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# A Train Among Cars and Planes in Florida? The Brightline Private Rail Project in the First Touristic Region of the United States

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## Introduction

- 1 The Brightline project is a private railway, both in terms of its governance and its financial structure. Led by Florida East Coast Industries-LLC (FECI), the idea is to re-establish a passenger rail service in Florida by launching a specialist operator and making use of a rail corridor originally created in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Brightline project proposes to create a high-speed rail service between four cities: Miami, Fort Lauderdale, West Palm Beach and Orlando.<sup>1</sup> The service will use 312 kilometers of existing lines, and a new 64-kilometre stretch is planned to connect the Treasure Coast, north of West Palm Beach, to Orlando's international airport. FECI is keen to highlight the wholly private nature of this operation, since the State of Florida has witnessed several failed attempts to set up a high-speed train line in the past.<sup>2</sup> The purpose of this article is to examine this project, with a particular focus on two of its principal characteristics: firstly the importance of tourism in the design and promotion of this rail project, which is intended to connect the three main hubs of Florida's tourist industry; secondly the fact that this rail project is taking shape in an inauspicious context where carbon-heavy modes of transport (airplanes and cars) account for the overwhelming majority of tourist mobility and everyday mobility, and where both public perception and the tourism landscape have been shaped by the predominance of cars. This article thus sets out to study the relationship between high-speed rail and

tourism by analyzing the planning and implementation of a railway project in an unfavorable territorial context, oriented towards carbon mobility. The aim is to understand how Brightline has built its business strategy and how a new transport infrastructure can have potential effects in Florida in a territory where green mobility is a minor issue both in terms of infrastructure and public policy and in the practices of residents and tourists. The project is original in several respects: firstly, because it is an attempt to create a new collective transport service which is not dependent upon the public sector; secondly, because of the context of mass tourism; finally, because it requires the construction and operation of new stations which will aim to make the railway an established part of Florida's landscape and transport habits. This article presents a case study to understand the territorial effects of tourism. Accessibility is a determining factor. Tourism has become one of the predominant objectives of transport network development (Page, 2009). Public authorities and even private companies play an important role in the development of tourism in the region, particularly by financing new transport networks: first the railways, then the motorway network and the airports. Transportation makes it possible to open up an area to tourist traffic and activities on different scales and is traditionally a powerful argument for the installation and investment of private companies, such as the French government's investment efforts (extension of the RER A suburban train line, TGV station, motorway slip road) to accommodate the Disneyland Park in Marne-la-Vallée. In some cases, operators or transport companies may also become tourism players, such as the ARRC in Alaska (Schorung, 2016). In the case of Brightline, we are talking about a conglomerate that is making a major investment in passenger rail transport in order to develop a new branch of activity and deploy a commercial strategy based on tourism and leisure activities. It is therefore interesting to see how a new entrant in the Florida mobility system is positioning itself.

## Methodology and scientific literature

### Research methodology

- 2 This research is based upon analysis of a substantial corpus of grey literature, as well as field work conducted between 2017 and 2019 for the purposes of my doctoral thesis in geography, focusing on passenger rail services in the USA. Studying a transport project obviously requires the gathering and analysis of documents relating to the project itself, published by the parent company FECI, the State of Florida and the federal government. The richest source of grey literature is to be found in the reports prepared by FECI for submission to the federal government (Federal Railroad Administration, FRA) in order to comply with regulatory requirements, particularly environmental obligations. To this we can add the documents produced by local and regional stakeholders, and consultancy firms seeking to ascertain the impact of the rail project, as well as data taken from the websites of these institutional stakeholders. Since the project itself is relatively recent—work began in 2015, with the first phase completed in mid-2017—academic writing on the subject is scarce. Finally, the national, regional and local press provide invaluable information regarding the perception of the project by local elected officials and residents, and how such perceptions evolve in response to new developments. The field research, conducted in 2017, focused on several locations: the Miami metropolitan area (MSA), the beach resorts of West Palm Beach and Fort

Lauderdale, home of the two most modest stations on the line, and the Orlando metropolitan area. This field trip enabled me to gather data and documents which will be of use in the analytical phase of this project, as well as visiting the construction sites of three of the four planned stations (the Orlando station is located within a future airport terminal, and the construction site is closed to the public). This methodology is, however, limited in one aspect: it does not include semi-directive interviews with any representatives of the project, who declined requests for a formal interview.<sup>3</sup> The answers referred to the information contained in the presentation brochures and on the website. This refusal can be interpreted in three ways: a reluctance for a private company to provide sensitive information on a project in the course of financing and construction; a reluctance for the private actors of the railway sector to discuss projects relating to passenger transport; a reluctance relating to the instability of such a project which constitutes a bet in a territory unfavorable to the train and relating to the uncertainty of its commercial success. The absence of interviews forced me to rely on documentary research and the press and consequently to try to build a critical view without insights from the actors carrying the project.

### The relationship between high-speed rail and tourism

- 3 Over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, innovations in transportation expanded the reach of tourism. Successive transport revolutions—trains, boats, automobiles, air travel, high-speed rail—allowed for unprecedented spatial diffusion, as new destinations became accessible to tourists for the first time (Gay, 2006; Gay and Mondou, 2017, pp. 17-19, 24-31). Transport providers also became key figures in the tourism industry. In order to boost passenger numbers on their trains, rail companies invested directly in the development of stations at tourist attractions within their networks or at the end of their existing routes, a phenomenon which can be clearly observed in the USA and Canada (Gay and Mondou, 2017, pp. 58-60). It is in Japan, however, where rail companies have invested most heavily in tourism. Adopting a policy of vertical integration and business diversification, train operators have played and continue to play a vital role in the development of tourist attractions and activities (zoos, theme parks, parks, ski resorts, hotels, restaurants etc.) (Aveline, 2003). The development of tourism is a major factor in urbanization, including the development of coastal holiday destinations, where available space is limited and demand is particularly strong. The appeal of “artificial tourism,”<sup>4</sup> especially theme parks, is a powerful vector of metropolization and suburbanization, with Disneyland Anaheim and Disneyworld Orlando the most emblematic examples. Many tourist attractions are dependent on the existence of extensive supporting infrastructure, especially theme parks.
- 4 Tourism is an activity which necessarily involves mobility, and thus transport infrastructure. The accessibility of a location and the ease of the journey come into play when tourists are choosing a destination, and thus have an impact on the development of tourism, both domestic and international (Prideaux, 2000; Lumsdon and Page, 2007; Page, 2007). Since the 1960s, the issue of the role played by high-speed rail services in the development of tourism has given rise to a sizeable corpus of academic literature (Bazin, Beckerich, Blanquart, Delaplace and Vandenbossche, 2011). Some scientific works have investigated the effects of transportation on tourism markets (Sands, 1993; Masson and Petiot, 2009; Urena *et al.*, 2009; Wang *et al.*, 2012; Pagliara, La Pietra, Gomez and Vassallo, 2015). It seems that increasing the supply of transportation, especially

high-speed rail, may increase some of these markets (Bazin, Beckerich, Delaplace and Masson, 2006; Bazin, Beckerich and Delaplace 2010, 2011; Delaplace and Dobruszkes, 2013; Bazin-Benoît and Delaplace, 2015; Billard and Bertrand, 2018). There is a large body of scientific literature on the structural effects of transport on tourist numbers and activities, on the potential benefits of improved accessibility (Berion, 1998; Mannone, 1995; Berion *et al.*, 2007; Masson and Petiot, 2009; Chen and Haynes, 2012; Wang *et al.*, 2012; Bazin-Benoît and Delaplace, 2013; Coronado *et al.*, 2013), and on the potential effects on tourists' choice of destination (Valeri *et al.*, 2012; Delaplace *et al.*, 2014, 2015; Pagliara, Delaplace and Vassalo, 2014, 2015; Albalade *et al.*, 2017; Pagliara, Mauriello and Garofalo, 2017). Finally, since high-speed stations are generally located in urban areas and cities are seeking to capitalize on the attractiveness of high-speed rail, scientific work has sought to analyse the effects on urban tourism and business travel (Faye, 1998; Bazin, Beckerich, Blanquart *et al.*, 2010, 2011; Delaplace, 2012, 2016; Bazin, Beckerich and Delaplace, 2013, 2014; Ruggeri, 2013; Delaplace and Perrin, 2014; Mondou and Pébarthe-Désiré, 2018).

- 5 Based largely on *ex post* analyses, the existing literature displays a tendency to downplay the dynamism associated with the creation of high-speed rail services. High-speed rail may serve to boost the dynamism of the tourism sector within a given territory on three conditions: a clear improvement in the all-round accessibility of the territory, a general strategy to develop and promote the territory's amenities involving both public and private stakeholders, and finally an intermodal strategy to improve urban transportation within the territory and effectively manage passenger transfers. Furthermore, the relationship between transport and the development of tourism is dependent on three factors beyond the realm of transportation: local potential, local strategies to prepare for the arrival of high-speed services, and the targeting of specific categories of clients by private actors (Masson and Petiot, 2009).

## 1. Florida: A destination of choice for American tourists

### The early development of tourism in Florida driven by its transport infrastructure

- 6 Florida is now one of the USA's principal centers of tourism, primarily as a result of the state's beaches, weather conditions and attractive scenery, as well as a thriving leisure industry and "artificial tourism" sector embodied by the state's many theme parks. Since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the state's positive reputation has been linked to the rise of tourism on the Florida panhandle. Tourism and territorial development have always gone hand-in-hand in Florida (Revels, 2011).
- 7 In many ways the history of tourism in Florida begins with Henry Morrison Flagler, a wealthy industrialist who made his fortune working with John D. Rockefeller. Flagler recognized the great economic potential of St. Augustine, building three hotels in the city including the flagship Hotel Ponce de Leon (a luxury hotel with 450 rooms). He transformed the city into a bustling tourist destination by playing on its natural charms (beaches and sunshine), while also creating an attractive artificial environment within his hotels. Flagler then set about developing Florida's rail network. He took ownership of some of the smaller lines in the north of the state and began to expand

the network to span the whole peninsula, while continuing to invest in tourism projects. He was firmly convinced of the exceptional potential of Florida's south-east and southern coasts as tourist destinations. In 1892 he obtained permission from the state government to build a rail line stretching down the coast as far as Palm Beach. He began building vast hotel complexes in what is now Palm Beach, and then extended the line down to Miami. This line became the Florida East Coast Railway.<sup>5</sup> Once again, this new investment was accompanied by the construction of a grand hotel (The Royal Palm), capitalizing on the clement weather and spectacular landscape of the bay of Miami. Flagler thus played a prominent role in the urbanization of Florida:

- his workers' camps were subsequently incorporated into a single entity, which would become West Palm Beach;
  - the city of Miami underwent major changes (the streets were paved, an electricity network was installed, piers were built to welcome steamboats, new schools and hospitals sprang up etc.).
- 8 Henry Bradley Plant was the second major figure in the development of Florida's tourist industry, and a direct competitor of Henry Flagler. Plant made Tampa (on the state's west coast) the base for his ambitious economic project: he renovated the city's railway network, developed its port and built a 500-bedroom luxury hotel (the Tampa Bay Hotel). He bought and renovated a series of hotels located along his railway lines (Hotel Kissimee, Ft. Myers Hotel, Ocala House). Between them, these two businessmen profoundly altered the image and indeed the geography of Florida (Revels, 2011, p. 55). The history of Florida as a tourist destination is part of the tourist revolution, analyzed by the MIT group (Mobility, Itineraries, Tourism). In particular, coastal summer tourism and vacationing are profoundly transforming the world of tourism. From the 1930s, the hedonistic model based on the "3 S" (*Sea, Sand and Sun*) spread from Hawaii and then to Florida (Équipe MIT, 2005, 2011; Monot and Paris, 2019, p. 103).
- 9 In the early twentieth century, Florida's cities were beginning to consider the potential of more affordable tourism aimed at the middle classes. The global context was particularly conducive to this development, with rapid transformations in mobility behaviors and a period of economic prosperity which saw working hours becoming shorter, wages rising and consumer lending on the rise. Florida's tourist destinations witnessed a property boom, as the state rapidly adapted to the rise of motorcar ownership—the first highway connecting Jacksonville, in the north, to Miami, on the state's southern tip, was inaugurated in 1911. By 1925, Florida was already attracting 2.5 million tourists each year and the number of people employed in the tourism sector had doubled. The state was hit hard by the 1929 stock market crash and its after-effects—spending on leisure and tourism is the first thing which households sacrifice in times of financial uncertainty—but rebounded relatively quickly when the New Deal gave the tourism sector a vital boost, not least in the form of the ambitious scheme to reinvent and redevelop the Keys. Florida's continued growth post-1945 was primarily driven by tourism: the state's population topped 1.9 million in 1940, rising to 2.7 million by 1950. The post-war context was also highly auspicious for the Floridian tourism boom:
- the national situation was positive: post-war prosperity, demobilization of some of the army, the *baby boom* and the attendant increase in family holidays;

- circumstances were also favorable in Florida: the ongoing expansion of the highway network, the opening up of the state to air travel, the increased availability of air conditioning and the draining of marshes to reduce mosquito numbers.
- 10 By 1959, Florida was attracting 11.3 million visitors each year and was firmly established as a prime tourist destination. Tourism in Florida was built on three main pillars: the state's beaches (abetted by changing attitudes to sunbathing and seaside holidays, as well as the emergence of the spring break phenomenon);<sup>6</sup> "roadside tourist attractions" (around thirty sites aimed at families but still relatively modest in size, located in the vicinity of the Everglades National Park and including Cypress Gardens, Marineland, etc.); and smaller attractions (secondary tourist spots looking to capitalize on the influx of tourists, the majority of which were subsequently wiped out by the arrival of Disney).
- 11 Walt Disney's decision to create his new theme park in Florida is probably the most significant event in the history of tourism in the state. In June 1965, Disney purchased over 11,000 hectares of land spanning Orange and Osceola counties, near Orlando. Locating the park in the Orlando area meant that it could remain operational all year round, in a region where land was plentiful and inexpensive, and easy to reach by car. When negotiating their arrival in Florida, Walt Disney Co. demanded a number of concessions, including work to widen Interstate 4, the construction of three new junctions on this highway, specific rights of first refusal on additional land and the transferal of essential infrastructure to Disney's control (sewers, water supply, electricity, the internal road network). The entire district was declared a politically autonomous zone, with the incorporation of two new cities (Lake Buena Vista and Bay Lake). Walt Disney World opened its doors on 1st October 1971, and within a few years had revolutionized Florida's economic geography and tourism industry. Over the course of the 1970s, 20,000 new hotel and motel rooms were created. Ever since, Orlando has been renowned as the world's theme park capital (Revels, 2011):
- 1973: opening of Sea World Florida;
  - 1982: opening of the first extension to Disney World, EPCOT Center;
  - 1989: inauguration of Pleasure Island (for night-time activities) and Typhoon Lagoon (waterpark) as well as a further extension to Disney World (Disney-MGM Studios);
  - 1995: opening of a new rival theme park, Universal Studios, and further work to expand Disney World (Animal Kingdom);
  - 1999: expansion of Universal Studios with new attraction Island of Adventures (Revels, 2011, pp. 125-134)<sup>7</sup>.
- 12 This building frenzy, catalyzed by the fierce competition between Universal and Disney, was accompanied by a scramble to build more hotels, restaurants and all sorts of other tourist facilities. This had major consequences for Orlando, not least the fact that the city's population doubled between 1971 and 1999. Orlando is a city built on tourism, whose residents are dependent upon the tourism industry and thus live in the shadow of the theme parks (Gladstone, 1998). In central Florida, theme parks and more modest attractions also began to modernize and expand (Busch Gardens, SeaWorld). In the 1990s, the Floridian tourism industry endured a period of uncertainty. Its image was in decline, and Florida was becoming synonymous with mass tourism, superficiality and overcrowding. Key industry stakeholders (the state government, promoters, large companies) totally overhauled their marketing strategy in response to this threat: a new promotional agency called VisitFlorida was launched, the sector was an early



adopter of the internet, products were revamped and new commercial niches were developed. This policy soon bore fruit: 48 million visitors in 1998 (up to 83.9 million in 2006) bringing in revenue of 41 billion dollars for the tourism sector.<sup>8</sup> It would be no exaggeration to say that the tourist economy has shaped modern Florida, and that there is a clear and strong correlation between the leisure and tourism sector, urbanization and economic development in the state (*cf.* table 1)<sup>9</sup>. Hence the aim of the Brightline project to connect the main tourist hubs of south-east and central Florida, and its heavily tourism-oriented commercial strategy.

Table 1. The importance of tourism to the Floridian economy (in 2018)

Sector	GDP (in millions of dollars)	Jobs (thousands)
Tourism sector (total)	91.3	Direct employment: 1005 Total employment: 1500
Of which:		
<i>Accommodation and food services</i>	30	688
<i>Real estate and rental</i>	14.1	84
<i>Arts, entertainment and recreation</i>	7.8	188
<i>Retail trade</i>	6.5	144
<i>Transportation</i>	5.4	105
Sector	Spending by tourists (in billions of dollars)	
Tourist spending (total)	94	
Of which:		
<i>Lodging</i>	26.6	
<i>Food and beverage</i>	21.3	
<i>Shopping</i>	15.4	
<i>Transportation</i>	18.7	
<i>Entertainment and recreation</i>	12	

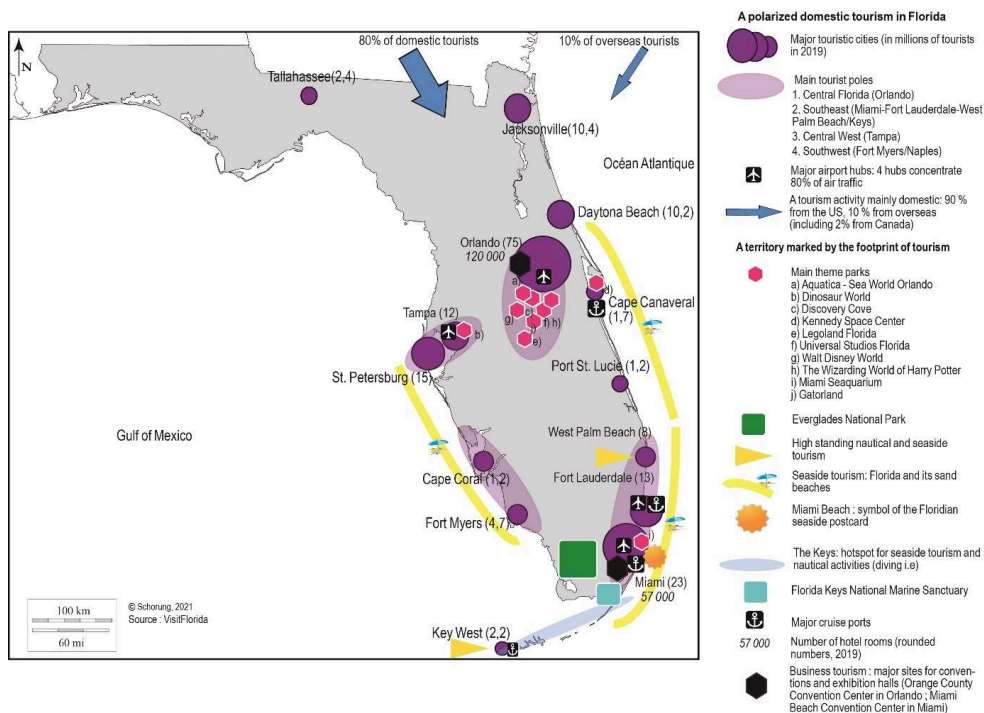
Source: Rockport Analytics, 2019

## Concentration of tourist activities in a small number of nationally and internationally-renowned hubs

- 13 In 2019, Florida welcomed a total of 131.4 million tourists from the USA and overseas<sup>10</sup>. Almost 89% of these visitors were Americans (116.8 million in 2019), confirming Florida's reputation as the USA's favorite holiday destination—these domestic tourists come primarily from the North-Eastern states, the Midwest and Texas.<sup>11</sup> Canada was the biggest source of overseas visitors, with 3.4 million tourists, followed by the United Kingdom with 1.4 million. The economic impact of this tourism is immense: tourist spending was 94 billion dollars in 2018, with more than 1.4 million direct and indirect jobs in the sector and 12 billion dollars in tax revenue (state and city taxes).<sup>12</sup> Annual visitor totals have continued to grow steadily over the years (with the exception of 2001-2002, due to the repercussions of the 9/11 attacks): 20 million in 1980, 40 million in 1990, 70 million in 2000, 81 million in 2010.
- 14 Domestic tourism in Florida is concentrated in four main zones: central Florida including Orlando (32% of American tourists), the south-east with the Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach agglomeration (18%), the central west coast around Tampa and St. Petersburg (14%) and the south-western coast around Cape Coral and Fort Myers (10%). At the county level, five counties attract almost 55% of all tourists from within the USA: Orange (28.9%), Hillsborough (8.1%), Broward (6.4%), Miami-Dade (5.9%), Duval (4.3%) (FDOT, 2012, pp. 3-12). Analyzing tourist flows is complicated by the extremely limited nature of the available statistics on interurban mobility in the USA, and particularly the total lack of surveys focusing on the travel habits of Floridians for tourism and recreational purposes. It is thus not possible to precisely quantify the origins of Floridian tourists, nor their destinations. This is a major constraint when it comes to examining the workings of Florida's tourism market, and taking tourist flows into consideration when analyzing transport projects. We can only offer the hypothesis that a new rail service connecting two major hubs of tourism (Miami and Orlando) could have an impact on the organization of internal flows of tourists within Florida.
- 15 The principal components of Florida's tourism industry (*cf.* figure 1) (Colburn & Dehaven-Smith, 2010) are as follows:
- Beaches: 63.4% of hotel and motel reservations are concentrated in beach resorts. The presence of numerous natural lagoons has been a boon for the coastal economy, as Florida has made the transition from a state associated with traditional maritime activities to a destination clearly focused on seaside tourism (Klein *et al.*, 2004; Klein and Osleeb, 2010; Onofri and Nunes, 2013). Florida's natural assets make it ideally suited to this kind of tourism (climate, sandy beaches, lagoons), with an attractively tropical image (sunshine, turquoise waters, white sands).
  - Theme parks: central Florida is home to the world's largest concentration of theme parks. Six of the world's top ten most popular theme parks (in terms of visitor numbers) are found in the Orlando area.<sup>13</sup> The agency responsible for promoting tourism in Florida (VisitFlorida) estimates that 36% of tourists arriving from outside Florida travel to this central region, and that visiting a theme park is the primary motivation for more than half of them. Between now and 2030, annual visitor numbers are expected to exceed 150 million. This will make Orlando the USA's most-visited metropolis, ahead of New York, Chicago, Los Angeles and Las Vegas (FDOT, 2017, p. 6-12).

- Cruise ships: in 2016, over 15 million cruise passengers set sail from one of Florida’s ports. Miami is the world’s biggest cruise port, while three other Floridian ports serve as “feeding” and redistribution hubs: Port Canaveral (4.2 million passengers in 2016), Port Everglades (3.8 million) and the Port of Key West (0.7 million).
- Urban tourism: Miami is the primary destination for urban tourism, for its beaches but also for conferences and business meetings. There are also numerous attractions including a number of iconic Art Deco buildings and art galleries, and the city has a dynamic cultural scene. Three additional destinations are effectively tourist annexes of the Miami metropolis: nearby Miami Beach, a mecca for luxury beach tourism with its seaside skyscrapers; West Palm Beach, specializing in luxury tourism and yachting; the Keys archipelago, which, in addition to its villas and smaller luxury hotels, is very popular for sailing and diving—the city of Key West, at the end of the highway which connects the archipelago to the Miami metropolitan area, is a destination in its own right.

Figure 1. Tourism in Florida: A popular vacation destination for Americans



16 In its official communications and press releases, Brightline insist on the structural significance of creating a new rail line in this heavily-frequented tourist destination, connecting Florida’s major beach resorts—Miami and West Palm Beach—with Orlando, the theme park capital. This new service could become a major tourist route for Florida, firstly for Florida residents who travel within the state for their holidays, secondly for American tourists visiting from outside Florida, and also for foreign tourists thanks to its connection to Orlando’s international airport. In the second section of this article, we will look in closer detail at the key characteristics of this rail project, and the actors involved.

## 2. The Brightline project: A rail line which aims to become the backbone of Florida's tourism sector

### A project which describes itself as entirely privately-funded: Who are the stakeholders?

- 17 The Brightline project<sup>14</sup> broke ground in mid-2015, and the first section of line (Miami-West Palm Beach) was inaugurated in late 2017. The project is led by Florida East Coast Industries LLC (FECI), a major real estate group which owns the rail infrastructure between Miami and the Treasure Coast on which the Brightline trains will run. The company's activities are split between four main branches: Flagler (commercial real estate), Flagler Global Logistics (integrated logistical chains), Parallel Infrastructure (rail management) and All Aboard Florida (intercity train lines). Brightline is a high-speed intercity train service which will ultimately connect four cities—Miami, Fort Lauderdale, West Palm Beach, Orlando—using 312 kilometers of existing rail lines. Only the final stretch from the Treasure Coast up to Orlando will require new infrastructure, a total of 64 kilometers of track (Schorung, 2019). According to FECI, the service will run at an average of 170 km/hour between Miami and Orlando. The line will have three city-center stations (Miami, Fort Lauderdale, West Palm Beach), thus firmly anchoring the service within the vast Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) of Miami. However, the choice of location for the Orlando terminus is entirely different. The company has opted not to create a new train station in the center of Orlando, but instead to build a station within the new terminal currently under construction at Orlando International Airport (All Aboard Florida, 2015, pp. 1-1-1-4).<sup>15</sup> Air-rail intermodal transfer has thus been prioritized. We might advance two hypotheses to explain this choice: a decision to prioritize tourists over interregional travelers; and a desire to avoid building a new railway line into central Orlando, which would have considerably increased the overall cost of the project—Brightline does not own any existing infrastructure within the city, where the only current line is a private freight line used by national carrier Amtrak. This new rail line is part of a commercial strategy to diversify the activities of the parent company which is based on three pillars: mobility by offering a new mode of travel between Miami and Fort Lauderdale and then to Orlando; tourism, since the network serves three major tourist regions of Florida and deploys commercial offers in connection with the tourism and events sectors; urban and real estate development through land and real estate development projects in the surrounding area.
- 18 At time of writing, the company plans to operate sixteen services daily between Miami and Orlando, with one train per hour in each direction throughout the day. The planned journey time between Miami and Orlando is 3 hours and 10 minutes, 1 hour 50 minutes between West Palm Beach and Orlando and 1 hour 20 minutes between West Palm Beach and Miami. Three different speeds of travel have been envisaged: a top speed of 200 km/h on the Orlando-Cocoa section of the line,<sup>16</sup> a top speed of 175 km/h between Cocoa and West Palm Beach, and a top speed of 125 km/h between West Palm Beach and Miami. The service will actually use two different types of line. The Orlando to Cocoa line will be a new infrastructure specifically designed for passenger trains, with no level crossings; this means that the trains will be able to travel at greater speeds than elsewhere on the line. The Cocoa to Miami line is a former freight line which is being modernized to handle both freight convoys and passenger

trains. The modernization work will also serve to increase the average speed of freight trains on this route, thus boosting the capacity of the line, despite the fact that train paths will now be shared with the new passenger service (Briginshaw, 2016; All Aboard Florida, 2017, pp. 3-60).

- 19 This project is innovative in terms of both its financial and its organizational structure. FECI is the parent company supervising the implementation of this new transportation service, while also retaining responsibility for rail freight operations and activities connected with local development and promotion. The project was initially known as All Aboard Florida, a name which has been gradually abandoned and replaced by “Brightline” in official documentation and for commercial purposes. Nonetheless, Brightline is not actually a branch of FECI. If FECI had pursued such a structure, the company would have been directly financially responsible in the event that the Brightline project should fail. In reality, Brightline is operated by three subsidiary companies of which FECI is the majority shareholder: the first is AAF Holdings LLC, which owns the physical assets (rolling stock, land around the stations), the second is AAF Operations Holdings LLC, which handles the general supervision of the group’s projects, and the third is AAF Operations LLC, responsible for the operational and financial dimensions of the project. This seemingly complex structure actually allows FECI to retain ownership of the infrastructure—the modernized line between Miami and Cocoa and the new infrastructure being built between Cocoa and Orlando—while also protecting the parent company from financial losses and the potential fall-out if Brightline should prove to be a commercial failure (Saginor and Dumbaugh, 2018, p. 34). In order to finance the necessary investments, and with the approval of the United States Department of Transportation, AAF Operations has raised 1.75 billion dollars in private activity bonds (PAB). These bonds are tax free and managed by the Florida Development Finance Corporation (FDFC), an agency delegated by the State of Florida to stimulate economic development. Jesse Saginor and Eric Dumbaugh (2018), in their initial analysis of the project, point out that details on how these bonds will eventually be amortized and paid back remain vague.
- 20 In summary, this is a passenger transportation project using a pre-existing privately-owned line and being developed thanks to private investment—the only assistance received from the State of Florida is the mechanism allowing the PABs to be considered tax-exempt. In this manner, Brightline has got round the strong political and societal opposition in Florida to projects involving substantial public investment in infrastructure other than highways, as well as the absence of public funding for intercity passenger rail services (Schorung, 2019). This leaves the company with total freedom over its commercial strategy and rail services, as well as its building and real estate strategy for the stations and surrounding areas. Major public-sector stakeholders (the federal government, the State of Florida) have only marginal involvement in the project: they retain control over the regulatory framework which governs transport projects, for example in terms of the preliminary environmental studies required; they also control the fiscal facilitation mechanism used by the project. Local public-sector stakeholders, particularly city and county authorities, also have peripheral involvement with the project as a whole, largely in matters relating to road networks and minor adjustments to public spaces in the vicinity of the stations. The body responsible for public transport in the Miami region, the South Florida Regional Transportation Authority, worked with Brightline to allow the metropolitan rail service to reach Miami Central Station. With these exceptions, the public sector is not involved

in this private rail project. As a result, there is little interconnection between this new service and other public transport services at the metropolitan or state level (Schorung, 2019).

### **A constantly evolving project whose focus on tourism is becoming more pronounced**

- 21 Upon launching, the service was an immediate commercial success, with passenger numbers exceeding the company's initial targets. In Q1 2018, when the service was partially operational between Miami and West Palm Beach, Brightline trains transported 17,800 passengers in January, 24,100 in February and 32,900 in March. Brightline offers two types of ticket: "select" (first class) and "smart" (second class). For the West Palm Beach-Fort Lauderdale services, prices are set at between 10 and 15 dollars in *smart* class and 20 dollars for a *select* seat. For West Palm Beach-Miami, tickets cost around 20 dollars in *smart* and 30 dollars in *select* (Broadt, 2018a). In 2018, the first full year of operation, the Brightline service transported almost 600,000, despite the fact that MiamiCentral and the Miami-West Palm Beach service only became operational in May of that year (TNM Staff, 2019). In 2019, passenger numbers exceeded 900,000 (Wile, 2020). The company's promotional materials are aimed at tourists, but also intercity travelers and commuters within the Miami-West Palm Beach metropolitan area. At the time of writing, no information is available regarding the socio-demographic composition of passengers nor the nature of their journeys (length, frequency, demand, user requirements etc.). It seems entirely possible that, in the long term, this private service may play a major role in satisfying the day-to-day demand for transport services for commuters.
- 22 The company's directors insist that the whole service, all the way up to Orlando, should be on line in the first half of 2021.<sup>17</sup> In order to finance the second phase of the project, from West Palm Beach to the international airport in Orlando, the company has submitted a request to issue further tax-free bonds to the tune of 1.15 billion dollars (Sorentrou, 2017; Spear, 2017). As a result of these plans, a legal battle ensued between Brightline and the Florida Development Finance Corporation, on one side, and the counties of Martin and Indian River and the CARE FL citizens' group on the other. The latter parties aimed to block the extension of the service to Orlando. They opposed the project on several grounds: first among them was the safety of the new rail service—since early 2018 several fatal accidents have occurred as a result of pedestrians not paying due attention near railway lines as trains enter the cities; they also cited the impossibility of using public money to fund private activities; finally, they argued that federal environmental impacts should take the opinions of local government bodies into account, seeking permission from all counties concerned—three counties on the Treasure Coast (Indian River County, St. Lucie County, Martin County) have formally expressed their opposition to the project (Rosenburg, 2018). In August 2018, the court rejected all of the plaintiffs' objections and the FDFC was able to approve Brightline's bond issue request (Ostrowski, 2018).
- 23 The original project, launched in 2015, is already being expanded in new directions. Brightline has launched a call for tender for the construction of a new station on the Treasure Coast. The company has invited four cities to submit proposals—Stuart, Fort Pierce, Sebastian, Vero Beach—but only Fort Pierce appears to meet Brightline's criteria

(Gardner, 2018). Two new intermediate stations are being planned in Martin and Brevard counties. Brightline and the city of Boca Raton have agreed terms for the construction of a new station which will further enhance the service's coverage of the Miami metropolitan area (Solomon, 2019). A plan to extend the line up to Tampa was already in the works, even as Phase 2 to Orlando had only just been confirmed. In June 2018, Governor Rick Scott announced that the State might be interested in renting land in the vicinity of Interstate 4 with a view to developing a high-speed rail corridor. Brightline has since tabled plans to create a line running alongside I-4 between Orlando and Tampa. The rights to this land are currently held by the Central Florida Expressway Authority, under the aegis of the State Transport Department. Patrick Goddard, President of Brightline, advanced two major arguments in favor of this new infrastructure: the opportunity to connect one of Florida's biggest tourism hubs (Miami) with the state's second most populous city (Tampa); and the fact that the Tampa Bay area is one of the most economically and demographically dynamic regions in the whole country (Broadt, 2018b). On 29 October 2019, Brightline announced a new extension of its service to the port of Miami, specifically its cruise terminal. A deal has been reached between Miami-Dade County and the company for the construction of the new "Brightline PortMiami Station." The idea is to provide cruise passengers arriving in Miami (the world's busiest cruise port) with direct access to an intercity transport solution.<sup>18</sup> A similar extension which would stop at Disney World, near Orlando, is now the subject of discussions between Brightline and Disney. The latest extension projects (Port of Miami, Disney World) underline a new attitude of large tourism companies towards the Brightline project. The analysis of the chronology of the project shows a clear lack of interest on the part of these large companies in relation to this railway line, the initial stations of which are not located near major tourist facilities. Florida's transport system is very well suited to the automotive character of tourist activities: major facilities, amusement parks, shopping centers, cruise terminals are served by an efficient network of highways, by huge car parks, and by a highly developed car rental sector. The automotive system aims to make travel by car as easy as possible. These extension projects under discussion would testify to a shared desire between those responsible for Brightline and private tourism operators to offer tourists a new mode of travel. An unknown remains concerning the last mile of trips: tourists arriving by train at a Brightline station, for example near Disneyworld, would need a car to get around the parks area and the metropolitan area of Orlando. According to data from the Florida Department of Transportation, nearly 45% of domestic tourists arriving by plane in Florida rent a car from a rental company within the airport.

### **3. What is the territorial scope of the Brightline project? A rail corridor in a territory whose environment, public image and mobility practices have all been shaped by automobile and air travel**

#### **Brightline is a new arrival in a territory designed for automobiles**

<sup>24</sup> Florida is a state heavily dependent upon automobiles: almost 90% of Floridians commuted to and from work in cars in 2018 (79.8% in their own cars, 8% in car-pooling schemes) with only 2.2% using public transport (3.8% in the Miami-Fort Lauderdale-

West Palm Beach metropolitan area, just 1.9% in the Orlando-Kissimmee-Sanford metropolitan area). This high proportion of automobile travel has remained stable over time (79.9% of commuters took their own cars and 9% car-shared in 2010) (FDOT, 2018, pp. 1-2). With regard to travel within the state, the dependency on carbon-heavy modes of transport is even stronger: the number of vehicle-kilometers has increased by 4.3% since 2013, while Amtrak passenger numbers have fallen by 3.3% over the same period (FDOT, 2015, pp. 4-6). Mobility habits and tourist travel in Florida are very heavily dependent on modes of transport with high carbon emissions (*cf.* figure 2): almost 50% of tourists arrive by plane, with almost 48% arriving by car (FDOT, 2015, pp. 7-8). Furthermore, almost half of all US tourists who arrive by plane then rent a car to get around during their stay. Along the route served by the Brightline project, there are already two federal highways (I-95 and the Florida Turnpike) which run up the east coast of Florida from Miami to Orlando. Traffic on these two major roads is expected to grow by 52% between 2007 and 2040. Almost all sections of the road will have reached maximum capacity by 2040. There are several reasons for this saturation: the substantial increase in both the local population and visitor numbers, and the scarcity of room for maneuver in terms of further expanding the highway network (All Aboard Florida, 2015, p. 2-4).

- 25 Florida's busiest international airports are:
- Orlando International (MCO): 40.1 million passengers in 2019 (five main airlines: Southwest 24.7%, Delta 14.8%, American Airlines 13%, Spirit 12.8% and JetBlue 11.8%);
  - Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International (FLL): 26.8 million passengers in 2019 (predominantly travelling with three budget airlines: Spirit 23.5%, JetBlue 21.4% and Southwest 21%);
  - Miami International Airport (MIA): 21 million passengers in 2019 (two main airlines: American Airlines with a 68% market share, and Delta with 11.7%);
  - Tampa International (TPA): 19 million passengers in 2019 (three main airlines: Southwest 31.8%, Delta 17.1%, American Airlines 16.2%)<sup>19</sup>.
- 26 Almost 80% of tourists arriving by plane land at one of four airports: Orlando, Miami, Fort Lauderdale or Tampa. There are more than thirty flights everyday between Orlando International Airport and the airports of West Palm Beach/Fort Lauderdale and Miami. Florida's internal air travel market is modest in scale—no Floridian airport features in the top ten domestic destinations from either Miami or Orlando—but there are still more than sixty direct flights every week between Miami and Orlando.
- 27 Florida does not have a high-speed rail infrastructure connecting it to its neighboring states, nor a high-speed or very high-speed line within the state. The number of Americans who use Amtrak long distance services to travel to Florida is negligible (FDOT, 2012, pp. 3-4; Schorung, 2019). Amtrak only offers three such long-distance services (Silver Star, Silver Meteor, Auto Train), which are severely limited both in terms of their coverage and the number of trains available—an average of two return journeys per day. These rail services have had a very limited impact on Florida's mobility landscape: in 2018, Amtrak services in Florida carried 885,000 passengers; the Amtrak station in Miami saw fewer than 64,000 passengers over the whole year, while Orlando served around 124,000 travelers. And yet, a brief look at the most popular rail journeys reveals that there is indeed a potential demand for train travel within Florida. Of the five most popular destinations out of Miami, four are in Florida (Tampa, Orlando,



Lakeland, Winter Haven), while three of the top destinations out of Orlando are within the state (Tampa, West Palm Beach, Miami) (NARP, 2019).

Figure 2. Florida’s mobility habits are not conducive to train travel

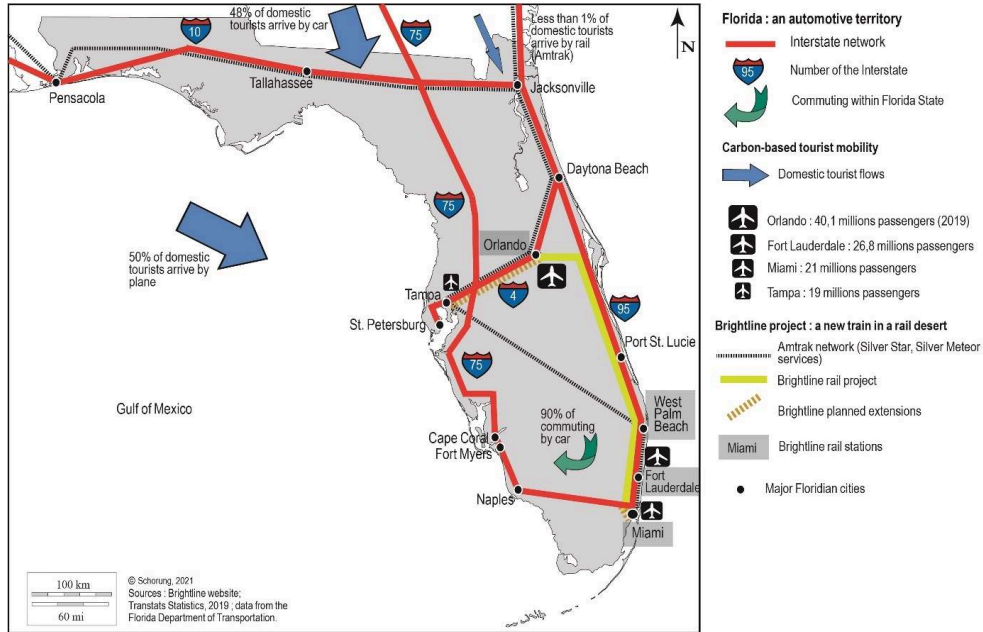


Table 2. What position to adopt in terms of competition with other modes of transport? Modal comparison on the basis of journey times and cost

Route	Train (Amtrak)	Bus	Airplane	Car
<b>LONG JOURNEYS</b>				
<b>Journey time (in minutes)</b>				
Miami-Orlando	360	300	60	285
Fort Lauderdale-Orlando	300	270	60	255
West Palm Beach-Orlando	225	235	60	220
<b>Cost of journey (in dollars)</b>				
Miami-Orlando	55	50	150	50
Fort Lauderdale-Orlando	50	50	100	45
West Palm Beach-Orlando	40	45	100	40
<b>SHORT JOURNEYS</b>				
<b>Journey time (in minutes))</b>				
Miami-Fort Lauderdale	45	55	/	50

Miami-West Palm Beach	105	115	/	105
Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach	60	85	/	75
<b>Cost of journey (in dollars)</b>				
Miami-Fort Lauderdale	5	10	/	10
Miami-West Palm Beach	10	15	/	20
Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach	10	15	/	10

Source: FECl, 2015, pp. 60-61

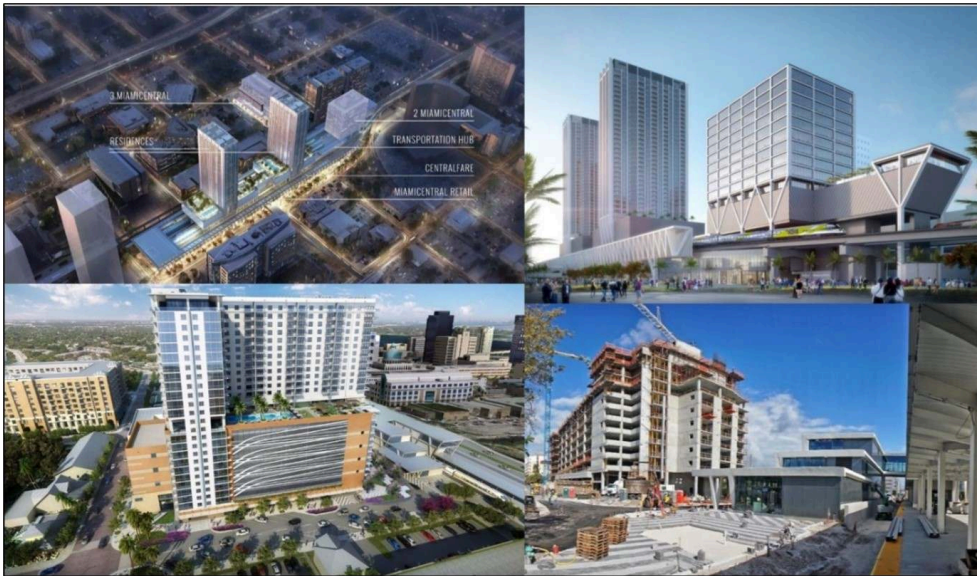
- 28 FECl has conducted research to identify the potential market for its Brightline service, and the modal share it is capable of achieving (*cf.* table 2). According to these projections, Brightline should be able to capture over 10% of the long-distance market (tourists and non-tourists)—cars will account for 88.2%, with air travel covering 0.8%, coaches 0.6% and Amtrak 0.1%. The majority of Brightline’s passengers (60%) would come from a modal shift away from cars, plus induced demand of around 20% (FECl, 2015, pp. 117-118). The remainder would be diverted from air and car travel in a secondary manner. The completion of Phase 2 to Orlando thus appears to be an essential priority in order to ensure that the overall project is profitable and reaches its projected passenger numbers. It is interesting to note that the company considers breaking into the short-distance travel market to be a more difficult prospect. In the short term they expect that travelling by car will retain its quasi-monopoly, with Brightline capturing a modal share of just 1.2%.

### **The new Brightline stations: tourism strategy, symbolic presence and catalyst for real estate development projects**

- 29 As well as being innovative in terms of its financial structure and governance, the Brightline project requires the construction of three new train stations (Miami, Fort Lauderdale, West Palm Beach) and a connection to the new terminal at Orlando International Airport. The first three stations, particularly Miami, are essential to Brightline’s property and real estate strategy (Schorung, 2020).
- 30 MiamiCentral station is located in downtown Miami near the city’s main business district and the famous waterfront, one of its major tourist attractions. This real estate development and urbanization operation spans six blocks and includes multiple components: the train terminal, which will house three rail services (Brightline, Metrorail, Metromover) and include a sizeable commercial center, two high-rise residential blocks and two office buildings rising to over 30 storeys, currently known as 2MiamiCentral and 3MiamiCentral.<sup>20</sup> The development will include some 800 residential units, almost 17,000 m<sup>2</sup> of retail space (including Central Fare, the city’s largest food hall spanning almost 4,600 m<sup>2</sup>), and just under 28,000 m<sup>2</sup> of office space. The residential units, some of which are already on the market, fall into the luxury category.<sup>21</sup> Brightline is also building a new skyscraper christened One MiamiCentral, with construction commencing in 2019. This flagship building will stand some 300 m tall,

marking a new addition to the Miami Downtown skyline and housing 280 luxury residential units, 250 hotel rooms and almost 56,000 m<sup>2</sup> of office space.<sup>22</sup> A fourth building just to the north of the station will contain 17,600 m<sup>2</sup> of office space and a large car park, while the fifth and final tower will be located to the west of the main station building and contain retail premises on the ground floor with twelve floors of offices above. Taken as a whole, the project will create around 93,000 m<sup>2</sup> of professional and commercial spaces, along with 1,300 new residential units (apartments and condominiums) (cf. figure 3).

Figure 3. Real estate opportunities connected with the new Brightline stations

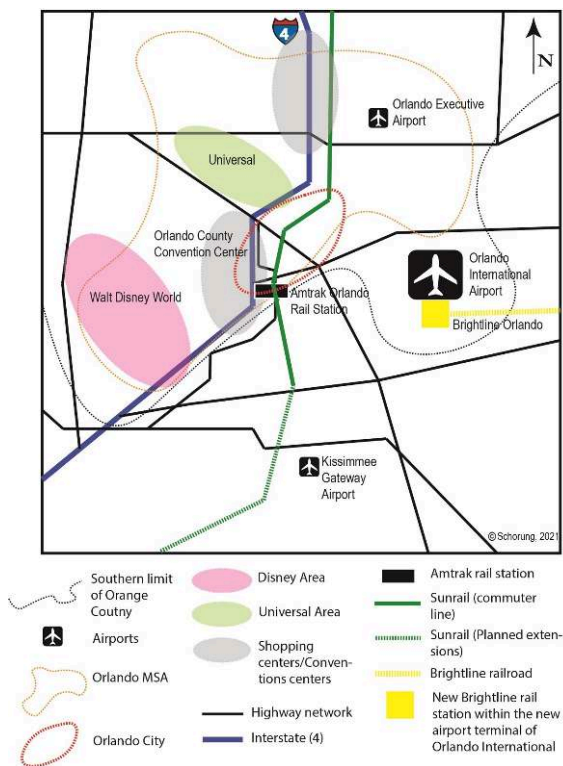


Source: The top two images show real estate opportunities connected with MiamiCentral; the bottom two are adjacent to the West Palm Beach station. These architect's projections (and one actual photo) are taken from the website [www.gobrightline.com](http://www.gobrightline.com) (accessed 29 June 2020).

- 31 The Brightline service also has two new, modestly-sized intermediate stations at Fort Lauderdale and West Palm Beach. The Brightline station is located in the center of Fort Lauderdale, a beach resort with a population of 130,000 in the vicinity of the Miami urban area. In fact, the station is right in the commercial and cultural center of the city, within easy reach of the Museum of Discovery & Science, the F.A.T Village Arts District and the Broward Center for the Performing Arts. It is also right next to the Broward County Bus Station, and two blocks away from the SunTrolley hub (trolleybus service connecting the city center to Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International airport). Here again we can observe the lack of effort to connect and coordinate the state's different transport networks. The Fort Lauderdale Tri-Rail Station is, by comparison, a while away from the city center. There is a clear separation between the two stations. The spatial configuration of transport networks is broadly similar in West Palm Beach. The new Brightline station is located right in the city center, a short walk from the Government Center, the Civic Center and the waterfront. It offers no connection to the Tri-Rail network, nor is it within easy reach of the city's bus (Palm Tram Bus) or trolleybus (Palm Trolley) services. Last but not least, the final Brightline station which should extend the existing rail service to Orlando by 2020-2021, is located within a new terminal of the city's airport, illustrating the priority afforded to air-rail connections.

- 32 The new Brightline stations serve as showcases for this new passenger rail service, and this includes the stations of Fort Lauderdale and West Palm Beach which are not on the same scale as the others. Their striking architecture is designed to promote the project and make it a distinctive feature of the region. The two main Brightline stations (Miami, Orlando) thus enjoy a favorable position within their respective territories (tourist mobility, proximity to major tourist attractions), despite their shared lack of a connection to the main rail networks and the failure to take multi-modal transport into consideration (*cf.* figure 4).

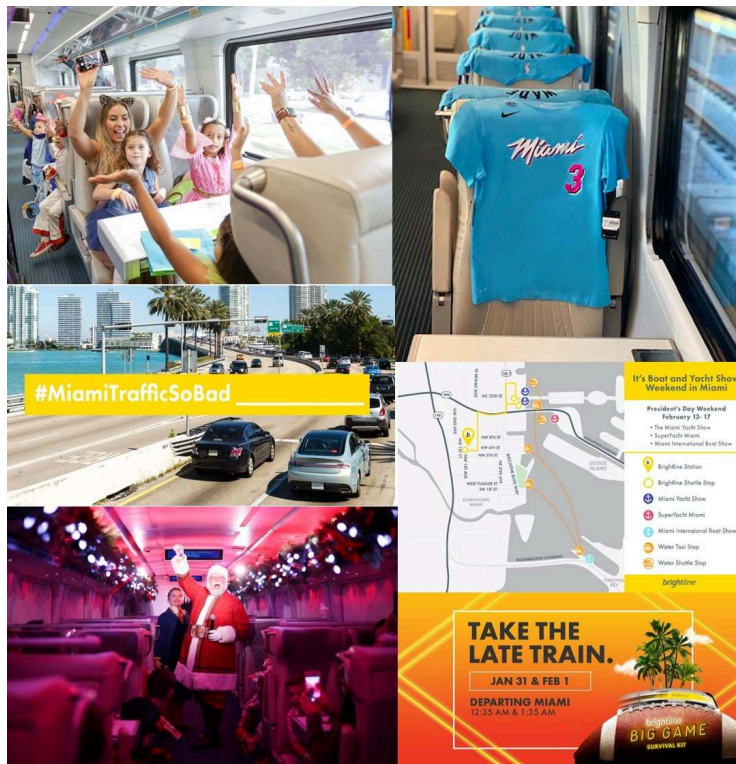
Figure 4. The territorial positioning of the Brightline stations: proximity to major tourist attractions, the Orlando example



## A potential reinvention of Florida's public image?

- 33 Tourism is universally acknowledged to be a driver of territorial development, a tool for promoting natural, cultural and historical assets, and a powerful influence on individual and collective perceptions of destinations. Over the past two centuries, rail networks have given rise to new forms of tourism (Gay, 2006). The USA has a certain tradition of combining tourism strategies with transport services. Rail operators doubled as travel agencies for visitors to the American west in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Yosemite National Park was created in 1864, and by 1907 was accessible via a railway line operated by Southern Pacific; by 1901 the Santa Fe Railroad Co. had a passenger service to the Grand Canyon, where the company had constructed the first hotel. Advertisements from this era bear witness to the tourism-focused strategies of the rail operators as they sought to capitalize not so much on the benefits of train travel, but instead on the attractions and imagery of the American west.

Figure 5. Brightline's digital communication: Constructing a new public image for rail travel



These images (©GoBrightline) were published on the Brightline Twitter account. Digital communication via social media has, by and large, replaced traditional poster advertising. These Twitter posts are designed to convey the company's marketing strategy, but also to create a new image of rail travel focused on tourism, festivities and entertainment, family outings and the comfort of travelling by train.

- 34 At time of writing, a number of companies (such as Brightline) and rail operators (including national rail company Amtrak) are using their advertising to promote a new visual vocabulary of themes and representations, with a view to creating a new public image for train travel in general, and particularly the tourist experience of travelling by rail. Brightline is using its digital communication efforts (website, social media) to promote this new image—the photographs posted on the Brightline Twitter account (cf. figure 5) are primarily focused on the experiential qualities of train travel, on cultural and sporting events accessible by train, and on sharing often irreverent takes on the difficulty of travelling by car in the state's increasingly congested metropolitan areas. As part of this marketing strategy, Brightline hopes to promote its train services at cultural and seasonal events (e.g., special events connected with Halloween or Christmas), sporting events (for example the home games of local basketball team Miami Heat) and professional conferences and exhibitions (the Miami Boat & Yacht Show, for example). Other companies, such as the Alaska Railroad Corporation, have gone as far as organizing integrated package deals offering transport, accommodation and excursions (Schorung, 2016). In the long term, this might also be an option for Brightline.

## Conclusion

- 35 The Brightline project is an innovative attempt to develop a high-speed rail service led by a private company which owns the accompanying rail infrastructure. In their public declarations, Brightline insist on the structurally-significant nature of this new line, running through such a tourist-friendly territory and offering a connection between Florida's most popular beach destinations—Miami and West Palm Beach—and Orlando, the world's theme park capital. In the context of this project, the new stations are considered as assets contributing to the visibility and profitability of the economic model of the future service, above and beyond their architectural quality.
- 36 The Brightline rail project is an example of an entirely new infrastructure and a new intercity transport service being created in a territory which is already heavily developed and where the tourism industry is highly advanced. Trains, not even high-speed trains, do not generate tourism, but they can intensify and reinforce the polarization of tourism around key transport nodes. Brightline appears to have fully appreciated the potential impact of high-speed rail on tourism, structuring its commercial strategy around this potential. Perhaps the most obvious expression of this strategy is the company's decision to create an air-rail hub at Orlando international airport rather than build a station in the middle of the city. The construction of these new stations, particularly those in Miami, West Palm Beach and Fort Lauderdale, is based on the assumption that existing tourist hubs will be reinforced by such an addition. This rail corridor will connect the most popular tourist destinations in central and eastern Florida, and in doing so hopes to boost the tourism sector—thanks to improved accessibility, a larger and more diverse selection of holiday options, the development of new combined services, and a new approach to the articulation between local and regional travel. In order to further examine and monitor the progress of this developing project (it will not be completed until 2021 at the earliest), it would be interesting to study the impact of this new intercity transport service on the number of tourists visiting the cities along the line, looking at the composition of this tourist clientele—regional, national or international—with an eye on potential partnerships between Brightline and private companies in the tourism sector. Furthermore, it would be interesting to conduct surveys with passengers to analyze the weight of tourism in the commercial activity of the Brightline service and the trajectories and practices of users' mobility.

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## NOTES

1. A rail system can be considered "high-speed" when its average operating speed is between 150 km/h and 200 km/h. However, true "high-speed" status is generally reserved for trains rolling on dedicated infrastructure and achieving speeds of 250 km/h and more, or trains travelling at over 200 km/h on conventional tracks (Ruggeri and Schorung, 2017).

2. Two previous attempts to create high-speed rail services in Florida ended in failure: the first attempt collapsed in 1991 due to lack of funding, while a second project was scuppered in 2004 by a sudden change of heart by Republican governor Jeb Bush (Schorung, 2019, p. 71-172). In June 2019, Arnaud Passalacqua presented a thesis for his Accreditation to Supervise Research (HDR) qualification entitled *Ce que porte le transport (XIX<sup>e</sup>-XXI<sup>e</sup> siècles). Une illusion au pays du rêve : le TGV et la Florida (années 1980) [The import of transport (19th-20th centuries). An illusion in dreamland: high-speed rail in 1980s Florida]*; 3 volumes (unpublished), Université Paris-Est, Marne-la-Vallée (France), in which he unpicks the complex history of attempts to create a high-speed rail service in Florida.

3. All of the provisional dates and figures cited herein were announced before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. It seems highly likely that some of these dates and forecasts will be revised by the operator during 2022.

4. "Artificial tourism" refers to the reconstruction of real attractions or the creation of artificial, utopian realities to create attractive, festive, convivial and idealised spaces. It represents a material and symbolic transformation of public space, smoothing away any rough edges, any differences, indeed any trace of the "outside world", in order to create an apparently sterile and uniform environment (Garnier, 2008). Theme parks provide the most obvious example of artificial tourism.

5. The FEC Railway is the ancestor of the present FECI and still owns this rail line, on which FECI's specialist subsidiary operates the Brightline train service. The current high-speed rail project is in this respect a continuation of Flagler's legacy. The Flagler Company stopped all its passenger services by 1968, after more than twenty years of difficult financial conditions and unprofitable passenger services.

6. *Spring break* is a brief holiday of one or two weeks between academic semesters. Traditionally, many college students travel to beach or mountain destinations to make the most of this break.

7. Since the turn of the two millennium, these two major rivals have continued to expand their parks and open new attractions. In 2016, Universal Studios launched an entire new park dedicated to the Harry Potter franchise. In the meantime, other attractions have sought to reinvent and develop their appeal (Marineland, Orlando Aquarium). In July 2017 the Orlando region saw the opening of a new waterpark visible far and wide, thanks to the presence of a 30-metre-tall replica volcano at its center. This information comes from the website of VisitFlorida.

8. All financial figures in this article are given in American dollars. All data in this section are from VisitFlorida, a non-profit corporation created as a public-private partnership by the Florida Legislature in 1996, and the EDR (Office of Economic and Demographic Research) of the State of Florida.

9. Florida's economy has also grown, excluding tourism, thanks to agriculture (plantation crops, citrus fruits, greenhouse crops), the phosphate industry, the space sector and real estate. The phenomenon of heliotropism allows Florida to attract many American retirees, in permanent or temporary residence (more than one million retirees settle in Florida during the winter). Real estate activity in various forms (office parks, towers, shopping centers, condominiums) has profoundly transformed the economy and landscape of Florida's major cities (Colburn and DeHaven-Smith, 2010; Mayda, 2013).

10. The Covid-19 pandemic has led to a collapse of tourism in Florida: 87 million tourists in 2020, 122 million in 2021. The outlook for 2022 suggests that tourist numbers could return to pre-pandemic levels.

11. This information is taken from the website of VisitFlorida: <https://www.visitflorida.org/resources/research/>, accessed 21 May 2020.

12. This information is taken from the website of VisitFlorida: <https://www.visitflorida.org/>, accessed 14 June 2019; see also: <https://www.visitflorida.org/media/30679/florida-visitor-economic-large-impact-study.pdf>, accessed 21 May 2020.

13. The biggest theme parks are (visitor numbers for 2019): Disney World Magic Kingdom (20.9 million visitors), Animal Kingdom (13.8 million), Epcot (12.4 million), Hollywood Studios (11.4 million), Universal Studios (10.9 million), Islands of Adventure (10.3 million), Sea World Orlando (4.5 million), Busch Gardens-Tampa (4.1 million) (AECOM/TEA, 2019).

14. In this article I use the name of the company—Brightline—to refer to the commercial identity of the rail service. For a spell, Brightline's directors had a marketing and branding cooperation agreement in place with major multinational Virgin and its CEO Richard Branson. For a period of around a year, starting in May 2019, the commercial identity of Brightline trains was actually "Virgin Trains USA" (Crooks, 2018). In August 2020, Brightline suddenly announced the end of this collaboration with no official explanation. The split could be connected to a failure on Virgin's part to make good on their investment promises (Associated Press, 2020).

15. All of this information is available on the Brightline website: <https://gobrightline.com/about-us/> and the FECI website: <http://feci.com/companies-all-aboard-florida.html> (accessed 20 June 2021).

16. Cocoa is a town near the Treasure Coast which marks the terminus of the Brightline rail corridor.

17. This provisional schedule was announced pre-Covid-19, it seems likely that work on the infrastructure up to Orlando will be delayed.

18. See the Brightline press release: <https://press.gobrightline.com/showPressRelease/100066903>, accessed 15 November 2019.

19. See the figures published by the Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS): <https://www.transtats.bts.gov/airports.asp?pn=1>, accessed 26 August 2020.

20. Information taken from the website: <http://miamicentral.com/welcome>, accessed 17 December 2018.

21. A. Gardner, "MiamiCentral Housing is Coming and It's Decidedly Non-Luxury", *Curbed Miami*, 11 November 2015.
22. THM Staff, "800 Rental Units At MiamiCentral Aimed at Young Entrepreneurs And Working Professionals", *The Next Miami*, 9 November 2015.
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## ABSTRACTS

The state of Florida is a major hub of the US tourist economy, particularly renowned for its beaches and its extensive commercial and leisure infrastructure (not least its many theme parks). The state is a popular destination for Americans, with US citizens accounting for  $\frac{3}{4}$  of all visitors. Florida is also one of the US states with the highest rate of dependency on carbon-heavy modes of transport (cars and airplanes), for both everyday and occasional forms of mobility. In this unlikely context, a private company by the name of Brightline has been working since 2015 to create a rail link between Miami and Orlando, with the first section of the line (Miami-West Palm Beach) inaugurated in late 2017. This project is original in more than one respect: it is being led by a private company, with no initial public investment and without the involvement of any government bodies; it also runs through a territory which, in theory, has an aversion to train travel and where tourist mobility is virtually synonymous with car and air travel. My objective in this article is three-fold: to examine the key role played by transport in the emergence of Florida as a *tourist mecca*; to analyse the key features of the Brightline project and its relation to the tourism sector; and to weigh up the territorial potential of this new line and its capacity to change established ideas and mobility patterns among tourists visiting Florida. I draw several conclusions from this analysis: the Brightline project has the potential to capture substantial tourist flows thanks to its proximity to many tourist attractions; tourism has been systematically prioritised in the company's strategy and communication efforts; stations have an important role to play in attracting passengers; and mobility practices in Florida are evolving.

L'État de Floride est un pôle majeur de l'économie touristique des États-Unis, particulièrement connu pour son tourisme balnéaire et pour ses nombreux équipements commerciaux et récréatifs (parcs à thème notamment), et prisé des Étatsuniens qui représentent plus des trois quarts des visiteurs. La Floride est par ailleurs l'un des États américains où les mobilités, quotidiennes comme occasionnelles, sont les plus dépendantes de modes de transport carbonés (automobile et aérien). C'est dans ce contexte que l'entreprise Brightline développe depuis 2015 un projet de liaison ferroviaire entre Miami et Orlando, dont le premier tronçon (Miami-West Palm Beach) a été inauguré à la fin de l'année 2017. Ce projet est original à plus d'un titre : il émane d'une entreprise privée et ne dépend ni d'un investissement public initial ni d'un quelconque acteur public ; il s'inscrit dans un territoire *a priori* défavorable au train, où les mobilités touristiques se font quasi exclusivement en voiture ou en avion. Cet article a un triple objectif : présenter le rôle moteur des transports dans la construction de la Floride comme *tourist mecca* ; analyser les caractéristiques du projet Brightline et son implication dans le domaine touristique ; discuter du potentiel territorial de cette nouvelle ligne ferroviaire et de sa capacité à modifier les imaginaires et les mobilités touristiques floridiennes. Il en ressort plusieurs éléments : le potentiel du projet Brightline dans la captation de flux touristiques importants de par la proximité avec de nombreuses activités touristiques ; la prise en compte systématique de

la dimension touristique dans la stratégie et la communication de l'entreprise ; le rôle des gares dans cette stratégie de captation de flux et d'évolution des pratiques de mobilité en Floride.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** Florida, tourism, tourist travel, high-speed rail, public image

**Mots-clés:** Floride, tourisme, mobilités touristiques, grande vitesse, imaginaires

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