

# Transportation planners ask state about two-way Callo Ocho traffic

By CATHERINE LACKNER

Acceding to requests from residents and businesspeople in East Little Havana, the Metropolitan Planning Organization's governing board has instructed the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) to present "in an expedited manner" its recommendation for the locally preferred alternative for traffic improvements along Southwest Seventh and Eighth streets.

The transportation department in June completed a preliminary study of both streets from Brickell to Southwest 27th avenues. Both are one-way streets, and a citizens' group contends they have become dangerous high-speed thoroughfares that have divided the neighborhood, resulting in a loss of community.

A plan for the area created *pro bono* by the PlusUrbia de-

sign firm says making them two-way would be more desirable.

"This is our one chance," said Juan Mullerat, PlusUrbia director, in August, when the FDOT preliminary study was being completed. He, along with several of the firm's principals, lives in East Little Havana.

Currently, the three one-way driving lanes are 11 feet wide, with two 7.5-foot parking lanes and two 9-foot sidewalks. PlusUrbia's plan would replace them with two 10-foot driving lanes, heading east and west, an 11-foot transit lane, a 4-foot bike lane, and two 8.5-foot parking lanes. The sidewalks would stay the same width, 9 feet.

"The department only recently became aware of PlusUrbia's plan," said Ivette Ruiz, FDOT spokesperson, in August. Redesigning traffic so that the area recaptures its neighborhood ambiance "is one of the alterna-

tives recommended for further study, but any change to the existing traffic pattern will require public and community acceptance," Ms. Ruiz said. The department would continue to get input from the community and all interested parties throughout the project development and environmental study phase, she added.

When Miami was growing rapidly in the 1950s, officials decided to create the one-way streets to streamline traffic flow into and out of downtown, said Francis Suarez, Miami commissioner and planning organization vice chair, at the Dec. 17 Metropolitan Planning Organization meeting. "The city has diametrically changed over the course of the decades, and it's apparent to me that the business community on Eighth Street and residents I've met are in favor of two-way streets. PlusUrbia has created a beautiful, complete street concept of what Eighth Street would look like as a bidirectional street," he said.

He said that Xavier Suarez, his father and former Miami mayor, told him in the late 1980s that the streets should be returned to a two-way status.

The younger Suarez said he has spoken to Frank Carollo and Bruno Barreiro, Miami and Miami-Dade commissioners respectively, who agreed to ask for the local alternatives study to be expedited.

"Though the community uniformly seems to be in favor of the plan, we are simply asking FDOT to expedite the study," Mr. Suarez said. "We don't want to prejudice the study — let the experts do their job."

He said the state transportation department has a history of taking neighborhood preference into account. "My experience with FDOT has been magnificent. They made Coral Way more pedestrian-friendly, even though their studies didn't support it. They listened to neighbors who didn't want the trees cut or uprooted. I hope this collaboration will result in another positive improvement for the City of Miami."

After the local alternative study is completed, the next phase is the project development and environmental study, set to begin soon and to take two to three years, Ms. Ruiz said in August. Then design, right-of-way acquisition and construction will follow. Construction is expected to begin in spring 2017.

To help alleviate jaywalking that has historically plagued the two streets, the department will make a series of pedestrian improvements over the next two to three years, Ms. Ruiz has said. "This includes the addition of 10 new pedestrian crosswalks along Southwest Eighth Street between Southwest 27th and Brickell Avenues."

But, Mr. Mullerat has said, "I want to ask that guy with a cane, jaywalking across Calle Ocho, where he wants his crosswalks."



Photo by Maxine Usdan

At this point Southwest Eighth Street eastbound becomes one way.