

Frequently Asked Questions

Below are 15 frequently asked questions about 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. Creole and Spanish translations are available upon request for all public documents.

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1. What is the Broward Commuter Rail (BCR) South Study?

The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) and Broward County are evaluating various alternatives for implementing commuter rail along the Florida East Coast Railway (FECR) from the passenger rail station in the City of Aventura in Miami-Dade County to 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. The proposed BCR South commuter rail service will share tracks with freight and Brightline. Miami-Dade County is also studying the implementation of commuter rail service in the FECR corridor, known as the Northeast Corridor, from Downtown Miami to the passenger rail station in the City of Aventura that also serves Brightline. The Northeast Corridor is in the Project Development phase with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) making it eligible to compete for federal funds.

On August 25, 2022, the Broward County Commission adopted a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) for Broward Commuter Rail South to extend commuter rail service on the FECR corridor from the passenger rail 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 South Fort Lauderdale. BCR South entered the FTA Project Development phase on December 2, 2022. BCR South will be an extension of the Northeast Corridor service proposed by Miami-Dade County. Both projects are developing preliminary designs and developing the necessary engineering and environmental documentation to fund and implement commuter rail along the FEC Railway, which will include public meetings and other engagement activities throughout the process. It should be noted that the Broward County Commission requested County staff to 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 vision of commuter rail to the north.

2. What are the benefits of adding commuter rail to the FEC Corridor?

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 multi-modal access to employment, healthcare, recreation and other services. Improving the transportation system helps sustain and support economic development and can stimulate smart growth, particularly at or near passenger station locations. 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, Tri-Rail and Brightline?

Tri-Rail is a commuter rail service on the South Florida Rail Corridor (SFRC) on shared tracks with CSX freight trains 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. FECR owns the rail corridor and Brightline holds an easement for all passenger rail activity along the corridor. Therefore, various agreements will be needed between Broward County, Brightline, and most likely FECR to advance the project.

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 Miami and Orlando, with fewer stops in the southeast Florida region, including: Downtown Miami, Aventura, Downtown Fort Lauderdale, Boca Raton, and Downtown West Palm Beach and Orlando.

4. Who funds/pays for the project?

Broward County is developing a 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 federal funding to match the local and state contributions to the project. It should be noted that the operations and maintenance costs for the project are expected to be funded locally from sources including farebox revenue, as federal and state funding opportunities for operations and maintenance costs are very limited.

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5. 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 a typical commuter rail service, such as Tri-Rail.

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

The project team has completed a preliminary analysis of future traffic volumes on east-west roadways crossing the FECR tracks. Conservative assumptions for the train operations were used and include: a maximum of 36 Brightline trains, 55-60 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 preliminary analysis indicates that the queues generated by a commuter train crossing will generally clear prior to the next train crossing. In summary, the proposed project will add 3 to 5 commuter trains in the east-west corridors during a peak hour. As the study progresses, additional traffic analysis will be conducted to determine what, if any, traffic control strategies can be implemented to help minimize travel time delays caused by the trains.

7. What noise evaluations are being done as part of BCR South?

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 which are much quieter and have shorter duration than the existing freight trains. Noise abatement options for any impacted sites will be evaluated as part of the Project Development / National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) phase including a review of existing quiet zones, potential use of noise barriers, use of specialized track supports, and a review of rail vehicle types and wheels.

8. 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 received a federal Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) grant to improve safety along the corridor. The additional features will include signage, fence placement, median delineators, and reflective pavement markers to bring heightened awareness to some of the railroad crossings and help prevent trespassing. In addition to the RAISE grant improvements, the Broward Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) has also received a safety grant from FRA for this corridor. This Broward MPO program is in the early stages.

FDOT has an ongoing rail safety campaign 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 railroad crossings. A Dynamic Envelope is an area near railroad crossings designed to keep motorists out of the danger zone. To increase safety for the public, white connecting "X's" are painted on the ground used to visually highlight the zone at railroad crossings where drivers, bicyclists, and pedestrians should not stop.

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

As part of the project, additional safety analyses will be conducted and as a result, additional safety improvements may be made as part of the project, particularly around the stations.

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9. 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.

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

Projections are being developed based on: FTA Simplified Trips-on-Project Software (STOPS) model for Current Year (2023) and Design Year 2045 and projected future population & employment approved in the MPO 2045 Metropolitan Transportation Plan. Preliminary forecasts compare favorably to other commuter rail systems in Florida– (combined ridership from Downtown Miami to S. Ft Lauderdale estimated to be around 20,000 to 24,000 daily trips in 2045).

11. How did the southern Fort Lauderdale (Broward Health Medical Center) station stop come about?

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 lies within the BCR South project limits and creates a logical terminus which will provide a gateway to downtown Fort Lauderdale, the Broward County Convention Center, Port Everglades, and the beaches, among other destinations.

12. Will Brightline stop at any of the BCR South Station locations?

In meetings with Broward County, Brightline advised that their intercity passenger service is no longer planned to stop at the Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport or any other BCR South locations. Brightline has recently opened intercity train stations in Aventura and Boca Raton. Their passengers will be able to connect to commuter rail service and access Ft. Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport via Aventura in Miami-Dade and via Boca Raton in Palm Beach County at a future date.

13. What is the schedule and next steps for the project?

The next steps are to complete the NEPA/Project Development process and obtain a Small Starts Grant from the FTA. The anticipated schedule is to complete the NEPA Study by the summer of 2024. The Small Starts Grant is anticipated to be obtained in early 2025, followed by design and construction. The objective is to begin revenue operations concurrent with the Miami-Dade Northeast Corridor service, which is expected to begin at the end of 2027.

14. Who will operate and maintain the service?

The operator has not been determined yet. Broward County is currently coordinating with Miami-Dade County for selection, oversight and management of the operator for the proposed commuter rail service.

15. What will the project cost?

The current Capital Cost is approximately \$317 million (in year-of-expenditure dollars).