



# Seminole Gulf Railway

A LIMITED PARTNERSHIP

4110 Centerpointe Drive, Suite 207, Fort Myers, FL 33916

Telephone: (239) 275-6060 Facsimile: (239) 275-0581 Online: [www.floridarail.com](http://www.floridarail.com) and [www.semigulf.com](http://www.semigulf.com)

August 9, 2023

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Speaker of the House  
United States Congress

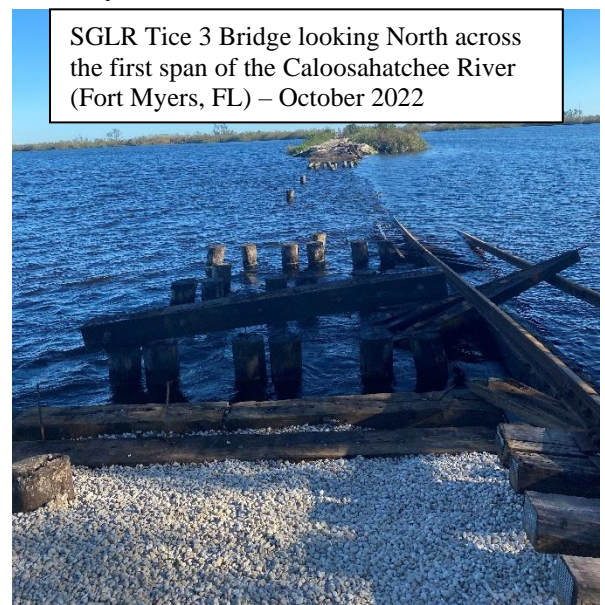
Re: Recovery efforts for vital railroad infrastructure in Southwest Florida from the destruction caused by Hurricane Ian September/October 2022.

Dear Speaker McCarthy,

You are certainly aware of the devastating effects that Hurricane Ian had on Southwest Florida in September 2022. Not only was the region hit with category 4 force winds and unprecedented storm surge, but also by the flood waters that rushed down the rivers from rainfall in central Florida. Our family owned shortline railroad, was one of many businesses impacted, but I dare say that none were hit across such a wide swath as ours, simply due to geography and the unique nature of railroads, especially in peninsular Florida. I address you today not only to reinforce the stark need to support shortline railroads like Seminole Gulf Railway (SGLR) in times of disaster to maintain vital components of the rail infrastructure that serve our national economy, but also to ask for your immediate support to make law H.R. 3782 – The Short Line Railroad Relief Act.

SGLR is a 111-mile Class III Shortline Railroad that has two (2) lines reaching into Southwest Florida. Our shorter line serves Manatee and Sarasota Counties (including the City of Sarasota), and our longer line serves Desoto, Charlotte, Lee, and Collier Counties (including the cities of Arcadia, Punta Gorda, Fort Myers, Bonita Springs, and Naples). The railroad was formed in 1987 with the purchase of the railroad from CSX. SGLR hauls much of the region's lumber, building materials, stone and other aggregates, plastics, steel, LP gas (propane), and recyclables, as well as foodstuffs and agricultural products. As part of the entrepreneurial enterprise, SGLR also operates the Murder Mystery Dinner Train, a local restaurant/attraction operating in Fort Myers, FL since 1991.

When Hurricane Ian slammed into the Fort Myers area, a historic storm surge raced many miles up the Caloosahatchee River and destroyed the three railroad bridges traversing the southern half of the river to Beautiful Island. As Ian ploughed Northeast through Charlotte and Desoto counties towards Central Florida, it dumped enormous amounts of rain across the rural areas and Central Florida. All of that rainwater then travelled back to the Gulf of Mexico down the Myakka and Peace Rivers. The historic flood waters caused by Hurricane Ian washed away the railroad bridge system over the Peace



SGLR Tice 3 Bridge looking North across the first span of the Caloosahatchee River (Fort Myers, FL) – October 2022

River just North of Arcadia, FL. Adding insult to injury, Hurricane Ian also flooded out SGLR's Arcadia, FL railyard and washed away several miles of track structure. In doing so, Hurricane Ian severed Southwest Florida's only connection to the North American rail system, that hauls the equivalency of about 10,000 truckloads per year, with much greater cost effectiveness, and fuel efficiency.

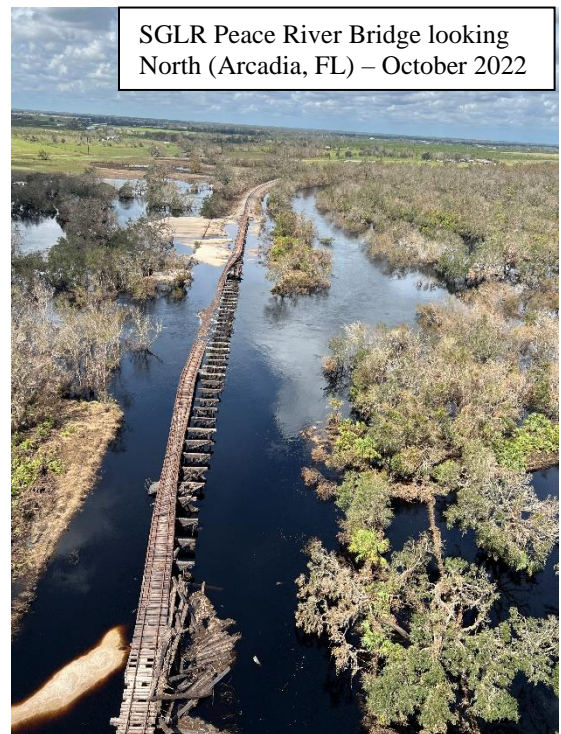
We have made great progress to rebuild entirely on our own. First SGLR added capacity to support the temporary diversion of some rail traffic to Sarasota. We then rebuilt in its entirety the Peace River bridge system and the surrounding Arcadia track structures. This enabled SGLR to reopen about 40 miles of railroad. What remains to rebuild are three (3) wooden trestle bridges, and repair our 75 foot steel drawbridge spanning the various channels of the Caloosahatchee River, part of the inter-coastal waterway. Until this work is completed, the City of Fort Myers, and the remaining parts of Lee and Collier Counties remain cut off from rail service.

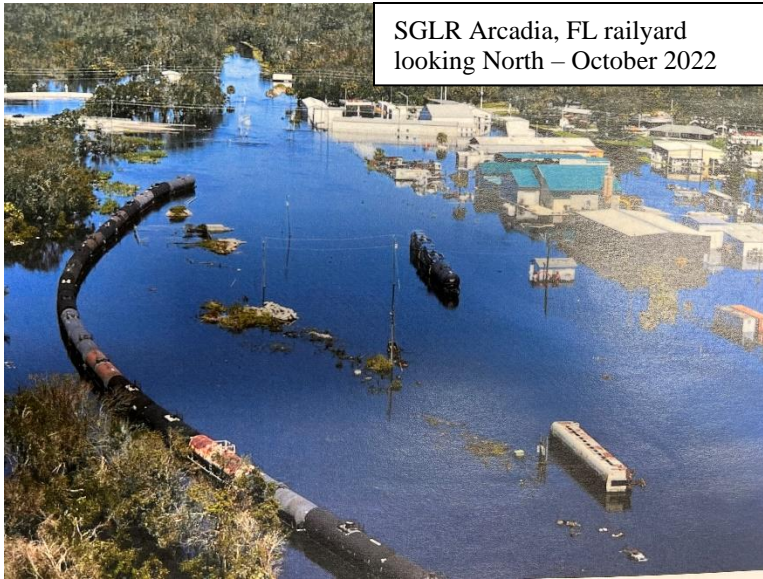
Meanwhile, SGLR is doing its part to support the broader rebuilding efforts in the area. Specifically, SGLR hauls much of the lumber, drywall, and flyash necessary to rebuild homes and businesses. Most recently, SGLR began hauling the rock needed to rebuild the Sanibel Island Causeway. Once the line into Fort Myers is reestablished, more goods may flow to the region, and the 100 or so railcars left stranded in Fort Myers may reenter the rail system.

The projected total to reestablish full rail service for Southwest Florida's recover efforts is substantial. The economic impact is more than simply the replacement and repair of the structures. Lost time and wages have been felt not only by the railroad, but also by its customers. Furthermore, the inefficiencies of moving the goods via other modes and destinations has significantly impacted the cost of materials coming into our region.

Despite all efforts to date, SGLR has not received any financial support from the federal government, the State of Florida, or any local municipality to help restore the critical rail infrastructure. All work thus far completed has been accomplished through self-financing. While I applaud our own efforts in being self-reliant, it will not come without cost to the broader economy, especially that of Southwest Florida. Meanwhile, competitive entities, such as trucking companies, enjoy the full use of the public road systems rebuilt with public funding, almost with impunity, and certainly with no direct costs.

The unique nature of shortline railroads, particularly those like Seminole Gulf Railway which are privately owned and operate on privately owned rights of way, rather than a state owned right of way as found in Vermont, is that there is no mechanism for public support for the private entity, on





private infrastructure, in times of disaster. Yes, there are grant programs such as CRISI that support the proactive rebuilding of shortlines ahead of disasters and frankly to replace out aging components. However, programs like CRISI leave no room for emergency release of funds, and do not allow for reimbursement so rebuilding may commence in a timely manner to the broader public benefit.

I ask that you join with your fellow members of Congress on all sides, and lead the effort to bring to immediate

effect a program to preserve America's shortline railroads by granting immediate discretionary and fully reimbursable funding in times of disaster like Hurricane Ian. The current House Resolution 3872 - The Short Line Railroad Relief as proposed by Congressman Byron Donalds (FL-19), SGLR's hometown representative, would place such a program under the direction of the Secretary of Transportation, and through that office to the Federal Railroad Administration for oversight and funds release. What is truly important is that the funds flow directly to the affected railroad, and that they are fully reimbursable, such that the railroad may spend the money up front and submit its documentation for reimbursement from the authorized reserve, in a timely manner.

Should you have any questions or wish to hear further testimony, I shall make myself available to you and the members of Congress. I may be reached best by email at [Rfay@Floridarail.com](mailto:Rfay@Floridarail.com).

Thank you for your time, consideration, and service to our country.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robert H. Fay', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Robert H. Fay  
Executive Vice President

Cc: Congressman Byron Donalds (FL-19)  
Chuck Baker, President and CEO – American Shortline and Regional Railroad Association