

When the Train Leaves The Station- Will We Be On Board?

By State Representative Dean Cannon



We have the opportunity right now to transform the way we travel as a state and region for years to come. Great opportunities like the one presented by Central Florida's Commuter Rail project are rare. The only question now is whether our state leaders will seize upon this golden opportunity or let it pass by? Our rapidly growing region has suffered for years with congested roads, particularly I-4.

For too long the solution to our transportation needs has been to only add more lanes. This way of thinking, though, is not a complete answer to the 21st century transportation challenges we face.

Central Florida Commuter Rail will create a 61-mile commuter link between DeLand and Poinciana. It will bring numerous benefits to the residents of Central Florida. Locally, it will help relieve congestion on I-4 and surrounding area roads in our community. But, investing in this mass transit system will not just benefit Central Florida. Commuter Rail will act as the mass transit spine to which future connections can be added to benefit all Floridians. With a smaller state budget, this solution is smarter and more cost effective than only adding lanes to I-4 and building more highways. Commuter Rail is the forward-thinking solution we need to meet the transportation challenges that will be created by a population that is projected to double in the next 50 years.

Commuter Rail will also give us the transportation system we need to support continued economic growth in Florida. Florida's economy cannot prosper if we are unable to move both people and freight. Commuter Rail will create jobs and help stimulate economic development and growth to surrounding areas. This means that even those Floridians who never step foot on a rail car will still greatly benefit from it. With Florida's economy hurting, your elected leaders should take advantage of every opportunity to ease the economic pain and stimulate growth.

Lastly, Commuter Rail will help address Florida's environmental and energy needs. By removing thousands of vehicles from our roads every day, this transportation system will reduce carbon dioxide emissions and our demand on foreign oil. Both are important for the future sustainability of our state.

Thanks to our congressional leaders Rep. Corrine Brown and Rep. John Mica we have the opportunity to secure more than \$300 million in federal funds to help pay for the \$615 million price tag on Commuter Rail. These federal dollars come from gas taxes that you and I have paid for years to the federal government. If we do not use these dollars now, they will be used to build mass transit systems in other states. It could be decades before Florida is able to bring in federal dollars again for a mass transit project.

Central Florida has seen great bipartisan leadership on this issue from Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer and Orange County Mayor Rich Crotty, to local governments and business partners, to Governor Crist and Florida Department of Transportation Secretary Kopelousos. Floridians overwhelmingly are in support of this measure as well. I am excited that the Florida Legislature this year has the ability to take the final step to make this project a reality. In order to purchase the 61.5 miles of track the Legislature must approve the purchase of liability insurance, like those already in place for Tri-Rail in South Florida, to protect rail passengers and the state's investment in the project. I am proud to say the Florida House passed these measures last year, and this year I am optimistic the Senate will join us in bringing a cost effective, energy efficient, environmentally friendly mass transit system to our region.

With our state facing numerous challenges, Floridians want leaders who can get things done. They want leaders who can come together and find common sense solutions to address the issues we face. Commuter Rail is an example of a common sense solution to address Florida's transportation needs for this generation and generations to come. Your voice matters, and your elected leaders need to hear from you on Commuter Rail. We need your involvement to make sure that this great opportunity does not pass us by. I want to hear from you if you have any ideas on this or any other topic. Feel free to visit my website at www.deancannon.com or contact me at 407-623-5740.

Have a wonderful Holiday,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dean Cannon', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dean

State Representative Dean Cannon represents House District 35, which encompasses part of Orange County including both Baldwin Park and Winter Park.