



The City of Miami's Response to the "Viewpoint" Article Written by Dick Goodman in the Miami Today on November 16, 2006

The City's proposal is intended to address transportation concurrency issues and provide connectivity throughout the downtown and adjacent high density neighborhoods. At this time, Miami is in a transportation concurrency exception area, which recognizes the area's transition to a highly urbanized environment, which cannot rely solely on street widenings to accommodate single-passenger vehicles.

Building new roadway capacity in our physically constrained street grid in downtown and its surrounding areas would be financially prohibitive, and would only result in temporary relief from traffic congestion. Public purchase of private property abutting these streets would also be financially infeasible, especially in light of the intense infill development underway.

It's therefore important that the City implement alternative transportation modes to satisfy anticipated demand for effective mobility options in the City's areas of highest density. More important, rail transit has been proven to attract new transit riders, accommodate more passengers, with greater convenience and comfort than traditional bus, particularly in cities where there is a strong preference for the private automobile.

The streetcar is expected to support economic development by facilitating a sustainable downtown environment, by connecting neighborhoods, creating more pedestrian-friendly public spaces, and thereby enhancing quality of life in our downtown area and its adjacent neighborhoods.

The north-south section of the proposed route will connect to other transit service to ensure a complimentary and comprehensive transit network throughout the downtown area. Metromover provides service as far north as 15th Street; Streetcar would expand the transit coverage area another 25 blocks north to 40th Street, at an approximate capital cost of \$20 million per mile, compared to an approximate capital cost of \$100 million per mile for an elevated peplemover system. The streetcar also provides another link in our transit network, by connecting to the Health District area, one of the largest employment centers in South Florida. Although Metrorail connects the Government Center with the Health District stops, the streetcar will pick up local trips that originate in the downtown area. Metrorail will continue to carry the long-haul passenger, riding from Dadeland/Kendall or the Hialeah/north central parts of the county. .

Several responses to Randall O'Toole's document have been published, in which his assertions have been soundly rebutted and revealed for its flawed misrepresentation of "facts" to promote a pro-highway/roadway/single-occupant vehicle agenda. To name a few: The Center for Transportation Excellence in Washington, D.C. (www.cfte.org) has published a response that cites economic benefits and property value increases in areas with newer rail transit investments. The

University of North Texas, Center for Economic Development and Research has published study results that document similar trends in, Dallas, Texas.

The economic benefits to neighborhoods that derive from rail transit investment cannot be ignored. Economic studies conducted on the LRT system in Dallas, Texas showed property values 25 percent greater than those in a control group of neighborhoods not served by rail. A second study between 1997 and 2001 showed the median value of residential property increased 32.1 percent near rail stations compared to 19.5 percent in the control group, while office building values near fixed guideway stations increased 24.7 percent compared to 11.5 percent in the control group.¹ A 2001 study of property values in Santa Clara County, California (San Jose and surrounding vicinity) found that light rail accessibility increased commercial land values by \$4 per square foot for properties within a quarter-mile walk of a station.²

Changes in land values and development trends U.S. cities such as Sacramento, San Diego, Santa Clara (CA) and Portland (OR) have been documented in a report, "*Property Values Rise Near Public Transportation*", published by APTA, which cites development statistics in these cities. The report contains examples that show where significant improvements in property values in areas located within a five to ten-minute walk to transit have been observed.

To clarify a point made in Mr. Goodman's article: the San Diego "trolley" system is not a streetcar, or a trolley, but rather a light rail system, designed to carry larger volumes of passengers on long-haul commuter trips between the suburbs and downtown areas. Light Rail systems cost on average \$66 million per mile to construct (National Transit Database). Therefore, the \$30 million per mile in construction costs that were incurred for the San Diego system and cited by Mr. Goodman are not outside of the norm. Other features of the light rail system include vehicles that typically carry 120-150 passengers each, and travel at speeds of approximately 55-65 MPH. In comparison, streetcars are designed to run at top speeds of 25-40 mph, in mixed traffic.

Mr. Goodman alleges "cost overrun experiences of other cities with their light-rail systems . . ." His allegation is unfounded and not supported with any factual data from these referenced cities.

Numerous studies document the growth in passengers, urban renewal and regeneration, growth in property values and economic revitalization of areas along the alignments of new rail transit and near stations.

With reference to Mr. Goodman's incorrect statement that Portland's streetcar opened in 1986 at a financial deficit and with disappointing passenger volumes, the fact is that *Portland Streetcar's opening year was 2001 and has enjoyed enormous success in attracting strong ridership*. In fact, it is the city's MAX Light Rail system that opened its initial phase in 1986, with subsequent extensions in 1999, 2001 (to Portland International Airport), and in 2004 to North Portland, to cover an approximate 44 miles over the Portland Metro area.

¹ *An Assessment of the DART LRT on Taxable Property Valuations and Transit Oriented Development*, University of North Texas, September 2002.

² *Transit's Value-Added: Effects of Light Rail and Commuter Rail Services on Commercial Land Values*, University of California, Berkeley, November 2001.

Regarding overall performance, again, the facts speak for themselves. The system was built within budget, and has consistently exceeded all ridership forecasts prepared prior to opening year. According to ridership statistics reported by the Federal Transit Administration and documented in the National Transportation Database 1984 through 2004, Portland's MAX Light Rail system reported 17,541 daily passenger trips in its first year and has seen consistent increases in passengers annually. In 2003 and 2004, total passenger volumes totaled slightly more than 31 million boardings (or trips) each year, or about 93,000 to 94,000 average weekday trips. In its first year of operation, passenger volumes exceeded forecasts by 22 percent.

Following are a few more important facts about the Portland Streetcar. The initial 4.8-mile alignment, opened in July 2001, was built at a cost of \$57M. This was followed by a half-mile extension in March 2005, built for \$18 million. Another half-mile extension is now under construction, and is expected to cost \$15.8 million, which includes the purchase of three additional streetcar vehicles.

In 2004, weekday ridership totaled 5,600 riders. The key successes here is that the Portland Streetcar, similar to systems in other cities, has succeeded in attracting new transit ridership, by the demonstrated 87 percent ridership increase between 2001 (opening year) and 2004. It has become a critical link for neighborhoods located nearby or next to the alignment (some 80 percent of trips are made by area residents, shoppers and employees). The City has seen increased desirability of areas around the alignment, with extensive new residential and office development, including the redevelopment of an old industrial site that remained vacant for many years prior to the streetcar system construction.

Ridership forecasts for the proposed Miami Streetcar completed in 2006 estimate that in opening year (2010) daily ridership would be between 6,000 and 15,000 daily, depending on fare structure, with 2030 estimates between 7,400 and 17,000 daily riders. Special "trolley bus," with maximum passenger capacity of 40, will not be able to meet this demand. Miami has another challenge: we need to build a local area circulator that will entice local drivers out of their autos and onto city streets. We need to encourage pedestrians to use our downtown public spaces, those that are now under utilized, and those that are being created through new development. Rail transit has been proven in several North American cities to do just that because of its convenience, attractiveness, quietness, and emissions-free operations.

The City of Miami has spent the last 24 months carefully studying the options, assessing the benefits and potential issues associated with streetcar implementation, refining the project financial plan, listening to area stakeholders and incorporating comments and suggestions into the system's planning, to design and build an additional type of transit system that will complement our existing transit service. The streetcar will address the increased demand for service that will result from today's development trends. In addition, the City has been seriously exploring alternative project delivery methods used successfully in Canada, Europe (Spain) and the United Kingdom to minimize the financial risk and exposure to the City over the long term. This is not a frivolous pursuit of a nostalgic past, but a serious and dedicated effort to help our City function effectively today and in the future.

