate as quickly as a car and could potentially get caught mid-crossing when safety devices are activated.

We understand that the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and U.S. Department of Transportation created a Checklist for Identifying Potential School Bus Route Fixed Driving Hazards at Railroad Grade Crossings and feel that this survey should be performed for each crossing in Martin County.

- Emergency / crisis response – How will the additional 32 daily train crossings affect ambulance, police, and fire rescue traffic and their response time to our schools in an emergency or crisis situation?

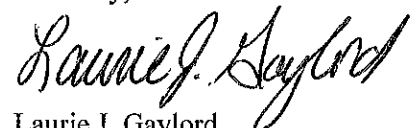
Economic

- The Martin County School District Transportation Facility is located on the east side of the railroad tracks. As already mentioned, the existing freight trains already cause delays to our bus routes. The additional passenger trains will cause further delays, increasing wait time and route time, which will also affect staff time and payroll, as well as an increase in fuel consumption and ultimately cost.
- In addition, the Martin County School District facilities and maintenance departments and warehouse are located on the east side of the railroad tracks. Our 100 “white fleet” vehicles cross the tracks a minimum of two times per day; delays caused by additional trains will cause further financial impact to the District.
- It is unknown at this time if the delays would require the District to alter school times. Until we know the actual schedule of the increased train traffic between the hours of 6am-9am and 1pm-4pm, we are unable to address this issue. However, altering school times could pose additional economic impact upon the District.

The cumulative impact of increased rail service through Martin County is, indeed, directly and indirectly, a significant concern to the operation of the School District and the safety of all of its constituents.

Thank you for the opportunity to voice our concerns about the impacts that All Aboard Florida may have on the Martin County School District. We appreciate the Federal Railroad Administration’s consideration of our concerns as well as those by other agencies and individuals in Martin County.

Sincerely,



Laurie J. Gaylord
Superintendent
Martin County School District

cc: Sarah Heard, Chair, Martin County Board of County Commissioners
Taryn Kryzda, County Administrator, Martin County Board of County Commissioners
Kim Delaney, Strategic Development Coordinator, Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council