

Street - Interstate 4

## Interstate 4 alignment is the only logical choice for light-rail line

### Interstate 4 alignment works better

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SPECIAL TO THE SENTINEL

The Lynx board is about to select a Locally Preferred Alignment for the first segment of the proposed light-rail system. Most of that route is in Orange County. County citizens will be asked to approve a new, permanent sales-tax or gasoline-tax increase that would finance the segment north of Orlando and be imposed beginning in 2005, when that segment is built.

Four cities that make up 70 percent of the route in the northern segment now under study are opposed to the CSX train alignment. Their city governments and city planners have determined that this alignment would have a serious, negative impact upon their communities.

The public-relations spin, by the consultants hired by the Florida Department of Transportation to study light rail, is that it would solve our traffic problems on Interstate 4. The current level of I-4 traffic would not decrease. Light rail is not a cure-all for traffic congestion. At best, light rail would offer an alternate means of travel.

According to Lynx Executive Director Leo Auger, Lynx is about to make a decision on final alignment for the light-rail system with only 10 percent of the design completed. There has been no I-4 alternative examined since 1996, when the consultant recommended to Lynx that it select the CSX route with only 2 percent of the design completed.

Light-rail routes must be chosen carefully to support the needs of the communities the sys-

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tem serves, or the system will do more harm than good. Based upon the recent light-rail study and information from the transportation consultants, we now understand what light rail's real impact on our communities would be.

There now are 16 trains per day using the CSX tracks. The ultimate goal for a successful light-rail system is to have 288 additional trains a day on the two tracks built adjacent to the CSX. The plan now envisions having those 288 trains by the year 2020, but should the system's success warrant it, this number of trains would occur sooner. Each train would have one, two or three cars and total 90 feet to 270 feet long.

A 4 1/2-foot-high fence would be built along the line to separate the CSX trains from the light-rail cars. Each train would be approxi-

mately 70 percent to 85 percent as noisy, with their horns blowing, as a freight train.

Florida law, title 27, chapter 351.03, requires that light-rail trains blow a warning horn — a horn that can be heard a quarter of a mile before each of the 46 at-grade crossings north of Orlando. Trains would run each way five minutes apart during the peak hours of 6 a.m. to 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. and block cross streets 27 percent of the time. Light rail would operate 18 hours each day.

Additionally, a network of buses would be used to bring passengers to light-rail stations. Locally, that would add significantly to traffic congestion, and air quality would be affected. Fire, police and emergency-response service would be affected. More than 800 property owners would have to deal with right-of-way issues or

loss of property value.

Let's consider light rail's real impact on our communities in the north:

**Winter Park** is prized for its historic, tranquil, pedestrian-friendly character. The city has stated that the proposed CSX route violates its comprehensive plans for future development. The residential nature of the community would be harmed. The route would run through Central Park and down New York Avenue, with stations at Denning Drive, Park Avenue and Harmon Avenue. Those stations are planned to draw more than 5,000 riders each day. The impact of as many as 288 light-rail trains to the city would include increased traffic congestion, limited access to the Farmers' Market and post office, and loss of trees and pedestrian space in the park. Train frequency and noise pollution would affect all 22

annual Central Park events, including the arts festival.

**Eatonville**, with its large mass-transit-dependent population in the north corridor, could benefit from light rail. However, the CSX route would be inconvenient and would not cross city property — unless expensive spurs are built. If not, commuters would have to ride a bus to stations in other cities. Mayor Anthony Grant stated that Eatonville's planned growth will occur west of I-4. The proposed CSX route without the proposed spurs would provide no positive economic impact. If the route were centrally located, near I-4, it would support the city's Community Redevelopment Plan, and tourists would have increased access to that historic city.

**Maitland** is a developed residential community. The small downtown area primarily supports

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community needs. Maitland's current and planned activity centers of high density are adjacent to I-4. The CSX route would run directly through Maitland's cultural corridor and very close to all of the city's cultural, civic and historical amenities, some of which are only 10 to 25 feet away. The current traffic of 16 freight and passenger trains is bearable, but the proposed 288 light-rail trains would destroy the city's cultural fabric. Right-of-way would be taken from two city parks and at least one historic property. That route represents numerous violations to Maitland's Comprehensive Development Plan.

**Altamonte Springs** says that the I-4 alignment, not the CSX alignment, is where the regional activity center is planned, with Crane's Roost Park becoming the future focus of the city. A light-rail alignment adjacent to I-4

would support the city's planned growth and already is integrated into its long-range planning. The CSX alignment is inconsistent with the city's Comprehensive Development Plan.

Based on the 1996 study from the DOT transportation consultants, the I-4 alignment would be less expensive to build and operate, would move people 42 percent more quickly, would have less impact on our communities, would cause less traffic congestion and would attract the same number of riders with 38 percent fewer stations. There is a consensus of opposition to the CSX alignment by the four cities in the north that would be affected by this first 26-mile segment.

Since the CSX route has such a negative impact on our communities, and I-4 offers so many positive benefits, the I-4 alignment is the only logical choice.