



Residents: Fix Poinciana SunRail bus service

- By Rachel Christian | Staff Writer

This article may be read at http://www.aroundosceola.com/news/residents-fix-poinciana-sunrail-bus-service/article_40754daa-b602-11e8-abeb-0b4af1ea9e00.html .



File Photo

Poinciana resident Marcos Marrero is one of more than 600 residents to sign a petition to get a fixed LYNX bus route to the last stop on the SunRail line.

It's something Osceola County and Florida Department of Transportation officials promised Poinciana residents during the planning process, Marrero said.

Now, he wants those officials to follow through with their promise.

“We were always skeptical about the location of this station – it’s pretty out-of-the-way and difficult to get to without a car,” Marrero said. “They said a bus would be put in place. Now, over a month after the station opened, nothing is in place.”

Technically there's a bus – but is it enough?

Poinciana is the southern-most stop on the SunRail commuter line that stretches across four Central Florida counties.

It opened July 30, along with two other Osceola County stops. Poinciana, which serves as the end of the line, is located at the intersection of Poinciana Boulevard and Old Tampa Highway.

Because of its out-of-the-way location, residents were told during planning and development that buses would run from Poinciana to the station.

And technically there is a fixed bus that stops there – but only twice a day.

Link 306 is a direct link from the Poinciana Walmart Superstop to Disney Springs. It makes two daily stops at the SunRail station – once going outbound at 6:35 a.m. and once coming inbound at 5:40 p.m.

Poinciana resident Keith Laytham says that's just not enough to truly serve the community.

“One bus a day stopping each direction serving the Poinciana station does not meet the requirements,” said Laytham, who worked with other residents to start the online petition. “They are lying to the people of Poinciana and we are being ignored.”

Less than what was promised

In April – less than four months before SunRail debuted in Osceola County - Commissioner Viviana Janer told fellow board members that two of the three buses LYNX planned for Osceola County's stations had been eliminated.

This was despite \$1.2 million budgeted into the county's financial plan by Florida Department of Transportation District 5 Secretary Noranne Downs over two years ago to help finance feeder bus service in Osceola County, Janer said.

“Apparently they ran some models and they don’t think there’s enough people in Poinciana who will ride these buses to SunRail,” said Janer at an April 2 county meeting. “They want people to go to the downtown Kissimmee station (if they need to take a bus.) So, my argument to them was, ‘Why did you build a station in Poinciana?’”

Janer, who also serves on the SunRail Board of Directors, said that decision was based on a LYNX ridership study that took place years ago, before the county saw some exAt the time, Commissioner Brandon Arrington – whose district actually includes the SunRail station in question – seemed angry at the sudden elimination of the routes. He even called the move “a slap in the face.”

“This is a system that’s supposed to work together,” Arrington said. “If we can’t figure out how to get the bulk of that ridership on to it, there’s not going to be any money at the fare box to be able to support the train in the long run.”

Suddenly not a priority

But just a few weeks later, Arrington changed his tune.

At a May meeting, he seemed content with the idea of an on-call bus shuttle service called NeighborhoodLink – where users must call at least two hours ahead to schedule a ride each time they wish to use the service.

The on-call service would be expanded to areas like Poinciana High School, Campbell City and Crescent Lakes subdivision.

Or, residents could take a different bus into downtown Kissimmee to ride the SunRail, which Arrington said would take about the same amount of time.

“The NeighborhoodLink will basically be the start of trying to figure out what the demand really is for serving the station,” Arrington said. “So, I think we have kind of a decent plan.”

Janer, who had taken the time to meet with the CEO of SunRail and other transportation officials, relented the issue.

“My concern was always with your constituents, and quite frankly...if you guys are OK with it, I’m certainly OK with it,” Janer said. “You’ve just made my life a lot easier.”

Another board member, Cheryl Grieb, also seemed weary of Arrington’s solution.

“I think it will be interesting to see how it actually plays out in real life,” Grieb said.

Where it’s at now

Statistics from FDOT show that people are definitely riding the Poinciana station.

About 482 people boarded the train from Poinciana on July 30 – its first day of service - making it one of the most popular stops on the SunRail line.

But now, according to numbers provided by Steve Olsen, a communications director at FDOT, those numbers have already fallen.

The ridership from Poinciana last week averaged 275 passengers a day.

Dorthey Schwartz is one resident who doesn’t think Arrington’s solution is working. Schwartz lives in the age-restricted Solivita Village of Poinciana right over the Polk-county line. She worked alongside Laytham to launch the petition for change, which shows signatures from residents of both counties.

“There are plenty of people in Poinciana who don’t drive,” said Schwartz. “SunRail was supposed to be something that’s easy to get to for all residents – not just those who have a car.”

Schwartz also wrote a letter to each Osceola County commissioner, urging them to consider adding a more frequent fixed-bus route.

Arrington was the only one to respond.

He told her there are no plans to increase bus service. There are greater transportation priorities elsewhere, he noted.

“I suggest the residents of Solivita look at creating a neighborhood shuttle for themselves,” Arrington wrote in his Aug. 29 email.

But not everyone who signed the petition lives in Solivita, just one of six villages that comprise Poinciana.

The online petition for change had gathered 604 signatures as of Monday.

Residents like Marrero, Schwartz and Laytham said they intend to continue pushing the issue until it's resolved.