

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

7
8 WHEREAS, North Florida has lacked passenger rail service
9 since September 2005, when track damage from Hurricane Katrina
10 led to the termination of Amtrak's Sunset Limited route, which
11 ran from New Orleans to Pensacola, Tallahassee, Jacksonville,
12 and Orlando, and

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

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

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

26 Orleans, Louisiana, to Mobile, Alabama, and

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

65
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

RAPID RAIL TRANSIT COMPACTARTICLE 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 which is contiguous with any member state may become a party to this compact, subject to approval by the legislature of each of the member states.

ARTICLE III

The states which are parties to this compact, hereinafter referred to as party states, do hereby establish and create a joint agency which shall be known as the Southern Rail Commission, hereinafter referred to as the commission, or any successor name adopted by all members of the commission. The membership of such commission shall consist of the governor of each party state, one representative each from the Mississippi 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
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 contribution of each party state shall be in
145 equal amounts, if possible, but nothing in this article shall be
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

conflict with any existing statute, or to limit the powers of
any party state, or to repeal or prevent legislation, or to
affect any existing or future cooperative arrangement or
relationship between any federal agency and a party state.

ARTICLE VI

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

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

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