

Here Are All the Major Miami-Dade Mass-Transit Proposals Under Discussion

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When it comes to the future of public transit in Miami-Dade, one thing we're not suffering for is ideas. Oh, people have lots of ideas. Of course, ideas require studies, and those require agreements among various local governments and agencies. Then there's the process of figuring out which ideas are best to pursue. Finally, in perhaps the most important step, we have to figure out how to pay for those ideas.

So in the end, very few of these bright ideas become reality — especially when it comes to building a completely new transit system or extending existing ones.

As Miamians spiral into ever deeper levels of depression over the daily traffic nightmare, here are the major mass-transit projects that are in the idea phase. Some may actually happen one day.

Tri-Rail's Coastal Link

Tri-Rail is great at linking South Florida's three counties — if you need to travel between the western suburbs of those counties. A second line, **dubbed Coastal Link**, that would connect the downtowns of Miami, Fort Lauderdale, and West Palm Beach by running a track on the existing Florida East Coast Railway lines was announced in 2011. The original goal was to open by 2015. That, of course, has come and gone, but the plan is still very much alive.

Tri-Rail's governing agency, the South Florida Regional Transportation Authority, has plans to extend a **link into downtown Miami from the existing system by 2017** (it would split off from the Hialeah station). The current earliest target date for the whole shebang to be operational is 2020.

Station locations are expected to be announced sometime this spring.

Baylink, AKA "The Beach Corridor Transit Connection Project"

Plans to better connect Miami and Miami Beach have been kicked around for decades, but the idea for Baylink, a streetcar and light-rail system, was proposed in 2002. It was really popular. It had momentum. Then **Miami Beach Mayor David Dermer worked tirelessly to oppose it**. The idea was revived in 2013, and this time around, it's the Miami Beach city government **that's taking the initiative to make sure the project continues moving forward**. Environmental studies must be completed. Funding must be found. Private partners must be brought aboard. But it seems like for the first time since 2002, there's momentum to get this project done.

There's a hitch, though: The plan has been broken up into three separate plans. Both Miami and Miami Beach will pursue exploring street/rail systems within their own city limits, and then the third phase would involve linking them with a light-rail over Biscayne Bay. It's not actually guaranteed yet if these systems will link seamlessly or if passengers will have to transfer to another system.

By the way, Miami was pursuing its own street-car system, but those plans were put on hold in 2014 when talk of Baylink returned.



Could an arial gondola solve traffic woes?

photo by Christopher Lance via Flickr CC

Aerial Cable Transit, AKA Gondolas

The Miami-Dade Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) in December 2014 commissioned a feasibility study of "aerial cable transit" (basically, a gondola system like those you see at ski resorts) to run along the east-west transportation corridor of the city. Denver-based Eco-Transit Technologies is conducting the study, and the plan would have stops at Florida International University, Marlins Park, Miami International Airport, the Health District, downtown Miami, PortMiami, and Miami Beach. The system would cross Biscayne Bay, the Miami River, and the Intracoastal Waterway. According to the MPO, the study is "50 percent" complete.

CSX East-West Rail

CSX Railways owns a railway that runs east-west, roughly parallel to the Dolphin Expressway. Some county leaders, including Commissioner Steve Bovo, would very much like to use that railway to extend a commuter rail system into West Miami-Dade. Various ideas include extending Tri-Rail or Metrorail along the line. Problem is, CSX is now playing hardball **with its asking price**.

Rail Link to American Dream Megamall

You know how there are plans to build the world's largest mall in northeast Miami? Yeah, well, county leaders have decided it would be good to get ahead of ideas of how to service the massive project with mass transit. An idea to extend existing rail tracks (owned by Florida East Coast Railway) **to create a different east-west rail corridor have been discussed**. This is still very much in the "ongoing discussion without firm plans" file.



Buses aren't sexy, but they can help.

photo by Ed Webster via Flickr CC

Bus Rapid Transit

Buses aren't sexy, but they're cheaper than rail.

The MPO is exploring a bus rapid-transit system that would revolutionize bus service in the urban core. Buses would get dedicated lanes and pick up passengers at something more closely resembling a train station than a street-corner bus stop. Think the South Miami-Dade Busway, but fancier.

A study is underway to gauge the feasibility and effect of three main routes:

- One along NW 27th Avenue from the Miami Intermodal Center near the airport that runs clear up to the Broward line.
- Another along Flagler Street that would connect the area around FIU to downtown.
- The third would run along Kendall Drive from Dadeland to SW 167th Avenue.

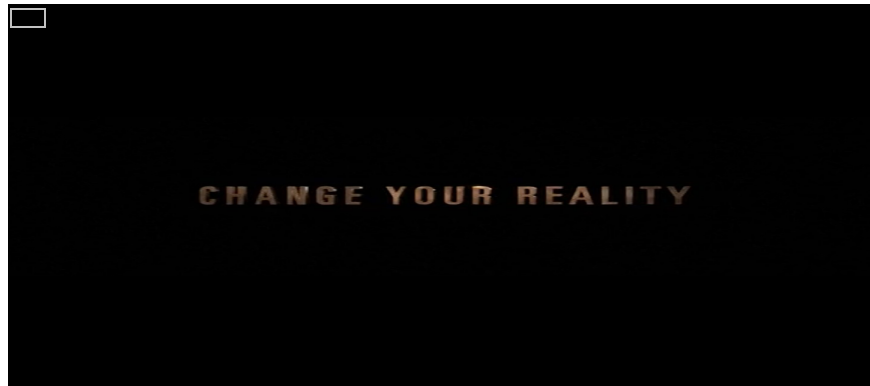
More Express Buses and Expanded Bus Service

The regular ' Metrobus system won't be ignored either. Incremental improvements are being made all the time. The biggest development underway is the State Road 836 Express Bus. The Miami-Dade Expressway Authority (MDX) is widening 836 to accommodate the express bus. The first of three routes is expected to begin service in 2017.

Water Taxis

The idea of public ferries shuttling people between the mainland and Key Biscayne or Miami Beach or up and down the Miami River has been kicked around for years but has never developed into much of a plan. The idea is still out there, though. Maybe it will happen someday.

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