

**By Senator Davis**

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

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

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

67

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

70 351.41 Rapid Rail Transit Compact.—The Governor, on behalf  
71 of this state, is hereby authorized to execute a compact, in  
72 substantially the following form, with the States of Alabama,  
73 Louisiana, and Mississippi, and the Legislature hereby signifies  
74 in advance its approval and ratification of such compact:

75

76 RAPID RAIL TRANSIT COMPACT

77 ARTICLE I

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

82

83 ARTICLE II

84 This compact shall become effective immediately as to the  
85 states ratifying it whenever the States of Alabama, Florida,  
86 Louisiana, and Mississippi have ratified it and Congress has  
87 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.

### ARTICLE III

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

139

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.

148

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.

155

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.