



## **Orlando Association Gets On Board With Commuter Train Travel – *December 2012***

For the last 15 years, the 9,000-member Orlando Regional REALTOR® Association (ORRA) has been energetically supporting central Florida's first commuter rail project -- and with most SunRail depots now under construction along an existing Amtrak route, and the zippy new train cars well advanced in the prototype stage, the \$1.2 billion alternative transport system is set to become a reality in 2014.

Not only will SunRail be an appealing way for many of the region's residents to commute to work, but the projected development along the railway corridor represents significant opportunity for property professionals, as well. Ironically, as Frankie Elliott, ORRA Vice President of Government Affairs, points out, mass transit is simply not an effective way for most real estate pros to get their business done. But, knowing that first-hand exposure to the rail line would give members a better 'big-picture' view of the system and future development along the route, she found a way to give them a ride.

Elliott had taken her young son to visit family in Winston-Salem by train, and was planning their next trip, when it occurred to her, "Wouldn't it be great if REALTORS® could experience train travel, if not as a daily commute, at least as a special sneak-peek?" Once she made contact with the right person at Amtrak, it was all very easy. "They obviously have a vested interest in seeing rail travel succeed," she explains, "and they made it happen for us, by adding three cars on to a regularly scheduled train that worked with our timing; by providing extra personnel to help with boarding; and so on. We've recently built a wonderful inter-modal transit station here in downtown Orlando, too, so everyone boarded buses to get the short distance to the train station, and it was a great opportunity for both of these agencies to put on a good show."

And so it was that nearly 170 REALTORS®, leasing agents, elected officials, Chamber of Commerce members, and other interested parties climbed aboard on the morning of Thursday, September 13<sup>th</sup>, and rode the rails from DeLand to Kissimmee along the planned SunRail route. Six Department of Transportation staffers fanned out among the three cars and made presentations regarding the new depot sites and other points of interest. When the party disembarked at Kissimmee, a luncheon presentation highlighted the over \$1 billion worth of Transit-Oriented-Development projects planned along the route so far -- from apartment communities to commercial and retail space -- as well as future SunRail expansion plans.

With a \$1,500 Smart Growth grant from the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS®, ORRA was able to provide substantial collateral materials to all



participants, including a notebook containing “Transit Oriented Development 101,” produced by the Center for Responsible Transportation.

A dozen other agencies, associations, and private businesses joined ORRA to co-sponsor the SunRail Line Sneak Peek Ride, and all have expressed interest in repeating the event in the spring. Next time, Elliott plans to make it part of a two-day Smart Growth workshop focused on helping municipalities along the SunRail corridor, most of which is zoned as industrial, to reinvent themselves through Transit Oriented Development. She notes that they are lucky to have a very progressive Planning Director in Orange County, and also that the model of Indianapolis, which is a few years ahead of Orlando in its commuter rail development, is available to copy. “Chris Pryor, Government Affairs Director of the Metropolitan Indianapolis Board of REALTORS<sup>®</sup>, is hosting a Smart Growth conference on transit-based re-development this month, and is generously sharing his materials and contacts with us.”

Remarkably, many of the SunRail Line Sneak Peek Ride’s “commuters” had never traveled by train before. “Nearly every single passenger commented on how relaxing it was, and how much work they’d been able to accomplish during the ride,” notes Elliott, “so, even though REALTORS<sup>®</sup> have long been ‘on board’ with the commuter rail system in theory, we’ve certainly convinced them of the extraordinary value of it, now!”

*To learn more about the SunRail Line Sneak Peek Ride and Orlando’s Transit Oriented Development efforts, contact the Orlando Regional REALTOR<sup>®</sup> Association’s Vice President of Government Affairs, Frankie Elliott, at 407-253-7276 or [FrankieE@orlrealtor.com](mailto:FrankieE@orlrealtor.com)*



# All Aboard!

## SunRail Line Sneak Peek Ride



Friday, September 14, 2012  
7:15 am to 3:00 pm

- Come be among the first to experience a preview of the actual SunRail line.
- Take a short bus ride from downtown Orlando, board an Amtrak train in Deland and ride the rails to Kissimmee.



- Learn about future development plans and see what future commuters will find along the line.
- In Kissimmee, be greeted with an informational luncheon highlighting regional economic development, transportation oriented development, connectivity enhancements, and future SunRail expansion plans.

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### Advance ticket prices

**\$50.00 for trip; \$35.00 lunch only**

FOR RESERVATIONS: Call 407-644-0539, visit [www.sunrailridealong.com](http://www.sunrailridealong.com)



For direct access to our registration web page.

The luncheon in Kissimmee is at 11:30 a.m. at the Kissimmee Civic Center located at 201 East Dakin Avenue, Kissimmee Florida 34741.