



News Clip

From: *Miami Herald*, Saturday, January 5, 2013

Subject: **At new Miami train station, too-short platform to require costly fixes**

Provided by: Jenine Sussman, Kommunikatz
jsussman@kommunikatz.com

<http://www.miamiherald.com/2013/01/05/v-fullstory/3168185/at-new-miami-train-station-too.html>

At new Miami train station, too-short platform to require costly fixes

State engineers are blaming Amtrak for a problem that will require a costly fix at Miami Central Station, the big new passenger-train hub under construction near Miami International Airport.

By Andres Viglucci

Months after construction began on the new train station at Miami International Airport's transportation hub, state engineers realized they had a problem: The planned station platform was too short for some of the Amtrak trains that will use it. About 200 feet too short, in fact.

That meant some trains parked at the \$88 million Miami Central Station would jut inconveniently out into the middle of Northwest 25th Street, one of just two direct connections for motorists between Northwest South River Drive and LeJeune Road east of the airport.

As it scrambles to correct the problem — which is likely to cost several million dollars and could require permanently closing the street — the Florida Department of Transportation is blaming Amtrak.

Agency engineers and consultants say the federal rail service failed to let the state agency know it would sometimes use longer trains on its Miami route than those the station was designed to accommodate. The FDOT says Amtrak raised no issues with platform length during extensive design-plan reviews that preceded the start of construction in May 2011.

An Amtrak spokeswoman said the agency had “always” warned FDOT that some of its trains could encroach into the street. But email exchanges released by FDOT suggest Amtrak first detailed the issue to an FDOT engineer in February 2012, nine months after the start of construction.

In any case, FDOT officials say, state taxpayers will now have to bear the cost of extending the platform all the way across 25th street, from the original length of 1,030 feet to 1,220 feet, or

about a fifth of a mile. They are also exploring whether to build a bridge over the platform or sink the roadway below it, options which may prove unfeasible, or close the street permanently and look for other routes to get motorized traffic across the busy industrial area. That would likely require acquiring private property to carve out a new connecting street, FDOT said.

“We just all wish they had made this known five years ago,” said FDOT spokesman Ric Katz, adding that the state has no ability to get Amtrak to cover any of the cost. “That said, we have to accommodate it.”

FDOT plans to hold a public meeting some time in February for local business owners to discuss the alternatives. But agency officials say any permanent street solution won’t be done until the end of 2014, or a year after the new rail station is scheduled to open.

“It’s not the best position to be in, but unfortunately we’re at this stage,” said Carl Filer, FDOT’s program manager for the Miami Intermodal Center, the MIA ground-transportation hub.

A price tag for the fixes is not yet available, but FDOT has set aside \$3.7 million from its budget for the street reconfiguration. Contractors are now figuring the cost of extending the platforms, which have been redesigned and are already under construction. That expense would be covered by project contingency funds.

The train station, in the planning for 20 years, is part of the massive Miami Intermodal Center across LeJeune Road from the airport. Miami Central Station, linked to MIA via a People Mover, was designed to be the city’s main passenger-rail hub, serving not just Amtrak’s national service but also regional Tri-Rail commuter trains. The train station is also connected to an adjacent new Metrorail station that serves the airport and the MIC’s giant car-rental facility.

The train station has two platforms, one exclusively for Tri-Rail and another to be shared by Amtrak and the commuter line. Both were originally designed to be 1,030 feet long, enough to accommodate Amtrak’s trains based on information provided by that agency, as well as the much shorter Tri-Rail trains, FDOT and its design and project-management consultants at AECOM said in an interview and in emails released by the state. There is also space at the station for a third platform if needed in the future.

FDOT and AECOM officials say Amtrak vetted and approved the station plans.

The first inkling FDOT officials got of a possible issue, they say, came during the 2011 groundbreaking, when an Amtrak official remarked casually that 25th Street seemed too close to where the platforms would end. Filer said he subsequently emailed the official to elaborate on his concern, but got no answer over several months. He later learned the official had left Amtrak.

Even then, Filer insisted, FDOT had no idea that some of Amtrak’s Silver Meteor trains would be too long for the platform as originally designed. Amtrak says train lengths can vary by season and equipment configuration, although the Miami station would see the longer trains only infrequently.

Only after he again emailed Amtrak in February 2012, Filer said, did he receive a response from the Amtrak official’s replacement, Jay McArthur. In the response, McArthur notes that the station platform could not accommodate some of its longer trains “without possibly encroaching” onto 25th Street and suggests in “strong terms” that FDOT reconsider its decision to leave 25th Street open and in the existing alignment.

The emails indicate AECOM consultants checked their records in March, and confirmed that Amtrak had approved the platform length. AECOM also recontacted the Amtrak officials who approved it, who confirmed having done so.

Amtrak spokeswoman Christina Leeds said she could not immediately respond in detail to FDOT's assertions. But, she added, "we are confident that we have consistently informed officials connected with this project of our concerns."