

2020 Solutions for Mass Transit

As the county administration dithers, dallies and delays on implementing any realistic transit solutions, it behooves us to advance solutions that are immediate, affordable, and eminently logical.

As a county commissioner and a member of the countywide Fiscal Priorities Committee, as well as a founding member of the Baylink Executive Policy Committee and (formerly) of the South Florida Regional Planning Council, I am pleased to report on transportation improvements that can feasibly be put in place by year's end.

Two components of improved mobility do not involve any capital improvements. One proposes to eliminate all public transit fares, at an approximate cost of \$100M/year, which is only 2% of the county's operating budget.

The second one also uses existing infrastructure and is revenue-neutral. It consists of issuing licenses to as many as 200 neighborhood circulators (jitneys and mini-buses) that would serve as last-mile transit links between the various outlying neighborhoods and the Metrorail/Metrobus stops. Their radius of operation would be no more than 2-3 miles and the fare charged would be no more than \$1-2, based on demand and population density. (For longer service in the SW Dade area, they would be permitted to use the S. Dade Transitway until that corridor is ready for whatever the long-term solution is finally funded and implemented, which might be another half a decade.)

The improvements seek to resolve congestion and provide mass transit solutions in four regions of the county, which can be described roughly as follows:

1. NORTHEAST CORRIDOR. This transit solution is almost ready for implementation - thanks to (1) the private expenditure, by FECI, of close to two billion dollars to double-track and activate passenger rail service along its existing tracks that connect Miami to Palm Beach; and (2) a deal worked out by the City of Miami (called a "perpetual easement") that permits the existing Tri-Rail trains to service, at modest fares, the stretch from downtown Miami to Little Haiti.

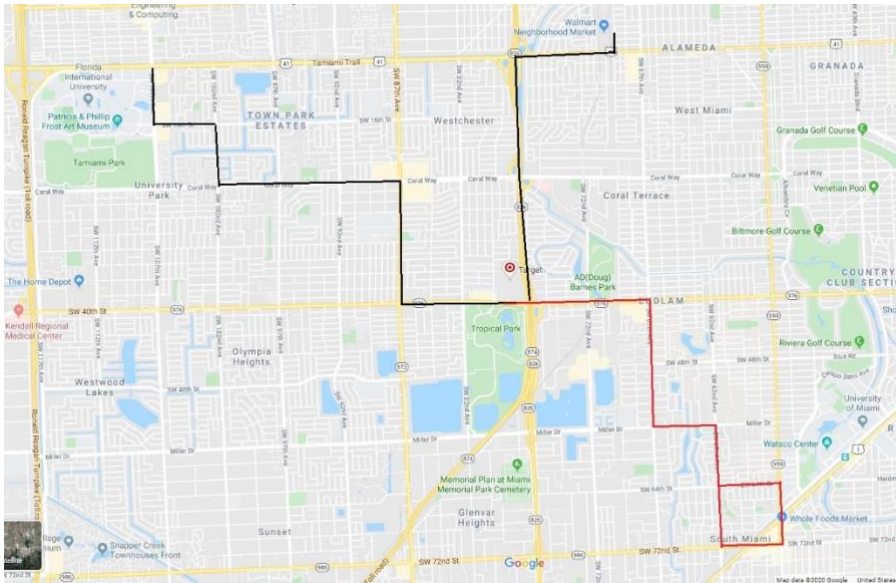
2. EAST-WEST CORRIDOR (S). Again, this transit solution is close to implementation, using existing infrastructure. Trolley service from downtown to the west end of the city limits along the Flagler/Eighth Street corridor already exists; this proposal, which is currently pending in the county's Transportation Committee, needs only to expand Miami's trolley service westward another 75 blocks to FIU (from 72nd Avenue to 107th Avenue).



EAST-WEST CORRIDOR (N). The north connection from east (Little Haiti) to west (Hialeah) uses existing infrastructure as mentioned above for the northeast corridor. Premised on the City of Miami and Tri Rail's

above-mentioned perpetual easement and a Sunshine meeting with Commissioner Jean Monestime, Tri Rail service on this line is ready for implementation. Only a final hurdle must be overcome, which is Federal Transportation Authority (FTA) approval of the "positive train control" (PTC), which is expected within a matter of months.

3. SOUTH MIAMI TO WESTCHESTER. This transit solution has already been approved by the two



commissioners from the area, which is mostly unincorporated Dade. The resolution emanating from the recent Sunshine Meeting convened by Commissioner Javier Souto, together with Commissioner Suarez, is awaiting committee assignment. See below for the configuration of the route.

4. KENDALL CORRIDOR SOLUTION. This solution, which also uses existing infrastructure, presents a short-term, viable alternative to the one being recommended by the county's consultant. It was discussed and approved in principle in a

Sunshine Meeting involving Commissioners Joe Martinez and Xavier Suarez. Its parameters and expeditious timelines are explained in my recently published article 'Transportation from the Dais Versus Transportation by Consultants'. It contrasts the short-term, affordable solution to the extraordinarily expensive solution (at \$250M) and laughably lengthy timeline (2032) being proposed by the county's consultants.

5. BAYLINK PERSONAL RAPID TRANSIT SOLUTION (PRT). In a series of Sunshine Meetings with commissioners representing Miami Beach, as well as mayors who represented the three jurisdictions involved (Miami, Miami Beach and Miami-Dade), the idea of a very light rail system was discussed and endorsed by all the participants. PRT is not an exclusive solution, and a monorail or Metromover supported by columns on the bay bottom, and costing perhaps five or ten times as much, might be an ultimate, long-term solution. PRT using small vehicles on an elevated guideway that can be supported on very thin columns ("glorified light-poles") will provide a tourist attraction, as well as a free transportation alternative for perhaps 10%-20% of the 40,000 Miami Beach hotel employees. It would also link Miami Beach residents to the Bayfront attractions (Frost Science and Perez Art museums and Miami Heat Arena) that cater to the local population.

6. NORTH CORRIDOR: The north corridor has been made the number one priority for funding by both the county commission and the Transportation Planning Organization (TPO). Unfortunately, due to the diversion of funds from capital improvements to operations, the county has failed to initiate this important corridor that would connect downtown to Hard Rock Stadium along 27th Avenue. This diversion should be corrected in the next budget year, which begins October 1, 2020. The numbers are fairly straightforward and entail restoring no less than \$100 million going forward each year to the trust that manages the half-cent tax called the Citizens' Independent Transportation Trust (CITT). Because bonds issued by this agency using the county's credit generated an 18 to 1 multiplier, there should be more than enough money to build the north corridor as either elevated light rail or at-grade light rail.

Footnote: The north corridor has been going through federal hearings called Record of Decision for more than a decade. As expressed many times by Commissioner Barbara Jordan, it should not be subject to extensive federal scrutiny going forward.