

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting**  
**Agenda Item E-2**  
**June 11, 2019**  
**City Commission Chambers**  
**405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL**

**City Commission**

**Mayor Raul Valdes-Fauli**  
**Vice Mayor Vince Lago**  
**Commissioner Jorge Fors, Jr.**  
**Commissioner Pat Keon**  
**Commissioner Michael Mena**

**City Staff**

**City Manager, Peter Iglesias**  
**City Attorney, Miriam Ramos**  
**City Clerk, Billy Urquia**

**Public Speaker(s)**

**Javier Betancourt, Executive Director MDC Citizens' Independent Transportation Trust**

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Agenda Item E-2 [9:54:56 a.m.]

Personal Appearance by Javier Betancourt, Executive Director, Miami-Dade County Citizens' Independent Transportation Trust.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Personal appearance by Javier Betancourt, Executive Director Miami-Dade County, Citizens' Independent Transportation Trust. Good morning. Welcome to your City.

Mr. Betancourt: Good morning Mr. Mayor, Mr. Vice Mayor, Commissioners, Mr. Manager, my family. I feel like I never really left Coral Gables. Certainly, Coral Gables never left me. It's a pleasure to be back.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: I called you a traitor when you left.

Mr. Betancourt: You did. I hope you meant that joking. This community is still very much a part of me Mr. Mayor. My kids go to Coral Gables Prep, my wife works at Coral Gables Museum and

*City Commission Meeting*  
*June 11, 2019*

we spend most of our disposable income here at your shops and restaurants. So, I'm still working on economic development on your behalf. With me today, I'm not sure if he's arrived, but he will shortly, is Alfred Holzman. Mr. Holzman is a member of the Transportation Trust and the Head of the Municipal Committee. And this is really just to provide you and the community an update on the people's transportation plan. So, I'm going to go through a PowerPoint, I'm going to go through fairly quickly. If you have any questions or want a discussion, I could certainly take questions or we can pause throughout, you let me know. But before I do that, I do want to thank in particular members of your team who work with us on a regular basis. This really is a model City. We work with every municipality in the County, as well as the County, and I can tell you, you have no better group of transportation professionals than you do here in the City of Coral Gables. Kevin Kinney, John, your City Manager, Assistant City Manager, Jessica, all work with us and do a great job on behalf of the City. We even work fairly regularly with the Vice Mayor through his role on the TPO, so I know you are very well represented there as well. So, thank you. Very quick background on the Transportation Trust. We were created at the same time that the voters of our county approved the half-penny increase in their sales tax in 2002. So, for a time it went from six and-a-half to seven percent. That half-penny was to go toward a series of transportation improvements called the Peoples' Transportation Plan. The voters also required that that plan and that collection of revenue be overseen by Citizens Independent Transportation Trust. That is the group that I represent. No really, I'm staffed to the CITT. The CITT is really this group of individuals volunteer board members; one appointed by each of the District Commissioners; one by Mayor Gimenez; and one by the Dade League of Cities. We do have a number of vacancies, and so, I'm encouraging anyone who's interested in serving to please apply. Commissioner Sosa, for instance has a vacancy, which I know covers a large portion of your City. We are guided by several things – Florida Statute which was recently amended, and we are still trying to understand the implications of those changes. We have a couple of ordinances at the county that establish both the CITT's role and authority and the Peoples' Transportation Plan, the list of projects; our own By-Laws of course; and then like any good government agency, we have a five-year plan. That is the book that lists all of the projects for which sur-tax dollars are being used. All of this information can be found online. We believe very much in transparency, so please visit our website, [www.miamidade.gov/citt](http://www.miamidade.gov/citt), you can find all of this and more. I won't go through the project review and approval process, unless you want to discuss it, its very lengthy. But suffice it to say that we look at every project that's proposed for sur-tax use at the county level, we review that, and we make a recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners. The BCC can only override our recommendation with a two-thirds vote. So, we are not the final authority on these projects, but we do have what I'd call relatively strong recommendations. This is not the process by which we review and approve municipal projects. Municipalities actually get their money upfront; you do essentially what you want with it, within the guidelines, and then we audit you on the back end. As I said, one of our primary functions is to audit the county and the municipalities

*City Commission Meeting  
June 11, 2019*

to ensure that the sur-tax funds have been spent appropriately. Most of the cities do a good job; there are a handful that we occasionally have some trouble with, and we then recapture those funds, but I can tell you that no city has done a better job of managing their funds than the City of Coral Gables. You've never had any major audit findings, and again, that's a testament to your professional team. So, we've been collecting this tax now for almost 17 years. Over that time, over \$3 billion dollars, \$3.2, have been collected. Sixty-six percent (66%) of those funds has gone for transit. Now it hasn't necessarily gone to transit expansion, as originally envisioned. A lot of it has been used to help operate and maintain and upgrade the existing system, which of course has become a very controversial piece of history. Twenty-two percent (22%) of the funds have gone to the municipalities. The original deal was that 20 percent of the funds would go to the cities, distributed on a prorate basis, but as cities have joined the county, we've had three join since 2002, that number has actually increased. Only 8 percent is going to Public Works at the County for roadway projects. I think there is a myth in the community that all the funds have been spent on roadway projects and not transit, the numbers don't bear that out. It's actually less than 10 percent has gone to roadway. They've just done a much better job of translating those dollars into completed projects. Less than one percent goes to our office for administration. We are actually able to spend up to five percent for overhead, but we want that money to be spent on the street and in projects, and so, we do a very good job of keeping that at one. And then we have a small fund balance with which we hope to make significant improvements in the transit system through the SMART Plan. This is essentially the same information presented on an annual basis, again, we can discuss that in more detail if you like. So, what were the original promises? - and you will hear a lot of references to both the referendum, which included a summary of the projects and Exhibit 1. Exhibit 1 was the exhibit to the ordinance establishing the PTP; and it actually had a laundry list of projects that were promised to the voters, not just transit. Of course, everyone remembers the rapid transit projects, you know the map showing the corridors, extended throughout the county. There were also supposed to be significant improvements to our bus system and our roadway system. Over 42 projects originally listed in Exhibit 1 for roadway improvements. Of course, the municipal improvements, that's the 20 percent I discussed earlier. There is also fair-free transit for all seniors throughout the county, what we now call the "Golden Passport," which was then extended to include veterans under a certain income threshold, which we now call the "Patriot Passport." Those are called for fair-free Metro Mover and a series of what we call neighborhood improvement project, smaller projects such as traffic synchronization, paving, lighting, etc. And what have we done with those promises to date? A lot of accomplishments and then a lot of work left to be done, as you know. The major accomplishment was the extension of Metrorail to the airport. That was one of the corridors in the original PTP that was accomplished. Immediately upon passage of the sales tax, we did provide that fair-free transit to seniors through the "Golden Passport," extended later to "Patriots" to veterans. We have used the dollars to completely renew the rolling stock of the system, so Metro Mover cars, new buses, which are eco-friendly now for

*City Commission Meeting  
June 11, 2019*

C&G and hybrid technology, and of course new Metrorail cars, which I think we are about the mid-way point changing over those metro cars that were very much overdue for replacement. Of course, the cities have done a phenomenal job with their 20 percent. We have 27 different trolley systems operating throughout the county, most of them free. We of course, completed a number of roadway projects, as discussed earlier, and associated with that some advanced traffic management systems to make basically our intersections smarter for smart signalization. Here's a quick overview of those municipal systems and the ridership carrying around 14 million passengers a year, which is phenomenal, its very popular, growing at about ten percent a year historically while other transit ridership is declining, the municipal ridership seems to continue to increase. I'm sure a big part of that is the fact that they are fair-free. And Coral Gables specifically operates what we call or consider a model trolley system. When new cities are coming online and asking about how to start a trolley system, we always point them to Coral Gables, because you've been doing it the longest and you've been doing it among the best. You are carrying over, I have 1.2 here, but we are at 1.3 million riders a year; you area connecting to the existing transit system; you are connecting to your neighboring communities, such as the City of Miami, and now you are also complimenting that with an on-demand service "Freebie" which I'm proud to say I helped to bring here when I worked at the City. So, all of this is working in tandem to try to get people out of their cars and into "green" complimentary transit service. The county also uses some of its dollars to build the University Metro Station pedestrian bridge, providing safe, first/last connectivity to the existing system. So, it's a combination of municipal projects and county projects here within the City of Coral Gables. So, the cities are fulfilling their end of the bargain; the county has also fulfilled, I would say, largely its promises to enhance its roadway system. Seventy-four percent (74%) of the roadway projects promised in the PTP have been completed and the remaining corridor are in progress. So that's the good news, but we also have to be honest. A lot of things that were promised have not come to fruition. I'll start with bus service. Here you see in the yellow bar the number of revenue miles of the bus system in existence in 2002. You see the green bar to the left is what was promised to the voters, it was an increase of about 63 percent; and we started to make progress on that and due to the recession and other factors that leveled off and actually started to decline, and here today, in the yellow bar, you can see we are roughly at the same amount of bus service we were at when the tax was passed in 2002. So clearly, we have not met that promise. But the one that most people remember, and most people are frustrated with is the lack of progress in our rapid transit corridor. Here is the Metrorail in existence at the time of the passage, here is the promise. We were going to extend Metrorail or some kind of rapid transit to every corner of the county; and here we are 17 years later and the only thing we've been able to accomplish is the extension of Metrorail to the airport. So, I know you are frustrated with the lack of progress on this, and I know the community is frustrated, we are frustrated and so, the question is, what do we do about it? Well, if you look at the original PTP map, you will see it bears a strikingly resemblance to the SMART Plan and I won't go into the SMART Plan, too much detail

*City Commission Meeting  
June 11, 2019*

because I think its been presented to you and to the community at large, but its essentially the same thing as the original PTP. And we are now putting all of our efforts into implementing and completing the SMART Plan, and if we are able to achieve that, then we would have fulfilled that original promise. The SMART Plan again, quick overview would take rapid transit, not necessarily Metrorail, and extend that to along six corridors – to the beach, along the east/west roughly paralleling 836; the Kendall corridor; the north corridor, along 27<sup>th</sup> Avenue; the northeast corridor, along the existing FEC tracks; and the south corridor, down to Homestead. That’s complimented by an extensive system of what they call bus express rapid transit systems. If you are aware, the express bus that runs on I-95 in the express lane, they want to take that concept and expand that to essentially all the different highways in Miami-Dade County. The Palmetto, I-75, potentially the Turnpike, are all introducing those express lanes, they’ll be able to run express buses along those lanes to get people to where they need to go more quickly. All six of those corridors are currently underway, what we call the PD&E phase, project development environment phase. That study is necessary in order to bring down federal funds and those federal funds are necessary to complete these projects. Its all extraordinarily expensive and we can’t afford it with our half-penny alone and it was never the plan to do so. It was always expected that the half-penny would be used as a local match to pursue federal and state funds. Complimenting the PD&E is the TPO’s land use scenario and visioning planning exercises. In other words, you have the PD&E looking at the transportation component and then the TPO is looking at the land use component, because those two things need to be in sync and work together for all of this to make sense. The county and the TPO have identified two priorities out of those six corridors, that’s the south Dade corridor and the north corridor. For south Dade they’ve already chosen a technology bus rapid transit, the Mayor likes to say its essentially a train on rubber tires. You’ll have gates coming down at intersections, you’ll have level boarding, pre-paid fares, etc. That project is currently underway. The north corridor, they somewhat selected a locally preferred alternative. Now they want to go to a fixed elevated guideway and to come back to the TPO in the next few months with a final technology, like with Metrorail, Metro Mover, Monorail...etc. This all cost a ton of money, as I said. We are talking about multiple billions of dollars. So, we have our half-penny secured and we are trying to redirect that toward the purpose of expanding transit, as originally intended. The TPO did identify, I think it was a billion dollars of funding over the next 30 years that they could apply toward the SMART Plan. The county did pass a tax increment financing district to capture the increased values of properties along the corridors and reinvest those dollars back into the system, that’s generating another two billion dollars over 30 years, but its still not enough to complete the entire plan. So, we are looking at all these additional revenue sources, whether its MDX, if they continue to exist, or their successor, the Turnpike, local option gas tax, parking revenue, etc. We need to look under every nook and cranny and find enough funding to complete what we call a funding lasagna, just layer, upon layer, upon layer, upon funding to be able to complete these projects. Last slide, I know I’ve gone a little long, I apologize. In addition to just primary role of oversight of the

*City Commission Meeting  
June 11, 2019*

dollars, we are engaged in a number of other different areas of focus. We believe very strongly in first/last mile. Ridership throughout the country is in decline. We believe a major reason for that is that its not as convenient as hailing an Uber or Lift. People want to get to where they are going from to where they are going as conveniently as possible. And let's face it, transit doesn't always provide the most convenient solution, because you have to either walk to a station, take a bus to a station, etc. So, we need to invest in our bicycle-pedestrian infrastructure, something I know the City is doing very well; on- demand connectivity's through services such as Freebie. I myself gave up my car a year ago. I bike to work, or I bike to the Metrorail Station, I'll use Freebie, I use the scooters, and when those don't work, I'll take Uber and Lift and that's been working very well for me. I know its not a solution for everyone. But we need to improve dramatically in that area. Enhancing county and municipal connectivity is a focus of not only the CITT, but of the county. As I said, we have Miami-Dade transit, Tri-rail, and on top of that 27 different individual transit systems now throughout the county. We need to do a better job of connecting those both physically, as again Coral Gables had done with the City of Miami, but also via technology. Currently, there is not one app that a rider can go to that will combine all these different services into one platform. System maintenance and cleanliness has become a major issue and major focus of ours and actually something Mr. Holtzman, who has joined us, has brought to our attention at the CITT. Simply put we are not satisfied. I know no one in the county is satisfied with the level of cleanliness of the system and we are providing greater oversight to ensure that that improves and also just ongoing operations and maintenance. We've invested millions, if not billions of dollars in new vehicles, new stations, and we need to make sure that those are maintained so that we don't have to prematurely reinvest in those things in the future. And finally, community outreach – I think the public, officials, everyone is talking about the PTP, but there is also a lot of misinformation out there and that's partially our fault. We haven't done a good enough job of going to the community and providing updates on what's happening, taking questions, taking input as to how to improve it. So that's part of why I'm here today. I'm going to all the Cities, different community organizations, Chambers, to talk about the PTP, the good, the bad, the ugly, and the hopeful, and with that I'd be happy to answer any questions.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you. Thank you very much. I'd like to ask a question and thank you for your appearance and a very, very good presentation. The advance traffic management system, are you doing any of that in Coral Gables or is that mostly elsewhere?

Mr. Betancourt: Its countywide.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Are you doing anything in Coral Gables?

Mr. Betancourt: Particularly any county road that runs through the City.

*City Commission Meeting  
June 11, 2019*

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: U.S.-1.

Mr. Betancourt: U.S.-1 is going to have this system.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: When – are you doing anything now?

Mr. Betancourt: We are getting an update, actually at our next meeting on that. We are taking a tour of the traffic control center, which we invested in and they are going to provide us an update on that. So, once I get that I can pass that along.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: This is intelligent intersections and if there is no traffic turning left then the left light doesn't come on, etc. I think it will help 10-15 percent of our traffic.

Mr. Betancourt: That's the idea – absolutely.

Commissioner Keon: It will also be along LeJeune?

Mr. Betancourt: It should be.

Commissioner Keon: That's the worst.

Mr. Betancourt: It's the entire county network. Particularly, if it's a county road or, I believe, potentially even a state road, they are looking to replace all of the traffic signals with this technology.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: North to south and south to north, you'll get to us at about 2030.

Mr. Betancourt: Components of this have already been underway. I know the first part was to replace the technology, that was basically the hardware. Now they are going in and implementing the software piece to actually activate these smart signals. I think it's a shorter timeframe than 2030 certainly, but I can provide you more details as soon as we get our update next week.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you.

Vice Mayor Lago: Mr. Betancourt, first of all, I want to thank you for being here. It's a pleasure not only to have worked with you at the City of Coral Gables, but also work hand-in-hand as a representative for the City on the TPO. You do an exceptional job on the CITT, but I want to, not

*City Commission Meeting  
June 11, 2019*

only commend you for your job, but I want to commend you for your honesty, because I've had the opportunity to sit on a panel with you and have real candid conversations in regards to the current state of our transportation system. So, I'm not going to rehash what – I think you did an exceptional job on really talking about where we are right now and certain failures that we've had in the system, which are not anyone's responsibility here, our responsibility now, but we weren't the cause of it. When you talk about where was – basically completed by the PTP, you mentioned about the line...the orange line, its about two miles. The goal as we continue to build the City and you see a lot of urban infill and you see all these...these developments that are forthcoming, is to build a robust transportation system that really delivers on the promises on the half-penny. I'm a believer that the half-penny is only the beginning, we may have to even have another half-penny, but we've lost the public trust. So, to deliver and to be able to get another half-penny, we need more people like you and the efforts where you come before cities and municipalities and you tell them the truth. People want to be told the truth, people want to know what the current situation is. I did not vote in reference to the BRT, I did not vote in favor of that, I voted for rail, I think that's the only solution, especially on the corridor heading south; and I think that's a battle that we may have lost, but I don't think we've lost the war, because eventually either that's going to have to be reconsidered or its not going to be effective, as you know bus ridership is down significantly. So, implementing more buses, in my opinion, and I'm not a transportation expert, is not the course that we should be headed in. I really think that we need to have discussions on the half-penny and how we are going to implement the SMART Plan, how we are going to deliver on the SMART Plan, how are we going to connect cities. There is an opportunity, I see our future is bright, especially with people like you in positions like the CITT. I really think that with Commissioner Sosa did, and I give her credit for after I, for a long time mentioned that unwinding had to occur today, not in three or four years when it was less painful and certain people were out of office. I really believe that unwinding needs to occur now and the funds needs to be directed, like you mentioned, they need to be directed for the intended purpose of why people voted for the half-penny, and that is for implementation and for right-of-way purchase. So, I want to commend you for being here. I know this is not an easy task to do. I know its not easy to come before municipalities and talk about the problems that we are having in the City, the problems that we are having in this community, because we've gone from transportation being a backburner issue to now being the issue in regard to whether this community will continue to prosper. There was a wonderful article yesterday in the South Florida Business Journal, I don't know if you had a chance, where they talked about the fact that our growth is directly connected to whether we can truly deliver on world-class transportation. So, I want to thank you for being here. I want to thank you everything that you do for the CITT. It's a pleasure to work with you, the TPO and the CITT work hand-in-hand on the benefit of this community as-a-whole. So, thank you.

Mr. Betancourt: Thank you Vice Mayor.

*City Commission Meeting  
June 11, 2019*



Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you very much. Any other questions?

Commissioner Keon: When you are talking about going south, it's the existing route.

Mr. Betancourt: The existing transit – used to be called the busway now it's the transit-way.

Commissioner Keon: That's the existing...

Mr. Betancourt: And that's one of the reasons, I think, they chose that as one of the top priorities, it was low-hanging fruit. We already own the corridor, just a matter of enhancing what's there. And that project is slated to cost about \$300 million, we are putting in \$100 million of our half-penny, the state is matching that with \$100 million and we are working to get \$100 million from the federal government.

Commissioner Keon: OK. When do you anticipate the east/west corridors to be considered?

Mr. Betancourt: All the corridors should be coming before the TPO for what they call a locally prepared alternative selection, sometime this year.

Commissioner Keon: Right.

Mr. Betancourt: So, they are just kind of in succession over these next few months. Now just because you chose a locally prepared alternative doesn't mean that the funds are in place to implement the project and that's where the priorities really become important.

Commissioner Keon: OK. So, once you have all of them locally preferred options or whatever and then you have your funding, you'll be able to come back and play out a plan going forward as to how you are going to move.

Vice Mayor Lago: The plan exists already it's called a SMART Plan.

Commissioner Keon: Well, I know the SMART Plan exist, but it's the implementation of the SMART Plan.

Vice Mayor Lago: Yes, but that's where it comes in on the TPO. So, for the first time ever the TPO is lockstep in regard to delivering on the corridors. Before there was a little bit of – we have our legislators here and our Senator who can really give us an overview in regard to this, but there's

*City Commission Meeting  
June 11, 2019*

been a lot of infighting in regard to the TPO, in reference to, I want my corridor first, I want that corridor first. So, for the first time ever, as a group, the TPO stood up and said, let's make sure that we deliver in the south and then we deliver in the north, the east/west. I want to be upfront because you ask the question, so as the representative I want to like, our esteemed colleague here doing a great job, the fact that he's being honest with us and telling us that the funding is not in place and the plan hasn't been delivered, we can vote on it, on the TPO, but that doesn't mean that its going to happen within one or even five years. This could take up to a decade if not longer. In 16 years the TPO has been able to deliver on two miles of rail, which is the orange line connecting the Metrorail to the airport. I tell you these things, not because I want to down play or give you bad news, I just want to give you the real news, and I think that's what is critical in what you are doing, because if enough people in this community understand the current state of our transportation system then they will hold our elected officials accountable, and I think that is critical. That we hold and we make this a priority, because if you are going to go back to the well and ask for another half-penny similar to what Broward just did, where they actually got a full penny, correct me if I'm wrong, you have to build the public trust and right now I think that's something that we lack, because we haven't built that public trust. We haven't used the money as was detailed when people voted for the PTP for the half-penny funding.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you very much.

Commissioner Keon: You will have a plan after all of the voting is done, so when is the SMART Plan – is how you implement the SMART Plan?

Mr. Betancourt: Vice Mayor the plan is there, we'll have updates once these all get their technology selected. Either we, the TPO, we often do these things together, could come back before the City and provide you an update.

Commissioner Keon: How long is that? – like when do you expect that to be...

Mr. Betancourt: We are expecting the end of the year, so I would say maybe early next year in January we could come back and provide you with a more detailed update.

Commissioner Keon: OK. Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you Javier. Thank you very much.

Mr. Betancourt: Pleasure. Thank you.

*City Commission Meeting  
June 11, 2019*

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you – very good presentation.

[End: 10:21:25 a.m.]