

Frequently Asked Questions

Below are the 15 most frequently asked questions on the Broward Commuter Rail (BCR) South PD&E Study. To view the answers, either scroll through each of the subsequent pages, or click on the question below that interests you most, and you will be taken directly to the answer.

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Florida Department of Transportation Mission Statement

The Department will provide a safe transportation system that ensures the mobility of people and goods, enhances economic prosperity, and preserves the quality of our environment and communities.

1. What is the Broward Commuter Rail South Study?

The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) District Four and Broward County have been evaluating various alternatives for implementing commuter rail along the Florida East Coast (FEC) Railway from Aventura in Miami-Dade County to Deerfield Beach in Broward County. This evaluation is a direct result of a previous study known as the 'Coastal Link' that evaluated 85 miles of commuter rail in Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach Counties. Recent efforts on the Broward County project, Broward Commuter Rail (BCR), include station screening along the corridor, ridership and operations modeling, traffic analysis for east-west roadways, analysis of various alternatives for passenger rail to cross the New River, cost estimating, and numerous stakeholder and public meetings. The FEC corridor is a shared-use corridor with freight trains and intercity passenger trains. Florida East Coast Railway, LLC owns the FEC Railway right-of-way and operates the freight rail service in the corridor. Brightline operates intercity passenger trains via a passenger easement in the corridor. The proposed commuter rail service will share tracks with freight and Brightline. Miami-Dade County is also studying the implementation of commuter rail service in the FEC corridor from Downtown Miami to a proposed station that will also serve Brightline in Aventura, known as the Northeast Corridor. The Northeast Corridor is in the Project Development phase with the Federal Transit Administration making it eligible to compete for federal funds.

On August 25th, the Broward County Commission adopted a locally preferred alternative (LPA) for Broward Commuter Rail South (BCR South) to extend commuter rail service on the FEC Railway corridor from the planned passenger station in the City of Aventura north to the City of Fort Lauderdale, a distance of 11.5 miles. Stations are recommended in the City of Hollywood, Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport, and Broward Health Medical Center. The Broward County Commission directed staff to submit the necessary documents to request entry for BCR South into the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Project Development phase. The Broward County Commission requested staff work closely with the City of Fort Lauderdale and other stakeholders to prepare additional analyses for crossing the New River and continue station planning with the cities north of the river to build consensus to enable future expansion of commuter rail to Deerfield Beach.

2. How does this project benefit Broward County?

Expanded and enhanced transit options can increase mobility, improve travel times, and provide congestion relief to our roadways. Additional transit options provide residents with improved access to employment, healthcare, and other services. Improving the transportation system helps sustain and support economic development and can stimulate growth, particularly at or near passenger station locations. Transit Oriented Development (TOD) is another benefit of commuter rail service. TOD increases population density in urban areas resulting in increased revenues which can help fund the transit service. Employers will have access to a wider pool of talent as employees have a more reliable travel time to and from work. The environment also benefits from fewer vehicles on the roadway which will reduce emissions and provide for a more sustainable transportation network.

3. What is the difference between BCR South, Brightline, and Tri-Rail?

Tri-Rail operates commuter rail service on the South Florida Rail Corridor (SFRC) on shared tracks with CSX freight and Amtrak. SFRC is owned by the State of Florida and located west of I-95. BCR South will provide commuter rail service on the FECR corridor and will share tracks with Brightline and FECR freight trains. It is anticipated that BCR South will have similar train frequencies or headways, costs, and passenger station spacing (2 to 5 miles) as Tri-Rail. Brightline is an intercity passenger service between Orlando and Miami, with fewer stops in the southeast Florida region, including: Downtown Miami, Aventura (under construction), Downtown Fort Lauderdale, Boca Raton (under construction), and Downtown West Palm Beach. Due to the faster travel times between cities and passenger amenities, Brightline is priced higher than Tri-Rail or the proposed BCR South and offers premium service compared to a commuter line. The FECR tracks upon which BCR South will operate are owned by the freight railroad and Brightline holds the passenger rail easement for the corridor. Therefore, various agreements will be needed between Broward County, Brightline, and most likely FECR to advance the project.

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4. What are the steps and schedule to implement BCR South and who will be making decisions?

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The schedule depends on when key decisions are made so that funding can be requested, approved, and programmed by federal, state, and local governments. Some of the projected key milestones are noted below.

a) Request Entry into Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) Project Development (Summer/Fall 2022)

FTA will decide if the project can progress into PD to begin the NEPA process. FTA will also determine the level of environmental documentation or Class of Action (COA) that is needed for the project, which determines the project's NEPA schedule. NEPA timeframes typically vary from 12 months to 2 years.

b) Complete the NEPA Environmental Study (Spring/Summer 2023)

The project team will continue outreach to build consensus and refine the Locally Preferred Alternative to avoid impacts and to minimize and mitigate any unavoidable impacts. The study will illustrate the benefits of the project and the team will coordinate with stakeholders to ensure that any NEPA commitments are properly documented.

c) Development of a Project Financial Plan (Summer/Spring 2022-2023)

This activity is ongoing and will be refined as the study progresses with the goal of developing a solid funding plan to compete for federal discretionary funds. This financial plan will identify the sources of local funding that will be required for the project to receive matching federal and state funds.

d) Endorse the 'refined' Locally Preferred Alternative and advance to the final design phase (Summer/Fall 2023)

The Broward County Commission will be responsible for deciding whether the project should move forward and whether the local funding required per the financial plan for the project should be committed. The Broward MPO will need to adopt the Locally Preferred Alternative and reflect the appropriate funding in the MTP.

e) Final Design and Construction -Dependent on Funding (2025 and beyond)

The final design and construction of BCR will be contingent on the funding available and committed, and the strategy developed to implement the project based on projected funding in coordination with the federal and state partners.

5. Who funds/pays for the project?

Broward County is responsible for developing the financial plan and identifying the funding sources that will be used for the project. Local funding can be a combination of funding from the county and the municipalities. It is expected that the County will request both federal and state funding to match the local contributions to the project. It should be noted that the operations and maintenance costs for the project are expected to be covered by local funding including farebox revenue. Federal and state funding opportunities for operations and maintenance costs are generally limited.

6. How much will it cost to ride the BCR South commuter rail?

BCR South has not determined the rail operator or a fare structure yet, but the cost for a commuter rail ticket is anticipated to be like Tri-Rail.

7. How many trains will be added to the tracks and how will that impact east-west traffic?

The project team has completed an extensive analysis of future traffic volumes on east-west roadways. Conservative assumptions for the train operations were used and include: a maximum of 36 Brightline trains, 60 BCR South commuter trains, and 24 freight trains. The commuter trains will traverse through railroad grade crossings at similar speeds and durations to the Brightline trains. The queuing analysis indicates that the queues generated by a passenger train crossing will clear prior to the next train crossing. In summary, 3 to 5 additional train crossings are anticipated in the corridor during peak hours. As the project progresses, additional traffic analysis will be conducted to determine what, if any, signalization strategies can be implemented to help minimize disruptions caused by the additional train crossings.

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8. What noise impacts will the commuter rail cause?

The project team has completed preliminary noise assessments for BCR South. Noise impacts associated with the addition of BCR South commuter rail trains are dependent upon several factors and are being evaluated in accordance with FTA and FDOT guidelines. The main factors influencing noise levels and impacts at noise sensitive areas such as residences include the total number of trains per day and night, speeds of the trains, the elevation of the tracks, the location and layout of the train stations, the distance from the railroad tracks, and the nearest crossings. The noise levels generated by BCR South trains will be similar to the Brightline trains as they move through the corridor which are much quieter and a shorter duration than the existing freight trains. Noise abatement options for impacted sites will be evaluated during the NEPA phase including the review of existing quiet zones, potential use of noise barriers, use of specialized track supports, and the review of rail vehicle types and wheels.

9. How will safety be addressed, particularly with the recent incidents occurring along the tracks?

Safety is the top priority along railroad corridors. Recently, FDOT, Brightline, and FECR applied for a federal grant to improve safety along the corridor. Furthermore, any railroad crossing being impacted by a new stations and/or realignment of the railroad as part of BCR South will be designed and constructed to meet current safety requirements.

FDOT has a rail safety campaign underway called Operation STRIDE (Statewide Traffic and Railroad Initiative using Dynamic Envelopes). STRIDE includes engineering countermeasures, education, and enforcement efforts to provide a comprehensive strategy to prevent fatalities near the railroad crossings. A Dynamic Envelope is an area near railroad crossings designed to keep motorists out of the danger zone. White connecting X's are used to visually highlight the zone at railroad crossings where drivers, bicyclists, and pedestrians should not stop to increase safety for the public. Rail safety tips to consider:

- Only cross at designated rail crossings
- Use caution around trains and tracks
- Remove your headphones and look up from your cell phone around railroad crossings
- Do not walk along train tracks
- Remember that trains can happen anytime, and trains can not stop quickly
- Red lights mean a train is on the way – do not cross for any reason!
- Never take photos on or near train tracks
- Cross at a 90-degree angle
- Do not drive around lowered gates
- Never stop a vehicle on train tracks

For more information on Operation STRIDE, visit: <https://www.fdot.gov/rail/programs/operation-stride>

10. What impact will the project have on property values and affordable housing?

Property values could increase, particularly around station locations. Some areas may have already increased with the speculation of commuter rail and potential stations. As for affordable housing, many municipalities include incentives for developers to provide affordable housing as part of their developments.

11. Where will stations be located?

Station locations were initially screened under previous studies. The project team has updated these to further evaluate and develop technical recommendations for station locations for BCR South. Station criteria include factors such as land use, access, transit supportive plans and policies, development potential, transit connectivity, and spacing between stations. The objective is to have commuter rail stations spaced between 2 miles to 5 miles apart to optimize both ridership and travel time. In addition, commuter trains are heavy and take time to accelerate and decelerate, so additional stops increase travel time which can reduce ridership. The team worked closely with the municipalities along the corridor to develop the technical recommendations for six stations.

[See next page for the rest of the answer to frequently asked question 11](#)

11. Where will stations be located? (continued)

Below are the BCR South technical recommendations for station locations:

- City of Hollywood (between Tyler Street and Taylor Street)
- Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport
- City of Fort Lauderdale (between SW 15th and SW 17th Streets, near Broward Health Medical Center)

Commuter rail service will extend into Miami-Dade County and into downtown Miami with additional stations as part of a separate project, the Northeast Corridor, which is being conducted by Miami-Dade County. It should be noted that final station platform locations can vary slightly and will be determined during the Project Development phase of the project as the project team works closely with the cities and stakeholders surrounding the proposed station locations. Once BCR South is in operation, there is potential for additional infill stations depending on their impact to operations and ridership as the system must remain time- and cost-competitive with vehicle transportation to maintain and increase ridership.

12. What are the ridership projections for the Broward Commuter Rail South?

BCR South ridership is expected to include approximately 4,000 daily riders and over 16,000 daily riders when combined with the Miami-Dade County (Northeast Corridor) segment. This combined ridership compares favorably to other commuter trains such as Tri-Rail (14,900 daily riders as a mature system operating in three South Florida counties) and SunRail (5,800 daily riders as a newer system operating in three Central Florida counties).

13. When will commuter rail service be enabled in northern parts of Broward County?

Broward County is in the planning stages for a County-wide transit system which will include light rail transit, bus rapid transit, and other new or expanded transit services along key corridors in northern Broward County. Results of these planning efforts are expected to be available next year (2023). Broward County is also continuing efforts to assess potential alternatives for allowing commuter rail service to cross the New River on the FEC corridor. Once a consensus is reached, it will be possible to move ahead with future commuter rail projects north of the New River, in Broward County as well as Palm Beach County.

14. What is the location and status of the planned BCR South station near the Broward Health Medical Center?

The planned station location is between SW 15th and SW 17th Streets, two blocks west of the Broward Health Medical Center. The station location was evaluated as part of the prior planning study work for the project and recent meetings with Broward Health Medical Center and the City of Fort Lauderdale confirmed strong support for the station. This station fits perfectly within the BCR South project limits and creates a logical terminus which will provide a gateway to the Broward County Convention Center, Port Everglades, and the beaches, among other destinations.

15. Why is the Ft. Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport station no longer marked as a Brightline station?

In recent meetings with Broward County, Brightline advised that their intercity passenger service is no longer planned to stop at the Airport. Brightline is constructing stations in Aventura and Boca Raton and their passengers will be able to connect to commuter rail service and access the Airport via Aventura (in Miami-Dade) in the near term and via Boca Raton in Palm Beach County at a future date.