

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

President's Message | John Kistler | April 2014

"No government is perfect. One of the chief virtues of a democracy, however, is that its defects are always visible and under democratic processes can be pointed out and corrected." Harry Truman, March, 1947

The past few months have served as a wonderful reminder to all of us of how fortunate we are to live in a community like Indian River County. Our cities and towns have been filled to capacity with both year round and snowbird residents, as well as the many tourists who join us here every year to enjoy the spring time activities available to them. Local businesses have continued to rebound from the great recession of 2008 and the weather has cooperated by providing us with post card picture scenes on almost a daily basis. "Season" as it is known here, has been a good one, and we are thankful for that. This time of year being economically successful is vitally important to enable those who provide our community with their services year round to continue to be able to do so. While we recognize there are definitely those out there still struggling, things are improving, and hopefully the better times will continue to benefit all of us.

With this continuing recovery in mind, it is important that our local and state officials do all that they can in order to help protect our special quality of life here. Recently a troubling issue has arisen that threatens our tranquil environment and we feel it is time for our voices to be heard in order for those with the power to hopefully do something about it to act on our concerns. This matter I am speaking of - All Aboard Florida.

For those of you not familiar with this proposal, it is a high speed train project that will travel daily from Orlando to Miami with no stops planned in Indian River County or the Treasure Coast. The trains, a total of 32 a day, will be speeding through our peaceful community at up to 110 miles per hour, bringing with them safety, economic, political and quality of life negatives that cannot be ignored by those of us who deeply care about our County.

The safety issues are an obvious concern. High speed trains traveling over 100 MPH through our quaint towns will inevitably lead to more traffic congestion, via crossing delays. The potential for accidents along the high-speed rail corridor will increase. Emergency services may suffer life threatening delays getting patients to our hospitals.

The economic impact on our community is also deeply troubling. The Vero Beach downtown region which has been revitalized and provides all of us with vibrant night life, restaurants, and other commercial endeavors, will be dealing with noise pollution from the blaring of the train horns. The sound has the possibility of being dealt with by establishing "quiet zones", but the cost of these must be borne by our local governments. Yes, government grants may be available to help curb some of these costs, but again that means we the taxpayers are footing the bill. There is also the potential of dividing the town between east and west regions. Consumers may choose

to stay on either side of the tracks rather than deal with the increased delays brought about by the trains, especially during our vital "season" when traffic congestion is already a concern. This division of our community is a real negative as both the mainland and barrier island must be successful in order for our entire town to continue to thrive. There will also be a decrease in property values for those along the corridor which lowers our tax base thereby impacting all of us through either increased taxes or decreased services. Neither option is desirable as a result of a train project with no stops in our area nor any signs of added economic benefit whatsoever to our region.

The political impact is something we at the Taxpayers' Association are also concerned with. Although, "All Aboard Florida" is a private enterprise, it is now abundantly clear that they will be seeking a large amount of government funding in one fashion or another. Whether it be government grants, "RIFF" loans through the FRA, or State funding for a required terminal at the Orlando airport, the message is obvious - We the Taxpayers will have a large burden to bear if this project is unsuccessful. Which raises another important question, what are the chances of financial viability for this project? Unlikely, seeing as commuter trains have a terrible record of being profitable. We would have a better idea of their prospects if the company made available the information necessary to help us come to such a decision, but so far anything reluctantly shared has been extremely vague.

So what can be done? This past week the Taxpayers' Assoc. Board unanimously passed a motion to draft a resolution to be sent to all government officials and agencies involved with this project asking that no government financial assistance be given. Without this assistance there is a chance that the project could be delayed or entirely derailed. We encourage any local citizens who share our concerns to do the same. To be clear, we are very pleased that Vero Beach and County officials have been at the forefront of addressing this issue, as recognized by others along the Treasure Coast, who took note of the fact that we were the first municipality to establish a City Advisory High-Speed Rail Commission. That commission has put a lot of hard work into the matter and we hope the City Council will benefit from those efforts and continue to do everything possible to ensure that our community remain the wonderful mix of serene surroundings and controlled growth that has made it such a joy for all who live and visit here.

In the meantime, if The Taxpayers' and other collective voices can assist our elected officials in achieving that goal, all the better.

Thank you,
John Kistler
President - Taxpayers' Association of Indian River County