

## **GMCC TOWN HALL MEETING: SMART PLAN**

**August 15, 2018**

The purpose of the Town Hall meeting was to gather information from experts in transportation solutions and different funding opportunities and options. Presenters included the Executive Director of our Transportation Planning Organization (TPO), the Director of Miami-Dade County Department of Transportation and Public Works, the CEO of the Miami Access Tunnel, a senior consultant from AECOM, experts in Bus Rapid Transit solutions, and the President of a major consulting firm experts in public/private partnership solutions.

We approached 8 different individuals from companies that are experts in rail, but none were able to accept our invitation to address our gathering.

We are currently working with the offices of Mayor Carlos Gimenez and State Representative Kionne McGhee to arrange a conference call with our Board for political opinions on the side of Bus Rapid Transit and Rail solutions respectively. This, we feel, will round out the picture of what are the options being considered that the support for either side. The Board will then take up further discussion and vote on the Greater Miami Chamber's position regarding the question of whether the Chamber should support the County's recommendation to apply for Federal Department of Transportation Small Starts Grant to construct Bus Rapid Transit and infrastructure on the south corridor with the potential for future rail conversion.

### **Aileen Boucle, Executive Director, Miami-Dade Transportation Planning Organization (TPO)**

- SMART Plan created and adopted in 2016
  - 2017 TPO adopted \$30 million annually 2023 over 30 years \$1B
  - In 40 year proforma for the SMART Plan is \$8B which is very back loaded
    - \$1.5 billion over first 20 years
    - \$3 billion over years 20-30
    - \$3 billion over years 30-40
  - Challenge is obtaining the funding for the start of the projects
    - You may have noted recently in the administration's release of the budget, in a 40 year Proforma, and in their discussion with the industry over financing the SMART Plan, you'll see that we have just over \$8 billion. It's important to know that in that Proforma it is significantly back end loaded. And that is our challenge, here in our community, is how we would advance transit in the earlier part of the plan where our funding challenges are at its highest.
    - As part of financing, the TPO Board has stated repeatedly that they want to maintain an opportunity to have a federal partnership for funding, state partnership for funding, but there's also the possibility for public/private partnerships.
- TPO deciding on 1<sup>st</sup> of 6 corridors to go through the local preferred alternative (LPA) funding process
- Next step is dev of 1<sup>st</sup> locally preferred alternative – which is a vote essentially on the technology (Bus Rapid Transit v Rail options) and is the crux of the 8/30 vote
  - There are Fed and State as well as P3 funding opportunities

- Current recommendation being advanced is for BRT with option for rail conversion later
  - Long-term goal is to bring rail to the South corridor per ridership preference
- County has prioritized North & South corridors, but as soon as studies are completed for each, funding sources will be investigated.

**Alice Bravo - Director, Department of Transportation and Public Works, Miami-Dade County**

- Low population density along the transit corridors
- Miami-Dade County has studied all potential transit solutions:
  - Heavy Rail Transit
  - Light Rail Transit
  - Bus Rapid Transit
  - Connected and Autonomous Vehicles
- Bus Rapid Transit today is the most immediate and fundable solution, with rail potential in the future
  - BRT offers similar infrastructure as would be needed for rail therefore funds available now also support rail conversion in the future
  - Upgrade to rail possible once ridership improves and funding is available
  - Federal money is available today through the Small Starts Grant FDOT funding
  - State money will only come after federal money
- Small Starts Grant is geared towards faster delivery and is for projects under \$250 million
  - New Start Grants for projects over \$1.3 billion are available but would require about another 10 years to go through the process
- Projected Costs
  - BRT: \$243 million cost
    - Equals 12% of available SMART Plan funds for all corridors
  - Rail: \$1.3 billion cost
    - Equals 73% of available SMART Plan funds for all corridors
  - Annual operations and maintenance
    - BRT: \$865 million
    - Rail: \$4.2 billion
  - Ridership projections by 2040
    - BRT: additional 10,000 – 11,000 daily rides
    - Rail: additional 16,000-18,000 daily rides
    - Comparison to Current Metrorail: 70,000 daily rides (considered low ridership)
    - Current Metro mover: 35,000 daily rides
- Why BRT?
  - Same travel time perhaps better
  - Ridership – right size solution for # of riders and density of population
  - Flexible to convert to rail (infrastructure is usable with minor upgrades)
  - Public engagement and support from
    - Pinecrest Homestead, FL City
    - Herald, LBA
  - No further National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) impact studies needed
  - If rail selected,
    - Further studies additional years
    - Noise/etc

### **Donald Yuratovac – AECOM's National BRT Expert**

Donald was the project manager for BRT implementation in Cleveland, Ohio. He shared several BRT formats. Some have had great success, like Cleveland, they had a 35% travel time improvement. Weekday ridership increased from 8,900 to 14,000. [This is an atypical result.] They were creative with naming rights funding for the lines and stations. Cleveland also saw property values increase along their BRT corridor.

### **Chris Hodgkins – CEO, Miami Access Tunnel**

Chris shared the P3 success of the Miami Access Tunnel and how his team collaborated to secure financing.

### **Lowell Clary - Clary Consulting Company President**

Lowell reviewed several P3 financing structures for municipalities. P3s share the risk of the project and bring in outside, previously unavailable expertise.

### **Rail Option**

While no one was available to discuss the rail side of the equation for the Town Hall, arguments for supporting a rail only option have been as follows.

1. The PTP half penny tax approved by voters decades ago was promoted to expand the Metro Rail system. The actual language of the referendum allowed for BRT, but the public assumption was it was for rail exclusively.
2. Rail is permanent and cannot be diverted by subsequent county leadership
3. Rail's permanence would encourage commercial and residential development along the corridor
4. It is believed that Rail would attract greater ridership

### **Open Discussion - Full Panel Question/Answer**

#### **Is there flexibility in the south corridor for BRT to switch to rail?**

Yes. It's being developed as an interim step that will ultimately be converted to rail once funding is available for that.

#### **What is the TPO deciding on August 30?**

1. Selection of Miami-Dade's locally preferred alternative (BRT vs. rail). The Department of Transportation and Public Works is proposing BRT as the locally preferred alternative.
2. Modification to current plan that would make the South Corridor eligible to solicit funding opportunities

#### **If BRT is selected, how could we convert to rail?**

Ridership volume increase is the determinant. Daily ridership would need to increase to 35,000. Many current BRT projects across North America are being converted to rail. (Canada has 4 cities doing this.)

#### **How can the business community get involved?**

Back the TPO's decision to bring unity and add legitimacy to the BRT to Rail solution.

#### **Federal Transportation Administration (FTA) was asked to pressure local political leadership to support rail in Miami-Dade**

They responded that it is a local decision and Feds would not opine.

