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## Report: Rail could bring 27,500 jobs, nearly \$3B worth of new business to Orlando area

By Dan Tracy, ORLANDO SENTINEL

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Orlando's planned high-speed train could create an economic boon worth billions of dollars for the region, according to a study sponsored by an international conglomerate that will bid on building the system.

Up to 27,500 jobs would be created and nearly \$3 billion worth of new business would occur annually in Orlando if the city is linked with Tampa to the west and Miami to the south by the year 2035, the analysis says. The surrounding area could pick up \$1.7 billion each year in economic activity, as well.

The report, paid for by Siemens, will be released today during a U.S. Conference of Mayors meeting in Oklahoma City. Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer will be there and speak about his city's successful efforts to win a high-speed train.



The projections might "seem large," said Steve Fitzroy, one of the authors of the study, "but in the context of the economies involved, they are reasonable."

Dyer said he thinks the high-speed project plus the SunRail commuter train, which combined could cost taxpayers nearly \$14 billion, will create plenty of jobs and spin-off development, such as hotels, restaurants and shops.

"You know there will be substantial ancillary development. ... It's important to put people to work," Dyer said.

Construction of the first high-speed rail link likely will begin early next year. Costing an estimated \$2.6 billion, it will run from Orlando International Airport to Tampa, with stops at the Orange County Convention Center, Walt Disney World and Lakeland.

SunRail, which would connect Volusia and Seminole counties with downtown Orlando and Osceola County, is supposed to be up and running by 2013. It would cost \$1.2 billion.

A second high-speed train, from OIA to Miami, is in the planning stages. It could cost as much as \$10 billion.

Sean Snaith, an economics professor at the University of Central Florida, reviewed highlights of the Siemens study and said, "I didn't see anything that was too outrageous."

The key to success, he said, will be to create strong feeder systems to ferry passengers to their final destinations. It also is important that both high speed legs are built, he said. So far, the Obama Administration has pledged \$1.25 billion towards the OIA-Tampa stretch but nothing for the Miami.

"A lot of things have to fall into place," Snaith said.

Ron Utt, a transportation expert with the conservative Heritage Foundation, is considerably more skeptical of the study, saying, "Essentially, what they are doing is making rough guesses."

High-speed trains, he said, have not stopped Europe from falling victim to the same recessionary forces plaguing this country. And Japan, which also has a high-speed network, recently went through a "lost decade" of flat economic growth.

He conceded that the trains in Florida would result in some jobs and related development, but "if you spent \$3 billion in a narrow corridor anywhere you are going to get a huge economic impact."

The question is whether the money might be spent more wisely, not on transit systems that he predicts will require large annual subsidies from the public to continue operating, he said.

Fitzroy said high speed trains will help Orlando and the state to compete for business with foreign competitors because they will offer another transportation option and shorten commute times between Tampa and Miami.

The Tampa-OIA leg, said Oliver Hauck, a Siemens division president, "is the perfect start ... It is simple to do, and it can be quickly implemented."

Siemens hopes to provide the trains for the project that are similar to the electrified ones they have built for systems in Europe and Japan.

"We would like to be the first in the United States to show what we can do," Hauck said.

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