

By Senator Davis

5-00637-26

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A bill to be entitled  
An act relating to a rapid rail transit compact;  
creating s. 351.41, F.S.; authorizing the Governor to  
execute a rapid rail transit compact with specified  
states to join the Southern Rail Commission; providing  
the form of the compact; providing an effective date.

WHEREAS, North Florida has lacked passenger rail service  
since September 2005, when track damage from Hurricane Katrina  
led to the termination of Amtrak's Sunset Limited route, which  
ran from New Orleans to Pensacola, Tallahassee, Jacksonville,  
and Orlando, and

WHEREAS, the Southern Rail Commission (SRC), formed by the  
United States Congress in 1982, has evolved over time with a  
vision to "promote the safe, reliable, and efficient movement of  
people and goods to enhance economic development along rail  
corridors; provide transportation choices; and facilitate  
emergency evacuation routes," and

WHEREAS, the States of Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi  
are members of the SRC, and

WHEREAS, the SRC has been highly successful in  
collaborating with Amtrak and other partners to obtain federal  
funding for the restoration of passenger rail service in its  
member states, including \$178 million in federal grant funding  
in September 2023 to restore passenger rail service from New  
Orleans, Louisiana, to Mobile, Alabama, and

WHEREAS, the new route between New Orleans and Mobile,  
referred to as the "Mardi Gras Service," made its first run on  
August 18, 2025, and runs twice daily between New Orleans and

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30 Mobile, with stops in Bay St. Louis, Gulfport, Biloxi, and  
31 Pascagoula, Mississippi, and

32 WHEREAS, the SRC has also identified a project connecting  
33 the entire Gulf Coast with services from Baton Rouge to Orlando,  
34 called the Gulf Coast Passenger Rail route, and

35 WHEREAS, states such as Florida, which are contiguous to  
36 existing SRC member states, are eligible to become SRC members,  
37 and

38 WHEREAS, by joining the SRC, Florida can leverage the power  
39 of a multistate coalition to study, plan, and obtain federal  
40 funding for passenger rail initiatives that benefit its  
41 residents and businesses, without obligating this state to spend  
42 state funds on rail infrastructure, and

43 WHEREAS, passenger rail stimulates economic development by  
44 fostering tourism, attracting businesses, improving access to  
45 markets, promoting job creation, and spurring investment in  
46 local communities, and

47 WHEREAS, passenger rail enhances connectivity between  
48 communities, businesses, military bases, health care facilities,  
49 educational institutions, sports venues, and tourist  
50 attractions, fostering regional cooperation and cohesion among  
51 diverse populations, and

52 WHEREAS, passenger rail can expand this state's capacity  
53 for emergency evacuation and disaster response during  
54 emergencies and provide another option for mobilizing emergency  
55 response personnel, particularly when roadways have reached  
56 capacity or have been damaged, and

57 WHEREAS, passenger rail provides an alternative mode of  
58 transportation, reducing traffic congestion on highways by

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alleviating the strain on existing road infrastructure, which increases safety and efficiency for all travelers, and

WHEREAS, accessible and convenient transportation options increase quality of life for residents by providing greater mobility, reducing travel times, and offering an alternative to driving, NOW, THEREFORE,

Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

Section 1. Section 351.41, Florida Statutes, is created to read:

351.41 Rapid Rail Transit Compact.—The Governor, on behalf of this state, is hereby authorized to execute a compact, in substantially the following form, with the States of Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi, and the Legislature hereby signifies in advance its approval and ratification of such compact:

#### RAPID RAIL TRANSIT COMPACT

##### ARTICLE I

The purpose of this compact is to study the feasibility of rapid rail transit service between the states of Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, and Mississippi and to establish a joint interstate commission to assist in this effort.

##### ARTICLE II

This compact shall become effective immediately as to the states ratifying it whenever the States of Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, and Mississippi have ratified it and Congress has given consent thereto. Any state not mentioned in this article

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88 which is contiguous with any member state may become a party to  
89 this compact, subject to approval by the legislature of each of  
90 the member states.

91  
92 ARTICLE III

93 The states which are parties to this compact, hereinafter  
94 referred to as party states, do hereby establish and create a  
95 joint agency which shall be known as the Southern Rail  
96 Commission, hereinafter referred to as the commission, or any  
97 successor name adopted by all members of the commission. The  
98 membership of such commission shall consist of the governor of  
99 each party state, one representative each from the Mississippi  
100 Energy and Transportation Board, or its successor, the Office of  
101 Aviation and Public Transportation of the Louisiana Department  
102 of Transportation and Development, or its successor, the Alabama  
103 Department of Energy, or its successor, and the Florida  
104 Department of Transportation, or its successor, and five other  
105 citizens of each party state, to be appointed by the governor  
106 thereof. The appointed members of the commission shall serve for  
107 terms of 4 years each. Vacancies on the commission shall be  
108 filled by appointment by the governor for the unexpired portion  
109 of the term. The members of the commission shall not be  
110 compensated for service on the commission, but each of the  
111 appointed members shall be entitled to actual and reasonable  
112 expenses incurred in attending meetings, or incurred otherwise  
113 in the performance of his or her duties as a member of the  
114 commission. The members of the commission shall hold regular  
115 quarterly meetings and such special meetings as its business may  
116 require. They shall choose annually a chairman and vice chairman

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117 from among their members, and the chairmanship shall rotate each  
118 year among the party states in order of their acceptance of this  
119 compact. The commission shall adopt rules and regulations for  
120 the transaction of its business and a record shall be kept of  
121 all its business. It shall be the duty of the commission to  
122 study the feasibility of providing interstate rapid rail transit  
123 service between the party states. Toward this end, the  
124 commission shall have power to hold hearings; to conduct studies  
125 and surveys of all problems, benefits, and other matters  
126 associated with such service, and to make reports thereon; to  
127 acquire, by gift, grant, or otherwise, from local, state,  
128 federal, or private sources, such money or property as may be  
129 provided for the proper performance of its functions, and to  
130 hold and dispose of same; to cooperate with other public or  
131 private groups, whether local, state, regional, or national,  
132 having an interest in such service; to formulate and execute  
133 plans and policies for emphasizing the purpose of this compact  
134 before the Congress of the United States and other appropriate  
135 officers and agencies of the United States; and to exercise such  
136 other powers as may be appropriate to enable it to accomplish  
137 its functions and duties and to carry out the purposes of this  
138 compact.

#### 140 ARTICLE IV

141 Each party state agrees that its legislature may, in its  
142 discretion, from time to time make available and pay over to the  
143 commission funds for the establishment and operation of the  
144 commission. The contributions of each party state shall be in  
145 equal amounts, if possible, but nothing in this article shall be

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146 construed as binding the legislature of any state to make an  
147 appropriation of a set amount of funds at any particular time.

149 ARTICLE V

150 Nothing in this compact shall be construed so as to  
151 conflict with any existing statute, or to limit the powers of  
152 any party state, or to repeal or prevent legislation, or to  
153 affect any existing or future cooperative arrangement or  
154 relationship between any federal agency and a party state.

156 ARTICLE VI

157 (1) This compact shall continue in force and remain binding  
158 upon each party state until the legislature or governor of each  
159 or any state takes action to withdraw therefrom. However, any  
160 such withdrawal does not become effective until 6 months after  
161 the date of the action taken by the legislature or governor.  
162 Notice of such action shall be given to the other party state or  
163 states by the secretary of state of the party state which takes  
164 such action.

165 (2) There is hereby granted to the Governors of each state,  
166 to the members of the commission for Alabama, Florida,  
167 Louisiana, and Mississippi, and to the compact administrator all  
168 the powers provided for in the compact and in this section. All  
169 officers of this state are hereby authorized and directed to do  
170 all things falling within their respective jurisdictions which  
171 are necessary or incidental to carrying out the purpose of the  
172 compact.

173 Section 2. This act shall take effect July 1, 2026.