

Transportation Summit Community Forum

An Opportunity for Public Input

SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS



CITIZENS' INDEPENDENT
TRANSPORTATION TRUST

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Forum Summary

The Citizens' Independent Transportation Trust hosted the Transportation Summit Community Forum: An Opportunity for Public Input on Saturday, February 22, 2014, at the Miami-Dade Main Library Auditorium. The Community Forum was a follow up event to the 2013 Transportation Summit on "Visioning the Future of Miami-Dade County's Public Transportation." Its main goal was intended to be to provide an update to the community on the main themes discussed during the Transportation Summit. The forum was open to all and was publicized via social media ([#MDTransp_forum](#) and [Citizens' Transportation Trust](#)), through transportation partners including transit vehicles and stations, as well as via print ads, a mailed brochure, e-mails and e-newsletters.

The Forum commenced with welcome notes and opening remarks from Mr. Charles Scurr, Executive Director of the Citizens' Independent Transportation Trust (CITT) and Mr. Paul Schwiep, CITT Chair. Both speakers emphasized that the Forum's intent was to involve citizens in the transportation planning process by obtaining their views on the county's transportation priorities. Mr. Kelly Cooper, CITT's Strategic Planner, presented the Proceedings Report of the 2013 Transportation Summit. Mr. Scurr also gave a presentation on the progress of various transportation projects in the county. After these brief introductory segments, the floor was then open to the centerpiece of the Forum: input from the public. The Honorable Linda Zilber, member of the CITT and former chairperson, served as a moderator.

There were approximately 130 Forum attendees, including over 100 residents, six exhibitors, CITT members as well as transportation partners and support staff. The event had 28 public

commenters who asked questions, shared their experiences or voiced concerns about transportation in Miami-Dade County. Representatives from various agencies, including Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) District Six, Miami-Dade Transit (MDT), Miami-Dade Expressway Authority (MDX), Tri-Rail/South Florida Regional Transportation Authority (SFRTA) and Miami-Dade Public Works and Waste Management Department (PWWM), were present during the Forum and available to answer questions. The day also featured a social media component, with a display of the Twitter hashtag #MDtransp_forum as a live feed of participants posting pictures and comments.

Although the event was organized and promoted to follow-up the 2013 Summit and provide feedback on its Proceedings Report, the overwhelming majority of commenters' specific points focused

on current route or mode-specific issues – far outnumbering those providing more general remarks on the county's transportation system. However, further evaluation of the speakers' broader issues connects extensively to the June Summit outcomes. The following section synthesizes the Forum participant views within the context of the five themes identified in the 2013 Summit, including mass transit's role in creating livable communities,

the use of technology in improving transportation, the consideration for community needs in transportation planning, transportation funding sources and priorities, and the need for public outreach. The discussion of these five themes encompasses important aspects of the transportation visioning process, and highlights the significant cross-cutting links across them.

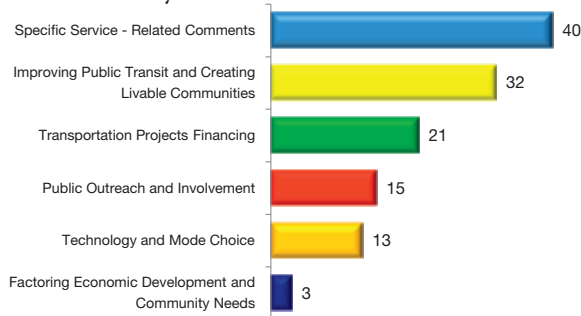
The point [of the Forum] is to hear from the community, about your views, your goals, to help us...with visioning transportation for the future.



Public Input on Transportation Improvement in Miami-Dade County

All participants were given the opportunity to voice their inquiries, comments or concerns. The citizens' issues were either directly addressed by the attending staff members of the respective agencies, or the questioners were directed to the appropriate agency staff for a more detailed discussion; subsequent to the event in a few cases, the agency provided written correspondence for this report. The comments with broader system implications were acknowledged and the participants received assurances from CITT staff that the issues would be brought to the attention of the Miami-Dade Board of County Commissioners. Each of the comments echoed some aspect of the broader themes identified during the 2013 Transportation Summit, therefore the ensuing discussion of the citizen feedback follows the organization of the 2013 Transportation Summit Proceedings Report. The following narrative also references the linkages between and across themes, and presents the comments in the context of the overall goal of the Forum to collect public input in visioning transportation in Miami-Dade County.

Figure: Community Forum Comments



The figure above shows the distribution of comments across the themes identified in the Summit. The comment count includes remarks made both during the Forum and via Twitter. An additional category, Specific Service-Related Comments, was created to capture all remarks that pertained to a very specific issue such as the frequency of a bus on a specific route. Many comments were included in several categories as they spanned across multiple themes. For example, a comment which referenced the lack of understanding among the general public about the insufficiency of the half-penny tax to fund public transit, was included in two categories – Transportation Projects Financing and Public Outreach and Involvement.

Improving Public Transit and Creating Livable Communities

The broadest theme that emerged out of the 2013 Transportation Summit focused on transportation improvements to create an integrated mass transit system that would enhance the quality of life of communities. Most of the comments offered during the Community Forum and in the hash-tagged Tweets were directly linked to this subject. Some residents expressed their desire for improved public transit through their suggestions for enhancing the reliability and accessibility of transit. Examples of specific remarks include more frequent bus service in their areas, ensuring buses and trains run on time, and ensuring buses maintain pedestrian-friendly speed to preserve the walkability of areas with public transit service. A second set of citizen remarks was also focused on the current system, namely the conditions of vehicles¹, equipment, stations and infrastructure². Residents noted a variety of specific service concerns and service improvement suggestions, including for Park-and-Rides (SW 152 Street, SW 200 Street); routes 11, 34, 35, 57, 77, 93, S, 120, 183 and 277; and areas of West Kendall, Aventura, NW 79 Street/7th Avenue³, Metro Zoo, and Miami Dade College's Kendall Campus.

A third group of comments was related to the broader need to enhance transit through the expansion of the existing network; for example, the expansion of Metrorail both southward and northward, connectivity to Miami Beach and other high density areas.

- ¹ For example, various concerns were raised with MDT bus and train cleanliness. In post-event communication, MDT describes its schedule of nightly cleaning, monthly interior detailing and pest treatments, and periodic window/anti-graffiti shield cleaning.
- ² One specific example was multiple inquiries on replacing Metrorail and Tri-Rail vehicles. In separate communications following the event, MDT notes procurement is on track to replace its railcars via PTP funding beginning 2016 and SFRTA noted it has 24 railcars entered in service over past two years with 12 new locomotives being added in 2014 to replace its oldest, least efficient ones.
- ³ FDOT District Six is currently conducting a pedestrian safety study at this intersection, per a follow-up communication after the Forum.



Technology and Mode Choice

Multiple comments made by Forum attendees also echoed another theme identified in the 2013 Transportation Summit, as they referenced technological improvements or the implementation of new transit modes. The technology suggestions focused mostly on improvement of existing services, such as features of the Easy Card payment system, the signage at Metrorail stations⁴, and the notification/alert system for Metrorail and Tri-Rail. Some improvements proposed through the citizen input included using the Easy Card in the tri-county area⁵, displaying the charge upon entry on the vehicle, and prorating payments for riding mass transit depending on length of travel.

With regards to transit modes, connectivity with Miami Beach via light rail was positively viewed by a couple of commenters, as well as the offering of a Bus Rapid Transit system. Some residents linked the transit services currently in place and the demand for more (in order to improve mobility) to the need for more funding, and recognized that improvements will require additional sources.

4 In correspondence following the event, MDT noted it continues improving the electronic signs in the stations through its Information Technology Services, and is procuring larger, more visible replacement signs for the current railcars.

5 SFRTA noted in post-Forum correspondence Easy Card system is currently used by both MDT and SFRTA/Tri-Rail. Moreover, plans coordination is underway with Broward County Transit and PalmTran that would lead to a single system usable across all four agencies

Factoring Economic Development and Community Needs

The third of five key themes identified at the 2013 Summit was the crucial link of economic and community development, with transportation projects planning. Comments from several speakers at the Forum similarly referenced the importance of accounting for the demands of the areas served by implementing transit and roadway programs. These community concerns include the future of young people, connecting transit to education and job centers, recommending urgency for corridors such as 27th Avenue because of its multi-county regional service nature, and serving centers of highest population density and congestion. Regarding these subjects and as noted for themes featuring innovative financing opportunities and applying transit best practices, MDT and CITT responses demonstrated continued priority of transit-oriented development and modal technology choices suited to each particular corridor application (for example, light rail to Miami Beach).

In discussing their specific concerns about comfort, reliability and safety, participants also suggested that Miami-Dade residents may be unwilling to use public transit for those reasons. Residents cited various challenges when using transit and argued that not only does the community need transit options but they also need accessible, comfortable and dependable buses and rails. In reference to general service issues, Mr. Derrick Gordon, MDT Assistant

“Transportation agencies “need to plan for access and amenities in order to improve how people experience mass transit.””

Director for Bus Services, emphasized the department's continuous, extensive efforts to provide for a comfortable experience for riders and asked that residents to share their concerns directly with him.

Transportation Projects Financing

Several residents noted the link between transportation improvements and the need for more transit funding. The references to transit funding echoed similar comments made during the 2013 Summit. The issue of transit financing was approached from various perspectives with several residents discussing the sufficiency of the half-penny tax funding, others suggesting that seniors pay some type of fee for their transit rides, and some proposing that toll fees, funding for road projects and for municipal trolley services be redirected towards public transit.

Several attendees maintained that the focus of spending to improve transportation should be on system-wide issues, towards the expansion of transit services and the improvement of the existing network. Residents insisted that the expansion of Metrorail should be a funding priority. Other concerns with funding implications referenced the inadequate maintenance of transit stops and vehicles. Some residents called for more funding to be dedicated for the upgrading of the facilities and system as a whole. Some comments with system-wide implications were discussed in more detail by representatives from MDT. For example, Mr. Albert Hernandez, MDT Assistant Director, Engineering, Planning and Development, updated the attendees on the planned \$40 million transit-oriented development capital

“Safety, convenience, on time, comfortable - all these elements that are part of a bus experience need to be good all the time...otherwise ridership is not going to be there and the money is not going to be there.”

improvements at the Golden Glades and a large transit hub with both Miami-Dade and Broward bus services at Aventura.

Both the general comments about increased funding for mass transit and the more specific ones on where that funding needs to be spent are indicative of the audience's interest in transit improvements. However, some residents

noted that they do not have a clear understanding of how the available funds are distributed and how the increasing ridership affects revenues (i.e., service frequency, coverage, route expansion, and other aspects related to the above theme of supporting transit for livable communities). These comments show the need for more public outreach, a request which was directly made by multiple participants, both during the Forum and throughout the 2013 Transportation Summit (as discussed in the theme below).

Public Outreach and Involvement

Speakers expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to participate in a community meeting. Many repeated the sentiment (also voiced during the 2013 Transportation Summit) that outreach should be done more often and in easily accessible locations. Commenters stressed the importance of the community receiving reliable information, including transportation agencies' efforts to improve transportation, the impact of various transportation projects on the environment, air and water quality, and the health of residents, or the above theme of transit financing, particularly in reference to the half-penny tax. Concerns for access to

information were expressed with remarks that the average citizens may not be “technically savvy” nor “have advocacy skills,” or that the general public may not have an understanding of how transit is financed. Some of the inquiries regarding the use of revenues collected via transit and toll fees point to the need of Miami-Dade's residents to receive more information on sources and uses of transportation funds. These comments highlighted





the need for public agencies to bring that information to the community. This concern about access to information and also for broader public convenience led more than one commenter to suggest community-based meeting locations. In the context of community-based outreach, when addressing a specific question from the audience about improvements in his city, Mr. John O'Brien, Transportation Manager at City of North Miami, invited residents to their council meetings.

In addition to organizing meetings at locations convenient to Miami-Dade residents, the county's transportation agencies also need to pay attention to the online community of transit users who

may provide additional feedback on transit issues. Their concerns and ideas may provide valuable information about the needs of travelers and the visions for transportation enhancements. These online sources are also outlets for getting the word out on projects and planned improvements.⁶ The Twitter hashtag [#MDtransp_forum](#) was referenced by several Twitter users in their live coverage of the forum. These users relayed some of the concerns expressed by residents and engaged some online users by informing them of the proceedings.

6 Matthew Toro. "El Portal Councilperson Presses CITT on Rail." Transit Miami website. <http://www.transitmiami.com/citt/el-portal-councilperson-presses-citt-on-rail>

Conclusions

The attendance of over one hundred Miami-Dade residents at the Forum on a Saturday morning downtown shows significant community interest in transportation issues in the county. The remarks made by the attendees point to two general areas of concern that transportation agencies need to address in order to enhance transportation. On one hand, agencies need to take into account the demand for an improved transportation system through the expansion of transportation corridors and the addition of transit modes. However, agencies also need to ensure that the transportation options available to residents are reliable and well maintained. The majority of citizens' comments demonstrated that the maintenance of a clean, efficient and reliable system needs to be a priority for transportation agencies, as it is the most likely starting point for most people's vision of transportation in the county.

The continuous engagement of Miami-Dade residents in the discussion of planned and ongoing transportation projects is important for assessing community impact and garnering support for future efforts. The Community Forum organized by the Citizens' Independent Transportation Trust is an important step in that process. The attendees both commended the Trust in organizing the event and expressed their desire for even more community outreach.

As a follow-up to suggestions received during the 2013 Transportation Summit for the use of alternative resources for outreach, the Trust has also made advances in expanding its online presence and informational channels with the use of Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/TransportationTrust>) and Twitter (<https://twitter.com/GoCITT>).



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