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Fare deal for the Glades

Palm Beach Post Editorial

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In normal times, a bus between Clewiston and Belle Glade would be nothing more than a way for people who can't afford cars to get to jobs, shopping and doctor visits.

But these aren't normal times in the Glades communities. If the sale of U.S. Sugar's land to the South Florida Water Management District goes through next year, a region that grew up on sugar is going to need some government help building a new economic engine.



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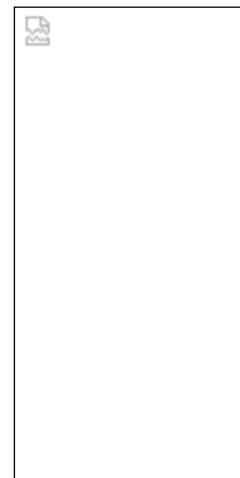
And help to the Glades has been slow, going back to U.S. Sugar's closing of South Bay Growers in 1994. That cost 1,300 jobs, and the state never produced anything to compensate for the loss.

So we are happy to report that the Florida Department of Transportation will spend \$40,000 to keep the Clewiston-to-Belle Glade bus rolling for at least two months. The bus originally was FDOT's idea. The state paid for three years for a pilot project to bring mass transit to rural areas. Of course, the number of passengers couldn't compare with coastal routes in Palm Beach County. But for many people in the rural towns, the bus offered a needed ride to the hospital or community college in Belle Glade and the Walmart in Clewiston.

Palm Beach and Hendry counties joined with the state last year to keep the bus operating. Hendry agreed to keep paying, but Palm Beach, facing cuts to its more crowded routes, refused.

That set the stage for the state to start showing the people of the Glades that they matter. They have been promised help if the sugar deal goes forward, but it wasn't until last week that the state agency charged with providing that help, the Office of Tourism, Trade and Economic Development, held a get-acquainted meeting with Glades officials.

The state folks promised to return after next month's legislative special session to work out a plan. The state's newfound willingness to put up some money to keep a rural bus line rolling is an indicator, however slight, that the promise might come true.



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