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Rail company unveils plans for downtown Lauderdale station

By Michael Turnbell

A largely ignored area at the north edge of downtown could be transformed into a new city center, with housing and retail rising around a landmark rail station that connects people to trains, buses and streetcars.

All Aboard Florida, the private Miami-Orlando passenger rail service, announced Friday it will build a 25,000-square-foot station adjacent to the [Florida East Coast Railway](#) tracks on Northwest Second Avenue, between Broward Boulevard and Northwest Fourth Street.

"We selected this area since it's strategically located in close proximity to cultural, entertainment and employment centers and connections to other transportation options," said Michael Reininger, president and chief development officer of the \$1.5 billion privately funded venture.

It is the last of four sites to be picked; the others are based in the downtowns of Miami and West Palm Beach, and at Orlando International Airport.

All Aboard Florida, owned by [Florida East Coast Industries](#) of Coral Gables, is buying up other parcels near the station site to spur development, which could include a mix of high-rise condos, apartments, shops and restaurants or offices. The other South Florida stations similarly are expected to be magnets for development.

Construction on all the stations is likely to start next year or as soon as site plans are approved. Service is set to begin running in 2016.

Both the Fort Lauderdale and West Palm Beach stations will feature a 35-foot wide passenger platform between two tracks. The "island" platform design allows passengers to board from either side. In Miami, the tracks and platform will be elevated four stories to avoid blocking downtown streets. In Orlando, the station would be about a mile south of the main airport terminal and have space for a future spur of central Florida's SunRail commuter train and a proposed magnetically levitated system from the airport to the Orange County Convention Center.

In Fort Lauderdale, escalators and elevators will take passengers from the platform to a multistory lobby west of the tracks for ticketing, luggage handling and a lounge. The station will be able to add platforms on the outside of both tracks for a future commuter rail line.

The company expects it will take trains three hours to make the 235-mile trip between Miami and Orlando. The service will run on the existing Florida East Coast tracks to Cocoa, then head west along new tracks built next to the BeachLine Expressway to the Orlando airport. Fares haven't been set for the service, which is largely geared toward tourists and business travelers. Once they arrive, passengers will be able to rent cars, pick up a taxi or shuttle, or walk about three blocks to catch a bus or streetcar.

More trains mean downtown commuters will face additional waits at crossings but officials say the shorter passenger trains — 16 a day in each direction — will pass through crossings in about 52 seconds. When trains are stopped at the station, the crossing gates at nearby Broward Boulevard will remain up. That will last for only about two minutes before the trains depart.

All Aboard Florida considered building its station at Las Olas Riverfront, but there wasn't enough room.

The 2.7-acre site chosen is now occupied by a vacant lot and a small strip center. It's on the opposite side of the tracks from the central bus terminal used by [Broward County](#) Transit. The route for a proposed streetcar called The Wave will run one block east of the tracks.

No direct links are yet planned between All Aboard Florida's station and the bus terminal or streetcar. There will be parking for up to 200 cars adjacent to the station, and that lot may eventually be developed into a garage with other uses.

The tracks will be reconstructed north of Broward Boulevard to allow for the platform, which will stretch 900 feet from north of Broward to south of Northwest Fourth Street. The platform will require the closure of Northwest Second Street at the tracks but the city said that won't impact emergency response times.

"It's hard to think of an area that is more geared to transit-oriented development. The bus terminal is there. The Wave station will be there," Fort Lauderdale City Manager Lee Feldman said. "You can't get any more transit-centric than that."

In downtown Miami, the largest of All Aboard Florida's stations will be built on mostly vacant land between the Government Center and Overtown Metrorail stations. The West Palm Beach station would occupy two acres north of City Place and west of the Clematis Street entertainment district.

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Cost: Estimated \$1.5 billion.

Route: 235 miles, including 40 miles of new track from Cocoa to Orlando.

Speed: South of West Palm Beach, average 60 mph up to 79 mph. North of West Palm Beach, up to 110 mph. Between Cocoa and Orlando, as high as 125 mph.

Number of trains: 32 a day, 16 in each direction.

Travel time: 3 hours from Miami, 2 hours 20 minutes from Fort Lauderdale and 1 hour 45 minutes from West Palm Beach. Officials say that meets or beats driving times. [Amtrak](#) takes about 5 hours from Miami.

Capacity: Each nine-car train is capable of handling 400 passengers.

Fares: Prices not set, but a one way ticket from Miami to Orlando likely will cost less than \$100, and less than that from Fort Lauderdale and West Palm Beach.

Amenities: WiFi, gourmet meals and beverage service, reserved seating.