

# Husein Cumber

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## The Future of High-Speed Rail in Florida, Creating Jobs While Reducing Emissions

Innovation and entrepreneurship are helping us meet the challenges of climate change and in the process, are creating economic opportunity. Florida East Coast Industries is finding opportunity in mass transit, creating jobs while writing a new, greener chapter in Florida's transportation patterns.

Established in 1892 by Henry Flagler whose railway opened up Florida, the Florida East Coast Industries of the 21st century is pioneering high-speed rail from Miami to Orlando. This business is finding opportunity and creating jobs with an eye to delivering emissions savings and getting more than five million people off Florida roads when the route is at capacity ridership.

As FECI's Chief Strategy Officer, Husein Cumber recognizes that mass transit has always been desirable for its convenience; now, he sees that there is also increased demand from Floridians because of transit's role in addressing climate change. "It's been an evolution. We launched Brightline (FECI's high-speed rail enterprise in Florida) in 2012, and if you think back over the last ten years, a lot of the debate was centered on whether or not climate change exists. Today, the discussion has shifted from not whether it exists, but to what are the different mitigation measures that we need to put in place to address climate change," Cumber explains. "People need mobility options, and being able to move people through mass transportation is critical."

The growing demand to address climate change is driving a renaissance of technology and business plans. To innovators and entrepreneurs, Cumber has sober advice on the emerging climate economy: "This is that once in a lifetime opportunity where you're on the front end of an industry that's about to explode. And you don't want to look back and say I had the opportunity to be part of something special but I just went for something safe."

Private sector solutions are key to blunting the worst effects of climate change. Decisionmakers who see the win-win of enlisting entrepreneurs in the fight against climate change have an important role to play. "Florida has the ability and will continue to attract people that are willing to come here and help solve the issues," Cumber said. "And so, where we can actually encourage them and incentivize them, I think Florida is going to be in a great position to attract companies, talent, and technologies we need to succeed."

While the marketplace's role in meeting the challenge of climate change is grounded in economics, the work has other rewards that are profound. "When you are able to do something that actually has a lasting effect—whether it's clean hydrogen, carbon capture, or building high-speed rail and fueling it with biodiesel, there's something very self-satisfying about that. You're building new technology, you're hiring people and training them with new skill sets and opening up new businesses that couldn't have existed but for these new technologies entering the market," said Cumber.

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