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## **Broward County leases Port Everglades land to railroad, expects new jobs**

By Brittany Wallman  
Sun Sentinel

A “milestone” agreement to lease public land at Broward’s seaport to a private railroad company won the County Commission’s approval Tuesday, cementing a deal that has been years in the making.

Broward elected officials and business leaders, as well as Port Everglades and Florida East Coast railway officials, said the compact for what they call an “Intermodal Container Transfer Facility” will bring much-desired jobs and expansion of commerce in an ailing economy.

The \$72.8 million plan creates a place at Port Everglades in eastern Broward County where the containers that carry goods will be put onto trains right at the port, after they are unloaded from ships. Right now, trucks must transport the containers from the ships to a much smaller railcar-loading site outside the port along Andrews Avenue.

Those trucks will no longer be mixing with local traffic, either, when the new facility opens. A railroad spur will shoot off the main line and connect with the new facility at the port.

The deal is between Broward County’s Port Everglades and the Florida East Coast Railway, and involves significant public funds. The county will lease 42.5 acres that are worth \$19.7 million, a gigantic swath of land at Port Everglades, to the FEC for 30 years, with two 10-year renewal options. The FEC will invest \$5 million, apply for a \$30 million state loan, and get \$18 million in state grants.

A separate but related project involves building a vehicle overpass leading to the port so that the trains running on the new spur can carry two layers of containers stacked one on top of the other underneath Interstate 595. That \$42 million Eller Drive overpass is expected to be paid for by the state.

As Broward commissioners dug into the details of the agreement, Commissioner Stacy Ritter said their main concern “is jobs, and this brings jobs to this county.”

Port officials say 760 construction workers will be employed to build the facility, and when it is done, it will support 2,100 new jobs in the region over the long term.

Lobbyist George Platt, a member of the Broward Workshop organization of business leaders, told commissioners the business community is “behind you all the way.”

He said the county's large construction projects, including the port rail complex, a coming runway expansion at Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport and the planned new Broward County Courthouse will breathe life into a job market that needs it.

"These are good jobs," he told them. "We're not flipping hamburgers here. These are really, really good jobs and they are going to lead to substantial increases in income."

Supporters said the port needs to expand in order to grab a competitive edge over other U.S. seaports, so that Broward County can benefit from jobs that come with the additional business.

The key, port and railway officials say, is to target more international trade, particularly with the widening of the Panama Canal, whose expected 2014 completion will open a new, fast shipping route for large ships arriving from Asia that cannot currently use the canal.

Port officials said they are studying a \$320.8 million dredging project that would be done from 2015 to 2017 to accommodate bigger ships.

Port Director Phil Allen, who will retire in January, called Tuesday's decision a "milestone" in efforts to expand the port during the next five years. He said infrastructure projects that expand port commerce "are critical for enhancing our competitive position and sustaining our local economy."

The Broward FEC deal would not undercut a recent decision by FEC and the Port of Miami to upgrade a freight rail spur to link the port to the FEC national rail network through its Hialeah rail yard near Miami International Airport.

That project, now in progress, is part of a major overhaul of the Port of Miami that includes a tunnel under Biscayne Bay and dredging of the port's cargo harbor to 50 feet to accommodate giant container ships after the Panama Canal's widening is completed.

FEC executives said Tuesday that their company backs these port upgrades because it is bullish on global trade.

"FEC is optimistic on the intermodal segment for South Florida and our financial commitments to both Port Everglades and the Port of Miami reflect that," said Husein Cumber, FEC's executive vice president for corporate development.

"The assets being built through public-private partnerships at both ports will give FEC and the ports the ability to market unique services to ocean carriers and beneficial cargo owners."

"Beneficial cargo owners" refers to so-called big box retailers such as Target, Walmart and Best Buy that use ocean carriers to move freight throughout the world.

"These infrastructure investments will ensure that the South Florida region has the port and rail infrastructure in place to compete with other parts of the country," Cumber added.

El Nuevo Herald Staff Writer Alfonso Chardy contributed to this report.

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