



The following article was printed in the Dec 25,2011 edition of The Reporter newspaper serving Poinciana and Eastern Polk County. The article was titled ‘Trains Could Boost Poinciana, Residents Group Leader Says’.

Coming soon near Poinciana: CSX jobs for the taking.

 November 24th, 2011  Michael Freeman



Rail lines that go through the Poinciana Industrial Park could soon lead to two things: SunRail, the commuter rail line, and new jobs at a CSX plant in Winter Haven. (Photo by Michael Freeman).

POINCIANA — For years, Poinciana residents have been complaining about the time they spend in their cars, as traffic gets more and more congested in this community of 10 villages. But as 2011 winds up, the new year could bring some new options for Poinciana commuters, courtesy of another transportation model: trains, which could bring this community not just another way of getting around, but thousands of new construction, transportation and warehouse jobs.

That’s exactly what this community hard hit by the collapse of the housing market so badly need, said Keith Laytham, president of the civic group Poinciana Residents for Smart Change.

“Construction and jobs are going to be the big issues in 2012,” he said.

Poinciana Residents for Smart Change is working to improve Poinciana, by creating alliances with the state and county governments that oversee this community that grew so rapidly in the past decade, from 25,000 residents in 2000 to more than 84,000 today. Poinciana’s 10 villages are divided between Polk and Osceola counties, and as Laytham noted, part of his group’s task is to work with the commissioners in both counties on bringing more services and infrastructure improvements here.

“Part of the frustration we have is where we’re located,” he said. “The Polk people only

understand Polk issues, and the Osceola people only understand Osceola issues. We're trying to come up with a way to make the interests of Poinciana known to the counties."

While some business groups are working to bring more companies to Poinciana and to create more jobs, Laytham said Poinciana Residents for Smart Change is "more interested in working with the county governments and trying to get everyone to get along."

When the housing market was booming, so was Poinciana, with new homes being constructed here every 90 days. But when the housing market crashed, the local economy took a major hit as well, and today the community is struggling to overcome a high home foreclosure rate.

Still, there are some major construction projects being slated for the next few years, and that includes the fact that Poinciana will host the final stop on SunRail, a 61-mile commuter rail line that will run from Volusia County to downtown Orlando, then into Osceola County. The last stop will be at the intersection of Poinciana Boulevard and Orange Blossom Trail, right across the street from the Gatorade plant. The project is expected to not only bring hundreds of construction jobs to Poinciana, but also help spur more economic development around the station.



The SunRail station in Poinciana will be built near the intersection of Poinciana Boulevard and Orange Blossom Trail. (Photo by Michael Freeman).

It will also make it easier, and faster, for residents to get into Orlando without fighting traffic on Interstate 4.

But as Laytham noted, SunRail helps Poinciana in another way.

"As a result of this, one of the things you're going to see over in Winter Haven is the CSX logistics yards, a freight transfer facility being built there in Winter Haven," Laytham said of the city in Polk County that's about 25 minutes from the Polk County side of Poinciana.

CSX Corporation, based in Jacksonville, is a leading transportation company that provides rail, intermodal and rail-to-truck transload services. On Nov. 3, CSX Corporation completed the previously announced sale of the 61-mile rail corridor to the state of Florida for the SunRail project.

The commuter system is expected to begin initial operations in 2014, serving Volusia, Seminole, Orange and Osceola counties. Under the agreement, CSX retains an exclusive freight easement to operate on the SunRail line in order to continue to provide common carrier services to its existing customers.

The closing represented "a significant milestone in this public-private partnership that

accommodates Central Florida's need for a transportation alternative to congested highways, while preserving and expanding environmentally friendly and efficient freight rail capacity," said Louis Renjel, CSX's vice president-strategic infrastructure.

As Laytham noted, that sale also gave CSX the funds to build the new freight transfer facility in Winter Haven. Over the next eight years, CSX and its affiliates plan to invest \$500 million into Florida rail infrastructure, primarily supported by proceeds from the SunRail transaction.

"You've got a big train with freight cars coming in where trucks get sent elsewhere down to South Florida, Tampa, and Naples, and it becomes a central distribution hub for the rest of the state," Laytham said, adding that this facility will be close enough to Poinciana that residents can apply for the jobs being created there.

"Winter Haven is 30 minutes away from us," he said. "Winter Haven is closer to here than Kissimmee is."

The facility will be hiring truck drivers and employees to do loading and unloading there.

"At least 7,000 jobs will be created by this transfer facility," Laytham said. "That's a tremendous opportunity for the people here in Poinciana. There will be a job fair coming up, probably in the first of the year, for those jobs. And the money for this comes from the SunRail sale. The state purchased the tracks from CSX, and CSX took that money and invested it in this project. That's outstanding news."

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