# Memorandum

MIAMI-DADE COUNTY

**Date:** September 21, 2010

**To:** Honorable Chairman Dennis C. Moss
and Members, Board of County Commissioners

Agenda Item No.
12(B)1

**From:** George M. Burgess
County Manager

**Subject:** Report on North and East-West Transit Corridors

---

This report provides information on significant events and work that have taken place for both the North and East-West Transit Corridors and presents a number of critical steps that are being taken to pursue less costly transit solutions for these corridors.

Among the critical steps that will be taken by staff upon acceptance of this report will include the transit department's immediate request to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) to remove the Orange Line Phase 2 project (North Corridor as heavy rail) from the federal New Starts Program; County administration will work with the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs (OIA) to change the description of previously awarded $24 million in congressional earmarks for the Metrorail Heavy Rail Orange Line to be used for incremental improvements along the NW 27th Avenue Corridor; and to continue our work towards implementing affordable, incremental improvements in the County, principally for the North and East-West corridors.

As you may recall, Miami-Dade Transit's (MDT) 30-year financial outlook was presented and discussed by the Board of County Commissioners at a number of Board meetings throughout 2008 and 2009, including two important transit summits. My July 17, 2008 report to you on MDT's Financial Status and subsequent August 28, 2008 report on 30-year Financial Scenarios for the department clearly laid out policy options for the Board both in the short- and long-term that would be needed to arrive at the $9.4 billion in needs beyond existing revenues in order to build, operate and maintain the Metrorail Orange Line, including both the NW 27th Avenue and East-West Corridors. Among the options to be considered were fare increases, additional General Fund support (beyond the current maintenance-of-effort level), unification of the transit system, a two cent increase to the Local Option Gas Tax (LOGT), adjustments to the current municipal contributions from the Surtax, and adjustments to fare-free programs.

I commend the Board for taking positive action on two of the critical funding recommendations in these reports which have been enormously helpful in closing the funding gap of the department. They include approval of fare increases with automatic adjustments using the Consumer Price Index (CPI) every three (3) years, and unification of the transit system. Additionally, the Board restructured the bus system network last year (through the Service Enhancement Restructuring Initiative (SERI)) which will result in significant savings to the department's operations budget for years to come. While these actions have made the department more financially sustainable, long term funding forecasts still present us with a significant challenge. If at any time we wish to pursue federal funding for any transit New Starts or Small Starts project, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) will demand that MDT demonstrate that it can operate and maintain both the existing system and the expanded system. For MDT, this will include the costs associated with bringing the Miami Intermodal Center-Earlington Heights (MIC-EH) Connector on-line in 2012. Prior reports to the Board have identified the need for an increase in revenue that equates to 0.2 mills in addition to a 2 cent increase to the LOGT in 2014. Both are needed to fund the current level of transit service and future operation and maintenance of the MIC-EH Connector.

MDT has been in the New Starts process for the North Corridor Heavy Rail Project since 2004 and the department's last three New Starts applications (2007, 2008 and 2009) have received a "Medium-Low" rating from the FTA primarily because of an insufficient financial plan. It should be noted, any rating below a "Medium" rating will not be recommended by the FTA for federal funding. In February 2010, the FTA published its latest comments related to MDT's financial plan in its annual New Starts Report for FY 2011:

> "The financial plan MDT submitted to FTA in November 2008 included $5.9 billion from revenue sources that do not currently exist. A viable strategy for funding MDT's current and proposed capital and operating expenses has not been presented to FTA during the past year. If a robust financial plan is not provided to FTA by September 2010, the North Corridor project will be removed from the New Starts program."

In subsequent communications between MDT and FTA, FTA recommended that the County voluntarily remove the project from the New Starts Program as removal by FTA would be viewed as a negative action and could potentially affect future federal funding requests.

Therefore, immediately following acceptance of this report, I will be directing staff to prepare the appropriate communication to FTA to withdraw its New Starts application for the North Corridor as heavy rail. The work on the East-West Corridor as heavy rail never reached the program level for the project to be eligible for New Starts funding; therefore, once MDT requests the North Corridor to be removed from the New Starts process, no further action will be required for the East-West project.

**Affordable, Incremental Transit Improvements for Miami-Dade County**

Following the November 2008 Transit Summit, the Mayor directed staff to work with the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) to develop affordable, incremental transit improvements for transit expansion in Miami-Dade County for the short and mid-term. The Mayor and I thought it extremely important that the MPO, on which each of you serve as a Board member, lead this task because of its federal and state mandate to guide the transportation planning process and to set transportation priorities for the Miami-Dade Metropolitan area through its Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) and Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Ultimately, any alternative plan that would be recommended by the work of the task force would have to be considered by the MPO Governing Board for inclusion and prioritization in the LRTP and TIP because all regional transportation projects must be included in these documents regardless of the source of funding. Furthermore, any project that receives federal dollars must be in the LRTP and TIP.

The MPO Short-Term Transit Improvement Task Force includes regional transit partners such as the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), Miami-Dade Expressway Authority (MDX), Miami-Dade Transit (MDT), Miami-Dade Public Works Department, the Office of Strategic Business Management, the Office of the Citizens' Independent Transportation Trust (OCITT) and representatives from the County Executive Office. A significant outcome of the short-term transit improvement task force was the restructuring of the bus system last year (SERI). The Mid-Term improvements task force continues to work with these same partners in evaluating an incremental approach to building transit service and ridership in several major corridors, particularly the North and East-West corridors. The MPO has hired a transportation firm to provide travel demand modeling for these two corridors. This analysis is expected to be completed in the next several months.

MDT had been evaluating the cost of implementing alternate premium transit service for the North and East-West Corridors. The result of this work was transmitted to the May 12, 2010 Transit, Infrastructure and Roads Committee (TIRC), titled; "Modal Options Preliminary Analysis Summary," and is attached hereto. I invite you to look at this report in detail. However, in short, the report provides preliminary

information detailing revenue, service and ridership information on various transit options such as Heavy Rail Transit (LRT), Light Rail Transit (LRT) Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and Bus Rapid Transit-Lite. In conclusion, there remains as much as an $800 million funding gap to implement BRT-Lite and a $1.1 billion funding gap in order to implement full BRT for both the North and East-West corridors over 30 years. While this report demonstrates that there appear to be cost-effective options to heavy rail, it also clearly shows that to provide any new premium transit service along these corridors will require additional funding and partnerships with other government organizations. As has been stated previously, the baseline assumptions include an increase in revenue that equates to 0.2 mills along with 2 cents of additional LOGT in 2014, both of which are needed to fund the current level of transit service and future operation and maintenance of the MIC-EH Connector.

However, in the near-term, the MPO task force has completed substantial work and has begun to put forth recommendations for the implementation of enhanced bus service in the North Corridor (NW 27th Avenue ) by FY 2012 and the East-West Corridor (SR 836 and NW 8th Street) corridors by FY 2013.

Along the 27th Avenue Corridor, new premium bus service will be proposed to replace the current route 97 (27th Avenue Max) service and which will operate 10-minute service between NW 215th Street and the Miami Intermodal Center (MIC), offering riders along this corridor bus service that will provide a one-seat ride to the Miami International Airport and other important destinations within the corridor. Additionally, MDT has been negotiating the purchase of a parcel at NW 215th Street which will provide a very important regional hub for the northern most location of the corridor, attracting hundreds of potential riders from Broward County. A number of other strategic park-and-ride locations are being evaluated along the corridor, including those in the vicinity of the Miami-Dade College North campus. The new enhanced bus service would likely have stops at NW 215th Street, 199th Street, 183rd Street, Miami-Dade College, Martin Luther King Jr. Metrorail Station, Opa-Locka Boulevard, NW 79th Street and the MIC. The enhanced bus project will feature specially-branded hybrid buses.

To begin these incremental enhancements, MDT has applied for a $1 million grant from the Job Access and Reverse Committee (JARC) program from the FTA. On June 17, 2010, the MPO Governing Board approved the FY 2011 TIP which includes the "North Corridor Metrorail Extension" project. This entry currently has some funding for years 2010-2011. This funding should be able to be used for engineering work for BRT for this corridor after the appropriate TIP amendment is made.

The MPO Task Force has also been looking closely at premium transit alternatives for the East-West corridor. This includes the proposal to add premium bus route services on SR 836 and/or SW 8th Street.

One alternative the task force has been evaluating is a SR 836 express bus which is proposed to operate from a new park-and-ride on NW 12th Street and NW 107th Avenue, and access the MIC by way of SR 836. This route is being proposed to operate every 15 minutes during peak periods only.

The task force has also considered enhanced bus service along SW 8th Street. The "SW 8th Street Enhanced Bus Service," will operate out of a new park-and-ride lot at SW 147th Avenue and SW 8th Street. The "SW 8th Street Enhanced Bus Service" route would have two stops along SW 8th Street before accessing the Florida Turnpike. The bus would access a park-and-ride lot at NW 12th Street and NW 107th Avenue, then access SR 836 and provide direct express service to downtown Miami. This route would operate every 15 minutes during peak periods. MDT has also applied for JARC funding to begin to fund the incremental improvements for this corridor. As has been noted previously, improvements along the East-West Corridor depend upon the successful completion of the 826/836 Interchange Project.

MDT continues to work with the FDOT and MDX to identify additional funding opportunities for these corridors. As ridership builds on these routes, service frequencies may be enhanced which presents an

excellent opportunity to implement full Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) service over the next five years for both the North and East-West Corridors.

**Funding Opportunities**

Key to funding incremental and BRT transit options for the North and East-West Corridors is obtaining a funding commitment from local, state and federal government levels. As stated earlier, MDT currently has $24 million in federal congressional earmarks currently designated for Metrorail Orange Line that would need to be re-designated to be used for NW 27th Avenue incremental improvements. During the FY 2011 appropriations cycle, which began in February of this year, MDT worked diligently with the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs (OIA) to request the Miami-Dade Congressional Delegation to reassign these dollars to NW 27th Avenue incremental improvements. However, this effort must be intensified for the coming Congressional cycle. The acceptance of this report, combined with MDT's voluntary withdrawal of its New Starts application for the North Corridor as heavy rail, will clearly affirm the County's commitment to pursue a different set of transit alternatives. After the acceptance of this report, we will continue to work with OIA to pursue the re-designation of the $24 million in new starts funds originally obligated for the Metrorail Orange Line to NW 27th Avenue Incremental improvements. Additionally, this action will be incorporated in the County's federal legislative agenda for the FY 2012 appropriations cycle which we will begin preparing this summer.

At the State level, FDOT continues to be a very important funding partner to the department. As you know, FDOT is contributing over $100 million to the Miami Intermodal Center/Earlington Heights Metrorail Connector Project and contributes substantial dollars to MDT's bus operations and bus facilities every year through its various public transportation programs. You may recall the State had also previously committed to continue to work with MDT on reprogramming their contribution, subject to availability and development of a viable transit alternative. MDT will continue to work closely with the State to program funding for incremental and BRT options for both the North and East-West corridors.

Assistant County Manager