

## **State lawmakers pass rail bill**

*By Staff and Wire Reporters*

A bill to help Florida rail projects and possibly help the state attract federal stimulus money for a high-speed line passed the Senate on Tuesday and headed to the governor's desk.

With a 27-10 vote, the Senate passed the measure, which is backed by Gov. Charlie Crist. The Legislature met in a special lawmaking session that began last week to address issues of financing for South Florida's Tri-Rail, a rail project near Orlando called SunRail and a proposed high-speed line that would eventually link Orlando, Tampa and Miami.

The House passed the legislation Monday.

Lawmakers hope the bill will demonstrate backing for rail projects in Florida, a key to obtaining \$2.6 billion in federal money for the high-speed rail line.

The bill provides \$13 million to \$15 million annually to reduce operating deficits in Tri-Rail, which serves Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach counties.

It also makes it easier for the state to spend \$432 million to buy 61 miles of existing rail track, owned by CSX Corp., from DeLand in Volusia County to Poinciana in Osceola County for operation of a SunRail commuter rail system. Additional money comes from the federal government, four Central Florida counties (Orange, Osceola, Seminole and Volusia), the city of Orlando and passenger fares.