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CENTRAL FLORIDA TRANSPORTATION PLANS FACE UNCERTAIN FUTURE

(METROPLAN ORLANDO Board considers implications of the loss of SunRail for future transportation plans in Orange, Osceola, and Seminole Counties as part of the region's long range transportation planning process.)

ORLANDO, Fla.—(April 30, 2009) – Future transportation plans in Central Florida face an uncertain future following inaction today by the Florida Senate regarding SunRail. The 61.5-mile commuter rail system, which was designed to provide a transportation alternative for 15 percent of the state's population, previously secured unanimous local support and was one of only five projects nationwide invited to proceed into the final stage of design necessary to secure federal funding. The project also serves as the spine of a broader passenger rail system planned for the region.

“SunRail is more than one project, it represents a necessary step for our future transportation system,” said METROPLAN ORLANDO Chairman and Osceola County Commissioner John Quiñones. “Future population growth, coupled with limited space and financial resources, require us to think and plan differently when it comes to transportation. This potential setback will have long-term implications for the region and the state.”

Currently, METROPLAN ORLANDO is nearing the completion of the three-year process to update Central Florida's long range transportation plan, as required by federal law. SunRail was expected to be the centerpiece of the plan. A recent technical analysis found that a loss of the project would not free up funding for highway projects. Additionally, reduced connectivity renders future highway and bus systems less effective.

“Following the loss of a planned passenger rail system back in 1999, this region came together and worked tirelessly over the past decade to make this crucial transportation project a reality,” said Harold Barley, executive director of METROPLAN ORLANDO. “The collaborative efforts of this entire community should be applauded. We will start the process over again tomorrow, with the hopes of a different outcome in the future.”

The loss of SunRail may also have implications for efforts to reconstruct Interstate 4. During the development of the I-4 Multi-Modal Master Plan, it was recognized that additional highway capacity alone would not meet the region’s long-term transportation needs. High occupancy vehicle lanes and rail transit service were incorporated into the master plan as critical components. As a result, the loss of SunRail may jeopardize the standing of the master plan for I-4.

A review of the entire planning process for I-4, which has spanned for more than 10 years, will likely need to be completed in cooperation with local governments, state agencies, and federal agencies. Construction associated with the master plan was expected to begin in 2011, to coincide with the start of SunRail service.

METROPLAN ORLANDO is the metropolitan planning organization for Orange, Osceola and Seminole Counties – the Orlando Urban Area. As the regional transportation planning organization, METROPLAN ORLANDO provides the forum for local elected officials and transportation experts to work together to improve transportation for Central Florida residents, businesses and visitors.

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