

**INDIAN RIVER COUNTY, FLORIDA
MEMORANDUM**

TO: Jason E. Brown, County Administrator
FROM: Richard B. Szyrka, P.E., Public Works Director
SUBJECT: Virgin Trains – All Aboard Florida Construction Plan and Permitting Update
DATE: June 7, 2019

DESCRIPTION AND CONDITIONS

On May 1 and May 2, 2019 County staff met with several representatives from the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) to conduct field reviews at each of the 32 highway-rail grade crossings located in Indian River County.

In preparation for the meeting, County staff reached out to FDOT to request the most recent construction plans for proposed railway improvements through the County. On April 30, 2019 via email, Indian River County received plans from the FDOT labeled “AAF Released for Construction – R.M.W., 02-13-19”. These Approved for Construction Plans were never provided to Indian River County by Virgin Trains, Brightline or All Aboard Florida (AAF) representatives.

It should be noted that Indian River County Public Works has previously reviewed construction plans for the high-speed railway service proposed by Virgin Trains/All Aboard Florida (AAF). On August 15, 2016 and on October 10, 2018, County construction plan review comments were sent to AAF and their response to the comment letters has been silence.

The site visits above went well as FDOT staff acknowledged that the All Aboard Florida (Virgin Trains) Released for Construction Plans, dated February 13, 2019, showed a lack of detail for pedestrian crossings, conflicting design information between plan sheets, disregard for public safety, and a general lack of consistency throughout the plans.

On June 4, 2019 the County sent a letter to Gerard O’Rourke, Freight, Logistics and Passenger Operations Administrator for FDOT. The letter provides information regarding the site visits mentioned above with FDOT and County Staff, the overall concerns of County staff with regards to the “AAF Released for Construction Plans” dated February 13, 2019 and detailed comments regarding the plans. The complete letter and comments are attached.

On June 5, 2019 a roundtable meeting was held at the FDOT office in St. Lucie County with Kevin Thibault, Secretary of FDOT. Also in attendance was FDOT District IV Secretary Gerry O’Reilly. A Commission member from each County along with each County Administrator/Manager were in attendance along with staff representatives from Indian River, St. Lucie, and Martin Counties attended the meeting. Several MPO staff members from each of the counties were also in attendance. The focus of the meeting was to formulate a stronger partnership between FDOT and the local governments to enhance funding for infrastructure improvements with more focus on addressing the environmental issues that are of a concern both locally and statewide.

During the meeting, the subject of AAF was discussed. Indian River County Staff referenced the June 4, 2019 letter and the safety and constructability concerns of the County regarding the Approved for Construction Plans dated February 13, 2019. During the discussion, Mr. O'Reilly stated that the project was moving forward and permitting was complete. At that point staff from St. Lucie, Martin, and Indian River Counties informed Mr. O'Reilly and Secretary Thibault that not only have right-of-way permits in each of the Counties not been issued for improvements effecting County roadways/infrastructure, but that none of the Counties had even received right-of-way permit applications for said improvements. It was then that Ron Howse, a SJRWMD Board Member and a member of the Florida Transportation Commission stated that he would reach out to the railway design engineers for AAF and ask them to contact County staff for "engineer to engineer" discussions regarding our safety and construction concerns. This would help with creating dialog between AAF and the Counties that has not been occurring. Staff from St. Lucie and Martin Counties also requested that FDOT provide them with the most recent construction plans that FDOT has on file, as they too do not have current construction plans.

Overall the meeting was positive and that FDOT understood the concerns of the Counties. It was stated by FDOT that someone from FDOT Central Office Railway Administration would reach out to each County for further action.

FUNDING

Not Applicable

RECOMMENDATION

Informational – No recommendation

ATTACHMENTS

Letter to FDOT Regarding Crossing Site Visits

APPROVED AGENDA ITEM FOR: June 18, 2019