

# MASS TRANSIT

## FL: Brightline Pins Passenger Hopes on Millennials, Aging Boomers

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SACRAMENTO, Calif. -- Michael Reininger, president of the soon-to-be-launched Brightline rail service, will need thousands of passengers a day to buy tickets to ride his shiny new trains from Miami to Orlando.

Where will he find them? Reininger sees a lucrative market in car-averse millennials and aging baby boomers, two massive population groups with no track record of train travel.

Millennials, those born from 1982 to 2000, are thought to be less enamored of automobiles than their parents. And early boomers and older Floridians might be at an age where they're willing to let someone else handle the driving on Florida's congested roads.

"When you think about the Florida marketplace, it is a very young and a slightly older marketplace," Reininger said last week during a tour of the factory where Brightline's trains are being built.

Boomers, with their household fleets, big garages and long commutes, hastened the demise of train travel and ushered in what Reininger calls "the monopoly of the car."

"That's a very strong monopoly," Reininger said.

Still, he looks to demographic trends as proof that a last-century mode of transport can thrive in an age of Uber and Lyft and self-driving cars.

Reininger jokes that in his day, every teen lined up to apply for a driver's license "15 minutes before their 16th birthday." Today, he says, millennials are opting out of car ownership altogether.

Skeptics aren't sure that the sociological trends are compelling enough to merit Brightline's \$3 billion investment in trains and tracks.

"If they're relying on that, they're definitely going to lose a lot of money," said Randal O'Toole, a transit analyst at the Cato Institute.

For most Floridians, passenger trains are a novelty -- settings for old movies or a way to get around Europe or big cities like New York, Chicago and Washington.

Aging Americans cling to their car keys as long as they possibly can, O'Toole notes. And millennials don't really hate cars, he argues. They just came of age during an economic period when they lacked the resources or the need to drive.

"It's pretty clear that the decline in per capita driving was due to the financial crisis," O'Toole said. "It had nothing to do with changing preferences."

Ticket prices will play a role in Brightline's passenger counts, and Reininger has yet to reveal how much it will cost to ride the trains.