



# DAILY BRIEF

From December 3, 2009

To learn more about AIF's positions on the Rail Special Session read our **Communiqué** which was delivered to all legislators today.

For the third year in a row, legislators in Tallahassee have taken up the task of passing legislation aimed at approving the Central Florida Commuter Rail project (more commonly known as SunRail). The difference this time around is that legislative leaders have called a Special Session just on the issue of rail alone. The other major difference is that this year's legislation goes beyond the approval of SunRail. Instead, it sets out to create a comprehensive rail transit system which would incorporate SunRail, Tri-Rail, and High Speed Rail (HSR). Senator Jeremy Ring (D-Margate) is the prime sponsor of SB 2B; while in the House Rep. Gary Aubuchon (R-Cape Coral) is once again carrying the bill (HB 1B). In general terms, both the House and Senate bill set out to create the foundation for a comprehensive rail transit system under the direction of a new Florida Rail Enterprise entity within the Florida Department of Transportation to oversee the development and operation of state-owned passenger rail systems, including high speed rail. This Florida Rail Enterprise is modeled after the Florida Turnpike Enterprise, which has successfully been in existence for a number of years. The bill also lays out the funding mechanisms for all three rail projects including an annual commitment to Tri-Rail of approximately \$15 million.

Due to the short amount of time afforded by the Special Session schedule, things are moving very fast in both chambers - much to the chagrin of a number of opponents to the proposal. In the Senate, a workshop was held today led by Transportation Committee Chairman Andy Gardiner (R-Orlando). During this workshop, each of the bill's co-sponsors presented different sections of the bill and took questions from fellow senators. This Q&A session provided the opening for opponents of the bill, mainly Senators Paula Dockery (R-Lakeland) and Ronda Storms (R-Brandon) to pepper the bill sponsors with tough questions about the legislation. In addition, Senator Carey Baker (R-Eustis) surprised all in attendance by publicly announcing his opposition to the bill. Sen. Baker had been a supporter of SunRail during the last two attempts at passing the bill. He announced that his opposition was due to the fact that the current legislation being considered goes beyond SunRail and that he was not supportive of attempts at drawing down federal stimulus dollars designated for high speed rail.

In the House, the bill was considered and passed by the House Economic Development and Community Affairs Council after much debate today. This will allow the House to bring the bill up during its scheduled floor session Friday, December 4th. It appears that the game plan is for the House to pass the bill first and then send it to the Senate for consideration.

The Senate bill has three committee stops before it is ready for the floor and we anticipate a number of amendments to be filed. One of the major sticking points revolves around allegations from union representatives that the legislation undermines union jobs. This opposition from the AFL-CIO and other rail unions puts into the question passage of the legislation in the Senate. Add to that the defection by Sen. Baker and the probabilities of success in the Senate remain questionable at this point.

**Associated Industries of Florida supports passage of legislation creating a comprehensive rail transit system in Florida. At a time when so many Floridians are out of work, we must make the necessary infrastructure investments that will lead to the creation of jobs and bring about much needed investments to our state.**