



Memorandum

Memorandum No: 22-079

Date: June 28, 2022

To: Honorable Mayor and Commissioners

From: Chris Lagerbloom, ICMA-CM, City Manager

Subject: Broward Commuter Rail and the New River Rail Crossing Update

This memorandum shall serve as an update to Memorandum 21-074, which was distributed on August 18, 2021. The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) recently distributed the following:

- 1) A Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document to help summarize most of the questions and feedback that they have received from various meetings, emails, letters, and phone calls. The Frequently Asked Questions, attached, can be distributed to your constituents and will also be available on the project website.

- 2) An update on the PD&E study efforts with key highlights:
 - The FDOT project team held an Alternatives Public Workshop (APW) offering both a virtual and an in-person option on January 27 and January 31, 2022, respectively, with over 200 participants.
 - The FDOT project team continues active outreach and educational efforts including meeting with civic, homeowner, and business associations throughout the area. Through its role providing on-going study coordination, the project team remains available to attend additional stakeholder meetings to present and/or provide question and answer sessions.
 - Community and business leaders, policy makers, and stakeholders have requested workshops to discuss the study and overall feasibility of the project. This has included a summit conducted by the Broward Workshop and the Tower Forum in which the City of Fort Lauderdale, FDOT, Broward Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), and Broward County all participated.
 - These meetings and forums have generated valuable discussion on the project and, more specifically, on alternatives to cross the New River.
 - The presentation slides that have been used for each meeting have been posted to the project website, which can be accessed at www.browardcommuterrailstudy.com.

For further information on this initiative, please contact Ben Rogers, Director of Transportation and Mobility, at brogers@fortlauderdale.gov.

Attachment: FDOT June 2022 FAQ Sheet

c: Tarlesha W. Smith, Esq., Assistant City Manager
Greg Chavarria, Assistant City Manager
Alain E. Boileau, City Attorney
David R. Soloman, City Clerk
Patrick Reilly, Interim City Auditor
Department Directors
CMO Managers

June 2022



Florida Department of Transportation, District Four

Broward Commuter Rail

Project Development and Environment (PD&E) Study
Financial Management #: 417031-5-22-01
Efficient Transportation Decision Making #: 14474



STAY INFORMED and GET INVOLVED: www.browardcommuterrailstudy.com

Frequently Asked Questions

Below are the 17 most frequently asked questions on the Broward Commuter Rail (BCR) 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.

1. [What is the Broward Commuter Rail Study?](#)
2. [How does this project benefit Broward County?](#)
3. [What is the difference between BCR, Brightline, and Tri-Rail?](#)
4. [What are the steps and schedule to implement BCR and who will be making decisions?](#)
5. [Who funds/pays for the project?](#)
6. [How much will it cost to ride the BCR commuter rail?](#)
7. [How many trains will be added to the tracks and how will that impact east-west traffic?](#)
8. [What noise impacts will the commuter rail cause?](#)
9. [How will safety be addressed, particularly with the recent incidents occurring along the tracks?](#)
10. [What impact will the project have on property values and affordable housing?](#)
11. [Where will stations be located?](#)
12. [What are the different alternatives for crossing the New River?](#)
13. [Why can't the freight trains move out west or use the proposed New River crossing whether it is a bridge or a tunnel?](#)
14. [Why can't you elevate the entire corridor?](#)
15. [How disruptive will the project be during construction?](#)
16. [How does future sea level rise impact the Alternatives to cross the New River?](#)
17. [What are the ridership projections for the Broward Commuter Rail?](#)

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 Study?

The Broward Commuter Rail (BCR) study originates from a regional planning study known as the 'Coastal Link' that evaluated placing commuter rail within the existing Florida East Coast Railway (FECR) Corridor through Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach Counties for a total of 85 miles. BCR is the Broward County portion (27 miles) of the 'Coastal Link', which extends north from Aventura in Miami-Dade (the Northeast Corridor) to Deerfield Beach. The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), Broward County, and the BCR project team have been coordinating with stakeholders to assess whether there is a consensus on a preferred alternative, also known as a 'Locally Preferred Alternative' (LPA), that can be presented to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) in order to advance the environmental study and to enter Project Development (PD). The PD phase is when the team will complete the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process, including continued public outreach, engineering evaluations, and the preparation of environmental documents addressing impacts to social, cultural, natural, and physical resources, as well as the benefits the project may bring to the county and the region.

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, 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 will provide commuter rail service on the FECR corridor and will share tracks with Brightline and FECR freight trains. It is anticipated that BCR 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 and offers premium service compared to a commuter line. The FECR tracks upon which BCR 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.

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

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 and on the following page.

a) Decide on a Preferred Alternative (Summer/Fall 2022)

The Broward County Commission is responsible for identifying a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA). Next, the Broward Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) will approve an amendment to the long-term Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) that will include funding for the Project Development (PD) phase which includes a NEPA study and 30% design. The decision on an LPA at this stage does not commit the county to funding or implementing the project, but it is necessary for the project to enter PD and be considered for future federal funding.

b) Request Entry into Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) Project Development (Fall/Winter 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.

[See next page for additional milestones...](#)

4. What are the steps and schedule to implement BCR and who will be making decisions? (cont'd)

c) Complete the NEPA Environmental Study (Summer/Winter 2023-2024)

The project team will continue outreach to build consensus and refine the Locally Preferred Alternative to avoid impacts and to minimize and mitigate any impacts that are unavoidable. 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.

d) Development of a Project Financial Plan (Summer/Winter 2023-2024)

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.

e) Endorse the 'refined' Locally Preferred Alternative and advance to the final design phase (Winter 2023-2024)

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.

f) Final Design and Construction -Dependent on Funding (2024 and beyond)

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 commuter rail?

BCR 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 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.

8. What noise impacts will the commuter rail cause?

The project team has completed preliminary noise assessments for BCR. Noise impacts associated with the addition of BCR 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 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?

[Return to Questions](#)

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 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. 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. A preliminary station screening report can be found in the Documents & Publications section of the BCR website at www.browardcommuterrailstudy.com.

Below are the BCR technical recommendations for station locations:

- South of Hillsboro Boulevard (Deerfield Beach)
- North of Atlantic Boulevard (Pompano Beach)
- North of Oakland Park Boulevard (Oakland Park)
- Downtown Fort Lauderdale (shared with Brightline)
- Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport (potentially shared with Brightline)
- North of Hollywood Boulevard (Hollywood)

It should be noted that the final station platform locations can vary slightly and will be determined during the Project Development phase of the project. Once BCR 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.

[See next page for additional frequently asked questions...](#)

12. What are the different alternatives for crossing the New River?

The mode, alignment, and technology for BCR have been determined through earlier studies - commuter rail alignment along the FECR corridor using push-pull locomotives. The project team has made technical recommendations for six stations as reflected in FAQ #11. A new passenger rail crossing of the New River that accommodates the needs of navigation is necessary to provide passenger rail service, including BCR. This is the major decision remaining for a preferred alternative to [request to] enter the FTA PD process. This new crossing will accommodate both commuter rail and Brightline trains while the freight trains will continue to run on the existing bridge. Below is a summary of the alternatives to cross the New River as well as the major differences between them.

- **Low-Level Bascule Bridge (25' Vertical Clearance to Mean High Water when closed)**
 - Lowest cost of the alternatives - \$240 million
 - Requires no private property impacts (acquisition of right-of-way)
 - Bridge length of 1,426 feet is minimum bridge length of all alternatives
 - Does not span Broward Boulevard and cross streets like the other alternatives
 - Requires the closure of SW 5th Street
 - Requires a bridge tender to operate the bascule bridge and operations and maintenance (O&M) funds for a bascule bridge
 - Will allow the existing freight bridge to remain open longer, allowing for improved navigation on the New River as the low-level bridge can accommodate approximately 90% of boats when closed
 - Minimal impact to the existing Brightline/Downtown Station
- **Mid-Level Bascule Bridge (56' Vertical Clearance to Mean High Water when closed) and High-Level Fixed Bridge (80' Vertical Clearance to Mean High Water)**
 - \$444 million for Mid-level bascule and \$452 million for High-level fixed bridge
 - Longer bridges through downtown (approximately 8,000-foot-long bridge), with approximately 1,400 feet of retaining wall approaches to the bridge
 - Both impact an estimated 34 private properties (right-of-way) at a cost of \$98 Million
 - Spans over Broward Boulevard and various cross streets through Downtown Ft. Lauderdale
 - Requires closure of a portion of NW 2nd Avenue between SW 10th and SW 11th Streets
 - Mid-Level Bascule requires a bridge tender and additional O&M funds for the bascule bridge
 - Accommodates 99% of boats (Mid-level when closed) and 100% of boats (High-level)
 - Requires the Ft. Lauderdale Brightline/Downtown station to be elevated (reconstructed)
- **Tunnel**
 - Highest cost of all alternatives - \$1.8 billion
 - Most private right-of-way impacts of all alternatives – impacting an estimated 103 private properties at a cost of \$148 million
 - Accommodates 100% of boats
 - Spans over many railroad grade crossings including Broward Boulevard and Davie Boulevard
 - Requires closure of SW 15th Street and closure/cul-de-sac of NW 5th Terrace (just north of Sunrise Boulevard)
 - Minimizes noise and visual impacts in underground sections
 - Total of 2,600 feet of tunnel portals/trench for the tunnel to surface at both ends
 - Longest construction disruption and highest construction cost and risks
 - Requires the Ft. Lauderdale Brightline/Downtown station to be placed underground (reconstructed)

13. Why can't the freight trains move out west or use the proposed New River crossing whether it is a bridge or a tunnel?

The existing freight service is owned and operated by Florida East Coast Railroad who owns the right-of-way for the corridor. This is a private company that has operated in this corridor for a century. FECR does not have property or freight rights to operate within the South Florida Rail Corridor west of I-95. Also, the freight trains will not utilize the proposed New River crossing, as the grades are too steep for their equipment – whether a bridge or tunnel. Finally, there are restrictions/regulations if FECR were to use the tunnel alternative at this location, given the class of materials the freight trains are carrying.

14. Why can't you elevate the entire corridor?

The cost of the New River crossing associated with the BCR project may make the project not cost-feasible. Therefore, it is anticipated that the crossing, annual O&M costs, and potentially the corridor access fees could require a larger percentage of local funds and may not be part of the Capital Improvement Grant (CIG) funding application. Increasing costs by adding or extending elevated sections of track could render the entire project not cost effective or feasible. Elevating the entire corridor would not be cost feasible from a federal funding standpoint at this time.

It should also be noted that the rail corridor is private right-of-way, and BCR will utilize existing tracks and right-of-way to the extent possible for commuter rail, similar to what Miami-Dade County is doing with the commuter rail segment from Downtown Miami to Aventura. Both counties are working closely with FECR and Brightline to ensure overall train operations remain at acceptable levels.

15. How disruptive will the project be during construction?

Construction for large scale projects such as BCR will be disruptive as many railroad grade crossings require modifications which may require temporary detours, and the crossing of the New River will require construction of either a bridge or tunnel. The four alternatives to cross the New River vary greatly as to the disruption they will cause. The Low-Level Bridge is the least disruptive and the Tunnel is the most disruptive. The intent will be to work closely with the local municipalities and the county to minimize disruptions to the local street networks. The Tunnel Alternative would require the development of hauling routes and plans for the significant volume of excavation that will be required for construction - roughly 65,000 dump trucks would be needed to haul excavated soil from the project site.

16. How does future sea level rise impact the Alternatives to cross the New River?

Resiliency, including sea level rise, will be evaluated and addressed in the final design phase of the project. Features to address resiliency will primarily be needed for the Tunnel Alternative, while the bridge options are inherently resilient with the largest concern being the vertical clearance for navigation under the bridge when closed. The anticipated reduced vertical clearances due to sea level rise will still accommodate similar percentages of the boats navigating the New River. The Tunnel Alternative may include additional infrastructure such as, but not limited to, floodgates for the tunnel portal openings, raised walls surrounding the portals, and redundant pumping systems to ensure removal of flood waters that can damage underground infrastructure.

17. What are the ridership projections for the Broward Commuter Rail?

BCR ridership is expected to include 9,500 daily riders and over 24,000 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).