

Tour of Tri-Rail system

System Overview: Tri-Rail ridership is 12,400 riders daily, up from 9,200 from the same time last year. According to APTA, Tri-Rail led the nation in commuter rail passenger growth for the third quarter of 2006. At this point, they are tracking to do the same in the fourth quarter; with 30%+ growth since June.

I began my self-guided tour at Ft. Lauderdale International Airport and traveled from baggage claim to the Tri-Rail shuttle stop to find that the 6:21 am shuttle did not arrive yet. After talking with a fellow passenger, we decided that it must be running late and waited until 6:45 am for the shuttle to arrive.



The shuttle is marked with Tri-Rail and the vehicle is a body on chassis style shuttle. This is a free shuttle to connect with the Tri-Rail station and the vehicle is equipped with one small luggage rack behind the driver. The shuttle ride was approximately 15 minutes and we were delivered to the Ft. Lauderdale Airport station.



The station entrance is covered with a large open air pavilion and signage is minimal. The tracks are clearly marked northbound and southbound, but there is no directional signage for the surrounding attractions.

According to Tri-Rail Director of Marketing, Bonnie Arnold, this is her “favorite station.” In her explanation of the station it is a destination station with a Bass Pro Shop, county training facility and sportsman’s water park. I learned later that all attractions are located southeast of the station. These attractions are then on the opposite side of the tracks from the parking and bus transfer area of the station. While I can see a Marriott Courtyard hotel from the platform, there is no directional signage to explain how you can walk to these attractions. According to Tri-Rail, the sportman’s park has not talked about wayfinding signage, but Tri-Rail does promote the park in their materials and the park has purchased advertising in train schedules. According to Bonnie Arnold, the Courtyard wasn’t happy at first about being next to the station because of the horns and whistles, but they’ve worked with them to mitigate the noise impact. The hotel has schedules and rider information at the concierge desk. Parking at this station is located on both the northbound and southbound (east and west) sides of the station.

There is no pedestrian movement allowed across the tracks in the station and the tracks are separated by orange plastic construction fencing which is in place because CSX has a five week tie replacement project starting February 7, so the



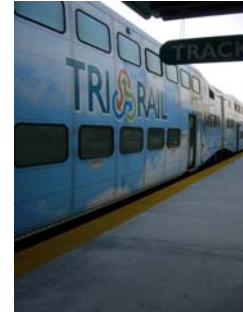


permanent fencing was removed to facilitate the work. To travel from one track to the other, pedestrians must go to the north end of the station and use the pedestrian walkway/crossing. There are both ticket vending machines and a manned ticket booth. The ticket vending machines are pretty easy to figure out and accept major credit cards. There are no amenities at the station.

Traveling south to Miami Airport on the double-decker diesel train is comfortable. The distribution of people is interesting; there are more than double on the upper deck with 23 people upstairs and only 10-12 down on the lower level. You do notice some rocking of the train and some vibration on this style of push-pull diesel



locomotive. Seats face in both directions and there are clusters of seats with tables. Seats are covered with dark/royal blue vinyl and floors are blue rubber. The train is very clean. The train follows the Interstate 95 alignment and runs along the west side of the highway. Restrooms are available in every car and ADA restrooms in the northern most car of each consist.



General Station Architecture

According to Bonnie Arnold, the neighborhoods did have some input into what their station would look like and Tri-Rail also designed certain features to complement the communities. For instance, the Opa-Locka Station has an Arabian motif, as does the city. The West Palm Beach, Deerfield Beach, Fort Lauderdale and Hollywood Stations are part of the original Seaboard Railway, so we had to maintain the historic architecture of the station and reflect it when making changes to those stations. Mangonia Park, Lake Worth, Delray Beach, Boca Raton, Sheridan Street, and Miami Metrorail Transfer Stations were all built during Segment 5. The towers, ped bridges and elevator shafts were all pre-fab. Some of the cities did have specific requests as to landscaping and colors and Tri-Rail did try to accommodate them to the best of their ability. Arnold said that you consider the Hialeah Market and Pompano Beach stations to be unenhanced.

Sheridan Station

The Sheridan station is under contract for construction and the project is anticipated to be TOD. Construction has not begun. The site appears to be parking and some industrial use. Again, orange plastic construction fencing is used to separate the tracks because of the CSX work. There appear to be no amenities at the station.

Hollywood Station

Hollywood station has clay tile roofs and a matching pedestrian bridge (again looks like stairs only). Parking is on the southbound side only. Unlike previous stations, the tracks here are separated by painted or coated chain link fence. There appear to be no amenities at the station.

Golden Gates Station

This station's architecture is more modern with a domed roof and matching pedestrian bridge. This station's platform is center and separates northbound and southbound. There appear to be no amenities at the station.

Opa-locka Station

This station has a pedestrian bridge up and over the tracks to connect northbound and southbound. The bridge façade has been constructed to match the surround buildings/architecture. There are a number of mosques in the area. Parking is only on the southbound side of the station. The pedestrian bridge seems to be stairs only, but I traveled through and was not able to investigate fully. There appear to be no amenities at the station. (see also general station architecture)

MetroRail

The majority of passengers on the train debarked at this station to make a transfer to the MetroRail. As we approached this station, fare checkers did come through the car. Fare checkers are the armed security officers with Wackenhut Custom Protection Services.

Hialeah Market

This station is in an old market area; looks like a farmer's market is there occasionally, however there appear to be no amenities at this station. This station is very close to a Home Depot, which is accessible and has considerably brightened a very blighted area. According to Bonnie Arnold, the market is not a functioning one, but I have noticed that they have cleaned it up over the past few months. The station is unfortunately impacted by the stench from a sewage treatment plant on the east side of the tracks and in the summer can be just awful.

Miami Airport

This is the southern most stop and end of the line. As passengers leave the train they filter out to the shuttle and bus transfer area. Small 30 foot buses take you on a five minute ride and deliver you to terminal E in the center of the airport. There is only one drop-off and pick-up point for the shuttle and it runs according to the train schedule. The shuttle was waiting for the train arrival and on my return from the airport to the shuffle, the shuttle left the airport at 9:15 a.m. for the 9:28 a.m. train. The shuttles are well marked with Tri-Rail station, but seem to be operated by Miami-Dade transit service.

Colorado Railcar DMU



As I head northbound, I have timed my trip to ride the DMU Demonstration Project from Miami Airport to West Palm Beach. This is a two train set and much taller than the other diesel locomotives. It is also no painted with the blue sky and palm tree wrap on the other trains. Entering on the lower level is easy with luggage and there is a



step from the platform to train, but it has a low floor feel. Luggage racks are available and trains also have spacious restrooms. Chairs are covered in a brown striped cloth and the chairs recline. Seats face in both directions and are also grouped (without tables). Again, the trains are very clean and there much more head room on the upper deck of this vehicle with nearly 6 feet in the raised seating areas (the center aisle is sunk about 6-12 inches).



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As the train pulls out of the station, I notice a couple of things. The large domed glass windows are huge and give a great view of the surrounding area. Many of the photos that I took are from shooting from my seat on the upper deck. Security and fare checking is again provided by Wackenhut. I feel safe leaving my baggage on the first level and enjoying the ride upstairs. You can clearly see the I-95 alignment from up here and even some traffic still remaining from Thursday morning rush hour. I also notice that this train is MUCH quieter and rocks less from side to side, I do wonder if the rocking has more to do with the actual tracks instead of vehicle type, but the

difference is still notable. Much of the ride north to the Ft. Lauderdale airport is another chance to see the stations from earlier this morning in daylight and I have very little company with few fellow passengers. Many board again at the MetroRail transfer station. As we travel north out of the Sheridan station, a southbound train passes with very little impact to the smooth and quite ride; this is a big difference from the encounter of passing a train earlier this morning. The further north I travel, the less industrial the right-of-way appears to be, with more residential and some commercial office buildings.

Ft. Lauderdale

North of the Ft. Lauderdale airport station is the Ft. Lauderdale station. This is one of the few that has permanent coated chain link fencing separating northbound and southbound tracks.

Cypress Creek Station

At this station, there is a commercial set of buildings within the quarter mile, but not sure if it is accessible to pedestrians. This commercial complex includes a University of Phoenix. According to Bonnie Arnold, there is a ramp to the U of Phoenix. Tri-Rail also operates a shuttle bus out of the Pompano Station that serves some of the corporate parks in the area.

Pompano Beach Station

This also has commercial buildings within a quarter mile, but again doesn't appear to have pedestrian access.

Deerfield Beach Station

On the north end of this station there is a Store-All storage facility. It is across the street, but makes me wonder if this is an interim use and if the owner is open to TOD. According to Arnold, there is talk of a TOD on the east side of the station where the hotel and Denny's are located, but she hasn't heard about any redevelopment of the Store-All storage facility.

Boca Raton Station

This is a busy station with a large number of passengers boarding, but passengers are all school aged children. There is a Town Center near this station and looks like you can walk easily to it. One of the boarding students is carrying a Starbucks so it appears to be a retail town center. The store fronts all have their back to the station and the station and town center are separated by a parking lot. A police officer with a School Board PD jacket boarded with students and provided discipline to some students when needed.

Students on the System

According to Arnold, the kids primarily go to two performing arts magnet schools – the high school across from the West Palm Beach Station and the middle school near the Mangonia Park Station. There are also about 100 kids who go to the Roosevelt Technical School, also in West Palm. Tri-Rail carries about 1000 kids a day when school is in session and does have a formal agreement with the School Board. Tri-Rail insists that the school board provide chaperones, and they have experienced some complaints from regular passengers about the kids' behavior, so Arnold says that may explain a school board PD officer.

Boynton Beach Station

There is a building under construction that will be within a quarter mile. It's for the Department of Children Services. They will have access to the station and we are working to get them on our Employer Discount Program.

Lake Worth Station

This station is surrounded by a HUGE sound wall and provides no access from the station to the surrounding area except for cars. According to Bonnie Arnold, the sound wall was requested by the neighbors. Not visible from the station, there is a very dilapidated mobile home park about as close to the tracks as you can possibly build something. There has been some discussion about selling the park to a developer, but Arnold hasn't heard anything about that for quite awhile and she notes that the way I-95 looms over the area tends to lessen its attractiveness.

West Palm Beach

Most students get off at this station and set off by foot. The greyhound station is also at this station with a small waiting area. I get off at this stop and conclude my travels with Tri-Rail.

General - Station Amenities

The stations Tri-Rail shares with Amtrak have restrooms, as does the Miami Airport Station. There are a few stations, such as Boca and Metrorail Transfer, that have coffee shops or restaurants easily accessible.