

NEWS

Brightline buys \$12.5 million property in Cocoa but says nothing about possible station



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A big-ticket but quiet land purchase by Brightline could be a signal that the commuter rail enterprise has its eyes on a Space Coast station — though the company so far is silent about its plans for Brevard County.

Brightline purchased a \$12.5 million piece of property off Clearlake Road in Cocoa right along the railroad last year, according to records from the Brevard County Property Appraiser's office.

Brightline picked up the 33-acre piece of land near the U.S. 1 and State Road 528 interchange in April of 2021 with no fanfare or public announcement. The land sits just near the curve where tracks will bend from north-south to east-west, a location where the train is expected to slow down already.

Despite several attempts to contact company officials, Brightline has refused to comment about either its land purchase or its long-term plans for Brevard.

Whether the first commuter rail to run along the Florida Eastcoast Railway since 1968 will ultimately stop in Cocoa or anywhere else in Brevard remains to be seen.

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Once service is up and running between West Palm Beach and Orlando, it will take time for the private train company to conduct a ridership study and determine if its economically feasible to add the stop.

A study conducted in 2016 by the Space Coast Transportation Planning Organization took multiple potential locations for a train station and ranked them based on various metrics.

The Clearlake Road land purchased by Brightline last year was ranked the highest due to its "strategic location and potential development opportunity," according to the TPO report.

That same study from the TPO cited Port Canaveral with its 2.5 million annual passengers, Kennedy Space Center and the beaches as major draws to Brevard and economic factors that would induce Brightline to add a stop.

Municipal leaders are hoping a future rail stop will be a major economic boon to the county, with the station itself serving as a hub for spending and commerce.

Building single-use stations has not been a part of Brightline's strategy so far, with the currently operating stations in South Florida incorporating retail, restaurants and even apartments as part of the overall structures.

During a tour of a Brightline station in South Florida earlier in May, multiple Brevard city leaders from Cocoa, Cocoa Beach and Cape Canaveral met with Brightline officials as part of a series of meetings that could one day lead to a Space Coast station.

Brightline hopes to launch its higher-speed passenger train service along an \$8 billion, 320-mile rail network stretching from Miami to Orlando to Tampa Bay by 2028. The line passes through Brevard County, though for the past several years trains have only been running from Miami to West Palm Beach.

Passenger service is expected to begin in early 2023 on the privately-held company's \$2.7 billion extension linking South Florida with Orlando International Airport.

Samantha Senger, spokeswoman for the City of Cocoa, said the city has yet to hear from Brightline officials on any particular plans for the tract of land.

When asked if Brightline has specifically discussed a station on the land, Senger said: "We've been in contact with them about our desire to have a station here, but as far as that particular piece of property, no."

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