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## Commuter rail plan runs into major problems

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Some Polk County residents are concerned about increased freight train traffic.

**HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY (Bay News 9)** -- Hillsborough County officials are hoping a plan for a commuter rail in central Florida can be agreed upon so they can pursue a similar system in the Tampa Bay area.

For the last week lawmakers in Tallahassee have been debating a multi-million dollar deal to buy 61 miles of CSX track to create a central Florida commuter rail.

The bill has been controversial to say the least. But Hillsborough County Commissioner Mark Sharpe is hoping the deal goes through.

"For us to be successful, they need to be successful," Sharpe said.

The Tampa Bay Area Regional Transportation Authority is also working on a plan for a commuter rail. And that plan uses the CSX railway similar to the plan in central Florida.

"I'm looking at their project and saying if that project is successful and we can show we're serious about transit, then CSX will be talking to TBARTA about the next step, how do we make the two connect," Sharpe said.

But some residents in Polk County aren't happy with the central Florida plan, and the dispute could keep the bill from passing.

"It's bad for Florida, and it should be stopped," said Polk County business owner Ellen Simms.

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[Commuter rail causes controversy](#)

A commuter rail in Orlando would mean more freight going through downtown Lakeland.

"And that's going to make it very difficult to go north/south, and my customers that are in the north are going to have a tough time getting over the tracks," Simms said.

Sharpe said there's always a price to pay for progress. And if the differences can be worked out, he said all Florida commuters would eventually benefit.

If lawmakers don't agree on something before the legislative session ends on May 2, the commuter rail plan will have to wait for the next legislative session.

CSX also wants to build a new freight rail center in Winter Haven. The company wants approval regardless of whether the commuter rail bill passes.

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