

GlobeSt.com™

The Branson Effect, Train-Style

Could Florida's future commercial growth emulate Europe's with a new rail system?

By **David Wilkening** | February 05, 2019



Okan Tower

MIAMI — It's sometimes called the Branson Effect — a reference to South Florida's intercity passenger rail system: Brightline. And its influence is being felt not only in extensive commercial development that includes the state's tallest building but also as a model for other Florida areas looking at similar systems.

The reference to Richard Branson was the news last year that his Virgin Group formed a partnership with Brightline, which only a few years ago overcame some resident resistance and other roadblocks to become the first new major private intercity passenger railroad in more than a century.

South Florida's train system has had a predictably major impact on commercial projects, particularly some within one mile of the Miami train station. Just one example: a \$300 million

tower that on completion at 70 stories will be the state's tallest building. It's being developed by a Turkish-based company Okan Group, named after the national flower.

"The easy access to a high-speed train service, just a block away from Okan Tower, affords residents a seamless lifestyle that has never been offered in Miami. You can live in downtown Miami, while also having the option to work and entertain in Fort Lauderdale and West Palm Beach within an hour," Okan Group Chairman Bekir Okan, tells GlobeSt.com.

Rail system is unique catalyst for growth

Okan Tower will include 149 residential condominiums, 236 condo-hotel units, and a 316-key Hilton Bayfront Miami hotel, along with 64,000 square feet of Class A office space and ground floor retail.

John L. Renne, Director and Associate Professor of Urban Planning at Florida Atlantic University and a Mobility Chair at the Urban Land Institute, tells GlobeSt.com:

"The recently opened Brightline in Miami is unique to the United States as it creates an experience only offered in places like Europe and Asia. Similar to these other cities, the Brightline is already proving to be a catalyst for urban infill projects in Downtown Miami that will reshape the city into a more walkable hub for the creative economy of the 21st Century."

All the development around South Florida's Brightline — not to mention its impact and relief for traffic-clogged local commuters — has not been lost on two other major cities, Tampa and Orlando.

Tampa Brightline's service now runs between Miami and West Palm Beach, but the company is going through the process of government approvals for a new Tampa-Orlando line.

Future of transportation?

Tampa's mayor recently led a coalition of two dozen City Hall leaders to Brightline's headquarters in downtown Miami



“I think we are looking at what our future looks like,” remarked Tampa Mayor Bob Buckhorn.

The latest Brightline news for Orlando was that a proposed route would have a station near the area’s airport, which is regarded as the local system SunRail’s major missing stop and a clear oversight for its future success. That would also put it near the popular theme parks.

Unique Visitors per Month: 159,136

<https://www.globest.com/2019/02/05/the-branson-effect-train-style/>