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Charlie Crist: Rail legislation will create jobs for Floridians

By Charlie Crist

Last week, Florida's transportation future entered the 21st century. As I signed legislation that solidifies our state's commitment to expanding passenger rail, I want to thank Senate President Jeff Atwater and House Speaker Larry Cretul for bringing their respective chambers together to seize this opportunity to create jobs and economic development for our state.

On behalf of the many Floridians who will benefit from additional passenger rail, I am grateful to our Legislature for understanding the importance of our current opportunity.

SunRail, Tri-Rail and high-speed rail represent a major step forward in modernizing Florida's transportation system. The vision of linking rail, roads, transit, airports and seaports is now possible through the partnership and collaboration of business, community and state leaders.

As leaders, we are responsible for having a vision of Florida 20 or 30 years from now. Innovation thrives in Florida — from our state-of-the-art tourism destinations, to space travel and exploration, biomedical research and renewable energy technologies. That same innovative spirit will now strengthen Florida's transportation system.

Investing in these projects will yield benefits beyond the rail lines themselves. Passenger rail will make Floridians' daily commute cleaner and more efficient, resulting in fewer cars and less pollution. It also will help us maintain and preserve environmentally sensitive areas. Residents and visitors will be able to travel from airports to attractions to beaches, using convenient and passenger-friendly rail and transit.

I applaud the Florida Legislature for understanding that investing in rail makes sense because it is more cost-effective than building more roads. Consider that approximately 2,000 cars travel Interstate 4 every hour. To add an additional traffic lane to this highway would cost an estimated \$1 billion per mile. Compare that cost to the \$7.8-million per mile investment in SunRail that can carry 15,000 passengers per hour.

Thanks to this legislation, Florida's infrastructure will be better equipped to encourage economic growth. SunRail, Tri-Rail and high speed rail will create thousands of jobs and generate millions in revenue while also safeguarding our environment that is so important to our visitors and the quality of life of our people.

SunRail, Tri-Rail and high speed rail are the building blocks of a better statewide transportation network. They will reduce congestion on our roads for Florida's workforce, for our visitors and for businesses moving goods and services to where they are needed. And most importantly, they will provide jobs and economic opportunity for Floridians. Faster, more efficient travel means people have more time for what matters most — supporting their families — and building a better tomorrow for future generations.

Crist, Florida's governor, is a candidate for U.S. Senate.