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Commuter Rail Boost for Area

SunRail is expected to bring businesses into Poinciana along with trains

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Published: Thursday, August 4, 2011 at 1:18 p.m.

POINCIANA | Right now, the area off Orange Blossom Trail near Poinciana Boulevard, across the street from Home Depot, looks like just another vacant field.

But as Fernando Valverde drives past it, he sees something else: the future of Poinciana.

That field, he said, is the chosen location for a new SunRail commuter rail station.

Poinciana is the final stop along the route, which starts in Volusia County and goes to downtown Orlando, before continuing into Osceola County.

When it is built, that vacant field could be transformed as businesses flock to build near the new station, Valverde said.

He predicts jobs and a brighter economic future once the station has been built.

Valverde called the approval of Sunrail "the beginning of a turn around of the economy in the Poinciana area," which has been badly hurt by the collapse of the housing market.

"This creative project will assure the community of the firm commitment of both private enterprise and public agencies," Valverde said. "It will help jump start residential and commercial development" around the Poinciana station.

That was the same view July 18 when a huge crowd gathered at Florida Hospital to celebrate a Community Kickoff ceremony for this project, at the site where another one of the rail stations will be built.

Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer and U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood were on hand, with LaHood announcing the federal government was providing Florida with a check for \$50 million to help get SunRail built.

"Secretary LaHood, I hope Central Florida has made you proud," Dyer said as he introduced LaHood to the crowd.

LaHood said the entire region collectively had reason to be proud.

"I come here today to say congratulations to all of you," LaHood said. "You are celebrating the 'vision thing' today, and I say congratulations to all of you."

Once the project has been built, SunRail will be a 61-mile passenger light rail system that will start in Debarry in Volusia County, cross through Seminole County into downtown Orlando, and then continue into Osceola County, to the final stop in Poinciana. There will be 17 stops along the way, including the one at Florida Hospital on Princeton Avenue.

"This is obviously a very important stop with a large number of jobs and a large number of trips made every day," said Lars Houmann, president and chief executive officer of Florida Hospital.

In addition to bringing a SunRail station to the neighborhood, Houmann announced that his hospital was committed to constructing a 90,000-square-foot office building here, one that will become the hospital's headquarters.

That project will also bring more jobs -- and some much-needed economic revitalization -- to the city, he said.

Valverde thinks the same is true in Poinciana, and he's calling on regional leaders to hold a similar Community Kickoff event at the site near Orange Blossom Trail and Poinciana Boulevard where the local train station will be.

"We are requesting that such a special community celebration as the one at the Florida Hospital's future station stop be held at the Poinciana station that is to be built adjacent to the Home Depot store close to the Poinciana Industrial Park," Valverde said.

"Bottom line, what is being made possible is hope for the citizenship that better times are coming and that a silver lining may be in our state's future," he said.

The Florida Hospital celebration attracted a large crowd that cheered whenever Dyer reminded them of the jobs that would be created locally through this project.

"These are the days that we live for," Dyer said, adding that he thinks the SunRail project will help "change the culture in Central Florida" from one of parochialism to communities working together to promote shared interests.

"SunRail is becoming a reality because our governments stood together in historic fashion," he said, "as we create a better future for Central Florida."

This story appeared in print on page R7

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