



December 11, 2014

Mr. Mark Howard  
Florida Trend  
Letter to the Editor  
P.O. Box 611  
St. Petersburg, FL 33731

Dear Mr. Howard:

Your editorial criticizing opposition to the proposed All Aboard Florida rail service in your December issue shows a lack of understanding for the concerns of those outside the Miami-West Palm Beach All Aboard Florida corridor. Your complete failure to appreciate why so many of the more than half a million people living on the Treasure Coast oppose the All Aboard Florida (AAF) project is surprising, and suggests that you do not understand how our region stands to be disrupted and possibly endangered, while providing those Floridians with none of the benefits of passenger rail service.

This project has incited tremendous activism on the part of thousands of Treasure Coast residents in Stuart, Vero Beach, Fort Pierce and Port St. Lucie. More than 1,700 of them attended one of the public meetings held by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) in November.

Your editorial demonstrated that Florida Trend has not considered the concerns of Treasure Coast residents. Those concerns are quite serious. Public safety is primary among them. As a leading health care provider in the region, operating three hospital campuses, Martin Health System has been firm in its opposition. In Stuart, we already face the burden of freight traffic multiple times a day. Those trains tie up traffic, challenging our emergency responders and law enforcement officers to respond to urgent matters in a timely manner. The rail line dissects the heart of Stuart's downtown area. The proposed passenger trains and intersection cycle times will hold up ambulances heading to our hospitals, as well as the arrival of physicians and other medical providers traveling to hospitals to take care of medical emergencies.

Regardless of the size and speed of these trains, the sheer number of new trains passing through our small, congested town will cause significant additional delays. In the case of medical emergencies, these delays can mean the difference between life and death.

Compounding the problem is the very real fear shared by many that AAF will ease the expansion of freight traffic once the Panama Canal's capacity expands. AAF itself expressed the potential for enhancement of "freight reliability and capacity" in the October 2012 environmental assessment they jointly prepared with the FRA for the phase 1 AAF project from West Palm Beach to Miami.

Just as our coastal towns are not designed for the addition of 32 high-speed passenger trains, the potential addition of long, noisy freight trains would be a serious detriment to the safety of our Treasure Coast communities and the quality of life we enjoy.



Unfortunately, safer and better alternatives—such as use of the western corridor for the additional trains—have not been considered.

For the Treasure Coast region, this project offers only additional roadway congestion, critical time delays for emergency services and the increased potential for serious accidents.

Your suggestion that AAF can lead to “greatness” for Florida’s cities is overly optimistic at best, and is certainly not applicable to the communities on Florida’s Treasure Coast. Your failure to appreciate the widespread serious concerns of our residents is surprising and extremely disappointing.

Sincerely,

Mark E. Robitaille  
President and CEO, Martin Health System