



SUNDAY NOVEMBER 16, 2025

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**83°/64°** See 30A

# Miami Herald

## Private train, public cash: How Brightline has been buoyed by Florida taxpayer dollars

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From the beginning, Brightline sold Floridians a dream. Passenger trains would make a triumphant return to Henry Flagler's 130-year-old rail corridor along the east coast of Florida. Finally, there would be a fast, comfortable alterna-

tive to driving between Miami and Orlando — and it wouldn't cost taxpayers a penny. "It's not publicly funded at all," Brightline executive Michael Reininger said at a 2017 congressional hearing. "It's completely an investment of private-sector capital." But despite the company's claim to be the country's "first new privately funded passenger rail service in a century," the luxury train has been

boosted by nearly a half-billion taxpayer dollars, an investigation by the Miami Herald and South Florida NPR member station WLRN found. Reporters identified \$486 million in public money directed to Brightline-related projects, a figure that includes funds for Brightline itself as well as money granted to state and local agencies. About one-fifth of the total has been for safety initiatives, largely in re-

sponse to an epidemic of fatalities that make Brightline the deadliest major passenger train in the country. More than one-quarter of the funding has been set aside for Brightline stations that were not in the company's original plans but have been requested by communities. Today, the private company that promised to be "financially viable on its own" is losing money — and using government subsidies to grow its busi-

ness. At Brightline's request, a \$33 million federal grant was awarded this year to help it add new railroad cars, lengthening the train from five railcars to seven. The grant, Brightline said in a financial report, will help the company "offset operating costs associated with its expansion of service." Brightline now acknowledges it is relying on government safety grants that will amount to tens of millions of dollars in the

coming years. At a congressional hearing in June, Brightline senior adviser Husein Cumber went as far as to warn lawmakers: "My fear is if you pull back on funding, you would also see an increase in safety incidents." Patrick Goddard, Brightline Florida's CEO, disputed the Herald's/WLRN's findings, calling the \$486 million figure a "gross mischaracteriza-

**SEE BRIGHTLINE, 2A**

## UNTRACKED AND UNMAPPED



A person stands on a house surrounded by floodwaters on Southwest Third Street in the Little Havana neighborhood of Miami, Florida, on Saturday, June 4, 2022.

*Records show flooding is far more widespread in South Florida than FEMA maps indicate*

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