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# Release

For immediate release: March 29, 2017

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## Rail safety expert warns risk of deadly railroad accidents will rise dramatically on the Treasure Coast with operation of high-speed passenger trains

As part of its continued fight to protect residents from the negative impacts of rail expansion, Martin County has released a report by national rail safety expert George Gavalla that includes concerning facts about the significant safety challenges and cost burdens facing Treasure Coast counties presented by the proposed All Aboard Florida (AAF a.k.a Brightline) high-speed passenger rail project that would operate on the Florida East Coast Railway (FEC) tracks.

Some of the key points in Gavalla's [report](#):

- **There are unique safety risk factors related to AAF running on FEC tracks.** Gavalla notes that the FEC has more at grade crossings per mile than any other major railway in the country, and because the rail line traverses densely populated areas, the FEC has a grade crossing accident rate that is more than double the national average.
- **The FEC rail line is among the deadliest in the nation.** Gavalla's findings show the current FEC rail line is among the deadliest in the U.S., with one of the highest crossing accident fatality rates in the country.
- **The FEC grade crossing accident rate is more than double the national average,** with a fatality rate that is 4.0 times the national rate. Equally disturbing, the fatality rate for pedestrians along the railroad right-of-way is seven and one-half times worse than the national average. These numbers are based on data from the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA).
- **The risk of deadly accidents will increase greatly if AAF becomes operational.** No other passenger rail system in the U.S. combines fast-moving passenger trains (110 mph) and freight trains (70 mph) on the same rail line, running through densely populated urban and coastal recreation areas with such a high concentration of tourists and seasonal visitors. The number of trains and the speed of the trains are major factors in railroad crossing and pedestrian accidents. Train speeds will nearly triple (from an average of 32 mph to 110 mph) and the number of trains travelling through the Treasure Coast (both passenger and freight) is projected to quintuple should AAF become operational through the Treasure Coast.
- **There is an increased risk of catastrophic accidents and deadly derailments on crowded passenger and freight train rail lines due to "secondary" collisions.**

Because AAF proposes to run both passenger and freight on FEC tracks, a passenger train could derail at high speeds and collide with a freight train or with another passenger train standing or moving on an adjacent track in what is known as a “secondary collision.”

Martin County has repeatedly asked AAF to address track and crossing safety measures, such as sealed corridor improvements, re-grading of intersections, and various pedestrian crossing improvements, as well as the inclusion of advanced technologies such as positive train control, vehicle presence detection, and remote health monitoring systems.

In most states, local governments are typically only responsible for maintaining roadway and signage outside of the railroad tracks; they are not responsible for costs related to maintenance and rehabilitation of the tracks or crossing signals themselves. But AAF's passenger rail project creates an unfunded mandate for Martin County taxpayers. This is a fundamentally unfair burden to place on taxpayers, and AAF has not indicated it is willing to pay for the costs associated with maintaining those safety improvement measures.

The proposed Florida High-Speed Passenger Rail Safety Act addresses Florida's current lack of any law or regulation governing high-speed rail safety and its increasing but unfunded maintenance costs. Without the legislation, Martin County's costs alone would rise dramatically for the upgrades and improvements necessary for the proposed the AAF project, potentially reaching \$13.5 million in 2030 and exceeding \$31 million by 2040. Martin County supports the legislation, which will enhance public safety at railroad crossings and alleviate the financial burden put on local governments to upgrade and maintain the crossings for these projects.

Martin County will continue its work to ensure the health, safety, and welfare of the public as it relates to the All Aboard Florida project. For more resources and information on the many local and regional issues of concern relating to the proposed AAF passenger rail project, visit <http://www.martin.fl.us>. In addition, please visit the county's social media platforms, Facebook and Twitter, for updates.

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