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House backs SunRail, high-speed rail bill

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The Florida House of Representatives passed a bill Dec. 7 that would pave the way for Orlando's SunRail project, as well as a high-speed rail project connecting Orlando, Miami, Tampa and Jacksonville.

After an 84-25 vote backing the rail package, the measure was set to be heard by a Senate committee Monday afternoon and could hit the floor as early as Tuesday, said Jaryn Emhof, spokeswoman for Senate President Jeff Atwater, R-North Palm Beach, who has been trying to rally support.

"The senator feels comfortable that we'll get where we need to be once everyone has a chance to look at the bill and understand what we're trying to do for Florida's future," she told the South Florida Business Journal, sister publication of **Orlando Business Journal**.

Lawmakers are still trying to address unions' concerns about how workers would be impacted by the proposal — a major concern to Democrats, Emhof said.

The bill will bring the state one step closer to securing more than \$2 billion for high-speed rail, and it also approved the creation of a funding mechanism that would assist the troubled Tri-Rail system in South Florida.

The bill would create a Florida Rail Enterprise within the state Department of Transportation — much like the organization overseeing the operation of Florida's Turnpike — that would manage passenger rail systems. The bill proposes a passenger rail commission that would advise the Florida Department of Transportation on designing, building, operating, financing and maintaining the rail systems.

Twelve of the 13 Central Florida house members representing parts of Lake, Orange, Osceola and Seminole counties voted in favor of the bill. Rep. Stephen Precourt, R-Orlando, did not vote, according to Florida House of Representatives.