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# Special session on rail set for Thursday

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Florida lawmakers will convene on Thursday for a special session on rail transit funding.

As the *South Florida Business Journal* **reported**, the goal is to secure billions of dollars in federal stimulus money for high-speed rail and other rail projects.

“Florida’s economy and our people need the boost that commuter rail can bring to our state,” Gov. Charlie Crist said in a prepared statement. “Creating more transportation alternatives means more jobs and more opportunities for economic development that can generate millions of dollars in revenue.”

Senate President Jeff Atwater, R-North Palm Beach, who, along with House Speaker Larry Cretul, R- Ocala, informed legislators of their need to meet this week, said a statewide rail transit policy would “lay the foundation for long-term economic development,” and bring “much-needed jobs at a time when almost a million Floridians are unemployed and looking for ways to meet their financial obligations.”

The plan on the table represents a compromise between prior House and Senate positions, Cretul said in a memo to lawmakers.

Key among those differences is funding Tri-Rail with surplus state gas tax dollars instead of a rental car surcharge in Broward, Miami-Dade and Palm Beach counties.

The **South Florida Regional Transportation Authority** (SFRTA), Tri-Rail’s parent agency, has for years sought dedicated funding from the state, which provides about \$20 million a year in funds to match the combined contribution from the tri-county area. Without guaranteed state funding, SFRTA has faced annual threats that the counties will reduce their contributions and trigger a loss in matching funds that could cut service in half.