



X-Plan for Transportation

(As published in Miami Today on March 12, 2015)

Where ever I travel in this county and whomever I speak to, the conversation always comes around to the lack of mobility in Miami-Dade County. Tolls have soared to more than \$8.50 for a round trip from one corner of the county to the other, more than Florida's minimum wage. The alternative, for those who are able to access a Metrorail or Metrobus station, is exactly the same price (\$8.50), if you include the cost of parking. Either way, there is no guarantee that the flow of traffic or multiple transit transfers will get commuters to work or back home as planned, squeezing residents not only for their money but their time.

Over the years, as the congestion worsened, numerous committees continued to meet and make long-range transportation plans, without ever securing the funds needed to create an efficient public transit system. Now, under the leadership of Chairman Monestime, we finally have a united front in the effort to move quickly to identify creative funding sources that will get long-stalled transit extensions off the ground. Calls for expeditious action have come from, among others, Commissioner Barbara Jordan on behalf of the Northwest, Commissioner Juan C. Zapata in West Dade, and State Representative Kionee McGhee in the South.

Prior to the first meeting of the Transit and Mobility Committee, I met in the Sunshine with the chairman of the committee, Commissioner Bovo, and we came to a consensus on various transit issues. The most significant were the following three potential funding sources:

License Tag Fees — I've ascertained from the State of Florida that automobile owners in Miami-Dade pay more than \$167 million a year for the thumb-sized license tag renewal "sticker" which costs less than six cents to print. I've asked the Miami-Dade County Legislative Delegation, led by Senator Anitere Flores, to return approximately 40% of the fees to Miami-Dade for transit expansion.

Convention Development Tax Revenues (CDT or Bed Tax) — Commissioner Bovo and I concluded that it was within the stated purposes of the bed tax to fund tourism-sustaining transportation infrastructure. We are exploring the bondable capacity of the existing bed tax and will also consider an increase.

People's Transportation Plan (PTP) — The Citizens' Independent Transportation Trust (CITT) allocates \$81 million annually to support Miami-Dade Transit (MDT) operations.

These revenues, which are generated from a half-cent sales tax approved in 2002, should be redirected to funding major capital projects as originally intended. Chairman Bovo suggested a prudent timetable of five years to wean MDT off the subsidy, reducing their allocation by \$16 million a year (allowing the administration the opportunity to allocate general revenues).

These three revenue streams amount to a bondable capacity of at least \$2 billion that can finance the four critical branches that our transit system lacks. In conjunction with the new passenger train line that Florida East Coast Railway is constructing (at their own expense), the county could finally build the following extensions to our transit system (see map below):

Note that our rail system currently extends from the South, ending at Dadeland, and to the North, ending in Hialeah, with an additional spur to MIA. We desperately need an **East-West extension** (from Miami Beach to at least FIU); to the **North along NW 27th** avenue; and further south along the **South Dade Busway** to Florida City.

A key linkage is the one that connects downtown Miami to Miami Beach, known as “Baylink.” (I am on the Beach Corridor Transit Connection Study Policy Executive Committee tasked with studying the viability of the connection.) Under the existing law, bed taxes can be used to fund this linkage.

The other three branches must rely on the dedicated funding sources previously mentioned. Together they would complete a rail network, that combined with existing bus and trolley routes, can efficiently reach the four corners of the county (creating the interlocking transportation system called for by Michael Lewis in his December 10, 2014 article). To the extent possible, the extensions would make use of existing rail, thereby reducing the overall project costs.

Miami-Dade County residents dutifully pay their taxes, directly and indirectly, via fees and tolls, with the expectation that the funds collected will be reinvested in their community. The funding sources proposed look at what we’ve already taken from the county’s citizens and reallocates those dollars to fund a real network of transportation options.

When we create an accessible and efficient public transit system, reducing the cost of commuting and burden of traffic congestion, we will see an increase in employment and ultimately the quality of life of all residents.

