



Seminole Gulf Railway

A LIMITED PARTNERSHIP

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A Tale of Two Bridges, How about Seven?

How Seminole Gulf Railway is helping to rebuild the Sanibel Causeway and its own bridges destroyed or damaged by Hurricane Ian.

Fort Myers, FL – Hurricane Ian was an unprecedented natural disaster that caused damage across Florida. The railroad that serves Southwest Florida was not spared, and in fact lost six of its bridges spanning both the Peace River in Desoto County and the Caloosahatchee River in Lee County.

The Seminole Gulf Railway (SGLR) operates from north Naples to Arcadia, where it connects to the CSX railroad and the rest of the United States. The company also operates a separate line in Sarasota County. Each year, 2,600 railcars – the equivalent of more than 10,000 truckloads – are delivered by SGLR to businesses in southwest Florida, just on the Arcadia to North Naples line. These railcars include materials such as drywall, lumber/plywood, rebar, and stone – all of which are critical items needed to rebuild damaged homes, businesses, roads, and other infrastructure.

“We need to rebuild the railroad so that our customers can supply the materials needed to rebuild our community,” said Robert Fay, Executive Vice President, Seminole Gulf Railway.

Restoring freight rail service is a critical step to recovery. One railcar full of plywood is enough to replace fifty roofs. One railcar full of drywall contains 117,500 board feet, enough for more than 150 bedrooms.

The hurricane slammed the Fort Myers area with a historic storm surge that raced several miles up the Caloosahatchee River and destroyed three railroad bridges traversing the river, and a fourth was significantly damaged. The railroad bridge over the Peace River near Arcadia also was destroyed by flooding from central Florida rainwater racing back down the river. A sixth bridge spanning Shell Creek in Charlotte County also suffered storm related damage, as did other smaller structures and several miles of track.

The loss of these critical bridge structures severed the region’s rail connection to suppliers throughout the country. The cost to rebuild this infrastructure and restore rail service is significant and extends well beyond the cost to replace or repair the bridge structures. The economic impact has already been felt across the region, only hampering the recovery efforts. SGLR continues to seek financial support from state and federal agencies.

Meanwhile, SGLR is supporting the rebuild efforts of the renowned Sanibel Causeway. Much of the rock (over 100,000 tons) called rip-rap used to support columns and embankments is now moving by rail to North Fort Myers where SGLR built at its own expense an unloading complex for the rock supplier. The rock is then trucked to Punta Rassa for direct use on the causeway. This would not be an option had SGLR not rebuilt at its own expense, the bridge systems across the Peace River in Arcadia, FL and Shell Creek in Punta Gorda, FL.

The railroad is now open as far as Bayshore Road in North Fort Myers, FL allowing for direct rail service to resume for over a half dozen customers. What remains is the heavy task of rebuilding the multiple structures across the Caloosahatchee River. The railroad is committed to the task, and seeks with the support of its hometown Congressional Representative, Byron Donalds (FL-19), federal disaster relief assistance as part of the critical transportation infrastructure. Congressman Donalds has sponsored H.R 3782 – The Short Line Railroad Relief Act.

Fay intends to meet with Donalds and other members of a House Field Committee at 10:00 AM on Thursday, August 10, 2023 at the Lakes Regional Library, 15290 Bass Road, Fort Myers, Florida 33919, to discuss: Weathering the Storm: Oversight of the Federal Response and Recovery Efforts in Southwestern Florida following Hurricane Ian.

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Seminole Gulf Railway (SGLR) is a Class III short line railroad headquartered in Fort Myers, Florida. SGLR also operates the *Murder Mystery Dinner Train*, a popular restaurant attraction (excursion train). With more than 100 miles of track, SGLR hauls much of Southwest Florida's lumber, building materials, stone, LP gas, plastics, steel, recycled materials, and other bulk commodities.