



CITY OF FORT LAUDERDALE
City Commission Agenda Memo
REGULAR MEETING

#22-0080

TO: Honorable Mayor & Members of the
Fort Lauderdale City Commission

FROM: Chris Lagerbloom, ICMA-CM, City Manager

DATE: January 18, 2022

TITLE: Resolution Urging the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) to
Consider the Tunnel as the Future of Commuter Rail Service in the City of
Fort Lauderdale - (**Commission Districts 1, 2, 3, and 4**)

Recommendation

Staff recommends the Commission approve a Resolution urging the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) to consider the Tunnel as the future of Commuter Rail Service in the City of Fort Lauderdale.

Background

The City is aware that the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) is working on a preliminary design and engineering study of commuter rail service and is in the process of selecting a local preferred alternative for a New River crossing. Three of the four options under consideration would build a bridge up to three miles long through the center of Fort Lauderdale's downtown and as high as 80 feet above ground level at maximum clearance, bisecting the City's downtown and creating undue blight that is contrary to the vision that the City Commission has created for the area as a vibrant, cosmopolitan, walkable urban center where people can live, work and play.

In addition, the City Commission does not believe that the FDOT has sufficiently considered the fourth option of building a tunnel that would allow the commuter rail service to cross under the New River.

Finally, the City Commission has already engaged in previous discussions about commuter rail service options in efforts to reduce congestion on our roadways and improve mass transit. Staff has been directed to draft a Resolution (Exhibit 1) urging the FDOT to eliminate the bridge options from consideration and pursue the construction of a tunnel as the local preferred alternative while continuing to work to reduce the project's construction costs.

Strategic Connections

This item is a *2021 Top Commission Priority*, advancing the Resiliency initiative.

This item supports the *Press Play Fort Lauderdale 2024 Strategic Plan*, specifically advancing:

- The Infrastructure Focus Area
- Goal 2: Build a multi-modal and pedestrian friendly community
- Objective: Transportation and Traffic

This item advances the *Fast Forward Fort Lauderdale 2035 Vision Plan: We Are Connected*.

This item supports the *Advance Fort Lauderdale 2040 Comprehensive Plan* specifically advancing:

- The Infrastructure Focus Area
- The Transportation and Mobility Element
- Transit amenities should be of high quality to support multimodal transportation and promote the reduction of the single-occupant vehicle.

Attachment

Exhibit 1 – Resolution

Prepared by: Daphnee Sainvil, Program Manager II, GAED

Charter Officer: Chris Lagerbloom, ICMA-CM, City Manager

RESOLUTION NO. 22-20

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA, URGING THE FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION TO RECOMMEND CONSTRUCTION OF A TUNNEL AS THE LOCALLY PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE FOR THE COMMUTER RAIL TRAIN CROSSING THE NEW RIVER IN THE CITY OF FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA, AND PROVIDING FOR DISTRIBUTION, DIRECTION TO THE CITY'S STATE LOBBYISTS, RESCISSION OF CONFLICTING RESOLUTION PROVISIONS, AND AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

WHEREAS, the City of Fort Lauderdale is supportive of the regional initiative to develop commuter rail service along the FEC railroad tracks through Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach Counties in an effort to reduce congestion on South Florida roadways and improve mass transit; and

WHEREAS, the City of Fort Lauderdale recognizes the challenges that commuter rail service would create at the crossing of the New River if the additional trains used the current bascule bridge to traverse the waterway, particularly the inordinate burden that would befall the marine industries located upriver in that the bridge would be down so frequently as to impose a severe economic hardship on those companies and their customers; and

WHEREAS, the City of Fort Lauderdale is aware that the Florida Department of Transportation ("FDOT") is working on a preliminary design and engineering study of commuter rail service and is in the process of selecting a local preferred alternative for a New River crossing; and

WHEREAS, three of the four options under consideration would build a bridge a mile or more in length through the center of Fort Lauderdale's downtown and as high as eighty feet above ground level at maximum clearance; and

WHEREAS, such a bridge would bisect Fort Lauderdale's downtown and would be detrimental to the vision that the City of Fort Lauderdale has created for the area as a vibrant, cosmopolitan urban core where people can live, work, and play; and

WHEREAS, downtown Fort Lauderdale is the center of an ongoing renaissance that needs to be nurtured, with 13,000 new residential units, 600,000 square feet of retail and restaurant space, 1.1 million square feet of office space, and 1,000 new hotel rooms to be developed over the next 10 years — on top of the phenomenal growth that has already occurred; and

WHEREAS, downtown Fort Lauderdale has seen an explosive increase in population, growing forty-one percent between 2010 and 2020, and is expected to grow an additional forty-five percent by 2025, thus placing the city center in the top two percent of fastest growing places in the State of Florida; and

WHEREAS, there have been academic studies illustrating how bridges and overpasses divide communities and can cause economic harm, and many urban areas such as Boston have decided to redevelop older areas by removing bridges and overpasses in favor of other solutions, and the administration of President Biden is advocating reconnecting communities as part of its infrastructure program; and

WHEREAS, a bridge would overwhelm the city's historic district where many of the few remaining early buildings in the community are located, as they would be directly under the maximum height of a new bridge; and

WHEREAS, a bridge would also impact the picturesque Riverwalk, which serves as the cornerstone of the city's arts, science, and cultural area, and features the Broward Center for the Performing Arts, the Museum of Discovery and Science, the NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale, and the Fort Lauderdale History Center; and

WHEREAS, a train bridge would be disruptive to plans being drawn up by the City of Fort Lauderdale and Broward County to build a joint governmental campus to replace the current aging administration buildings; and

WHEREAS, the City of Fort Lauderdale is pleased that the Florida Department of Transportation has determined that a tunnel could be built for substantially less than originally projected and is technically feasible to construct; and

WHEREAS, the City of Fort Lauderdale believes that the price of a tunnel could still be further reduced by continuing to engage with world-renowned tunneling experts regarding their prior experience; and

WHEREAS, the City of Fort Lauderdale believes that the actual construction costs must be considered side-by-side with the social costs of a bridge and the economic development benefits of a tunnel, for the decision reached will have long-term consequences as a legacy project for the community; and

WHEREAS, the City of Fort Lauderdale believes that it can work cooperatively with partner agencies to find financial support for a tunnel beyond traditional transit financing routes;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA:

SECTION 1. The City Commission of the City of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, urges the Florida Department of Transportation to recommend construction of a tunnel as the Locally Preferred Alternative for the commuter rail train crossing the New River in the City of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and transmit that recommendation to the Broward County Board of County Commissioners and the Broward Metropolitan Planning Organization while continuing to work to reduce the project's construction costs and find the necessary financing.

SECTION 2. The City Commission of the City of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, urges the Broward County Board of County Commissioners and the Broward Metropolitan Planning Organization to adopt construction of a tunnel as the Locally Preferred Alternative once a recommendation has been transmitted.

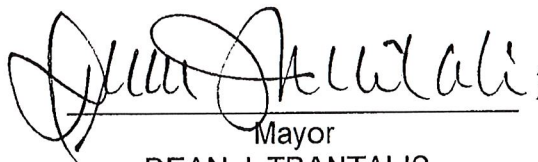
SECTION 3. The City Commission directs the City Clerk to transmit copies of this Resolution to the City's state lobbyists, Governor Ron DeSantis, Senate President Wilton Simpson, Speaker of the House Chris Sprowls, the Broward League of Cities, the Florida League of Cities, the Broward County Legislative Delegation, the Broward County Board of County Commissioners, the Miami-Dade County Board of County Commissioners, the Palm Beach County Board of County Commissioners, the Palm Beach County League of Cities, the Miami-Dade County League of Cities, and any other interested parties.

SECTION 3. The City Commission directs the City's state lobbyists to advocate for construction of a tunnel as the Locally Preferred Alternative for the commuter rail train crossing the New River in the City of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and to offer their assistance to the Florida Department of Transportation, Broward County, and the Broward Metropolitan Planning Organization to reduce project costs and find financing.

SECTION 4. That all resolutions or parts of resolutions in conflict herewith, be and the same are hereby rescinded to the extent of such conflict.

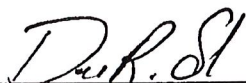
SECTION 5. That this resolution shall take effect immediately upon its adoption.

ADOPTED this 18th day of January, 2022.



Mayor
DEAN J. TRANTALIS

ATTEST:



Deputy City Clerk
DAVID R. SOLOMAN