

Transportation

VIEW FROM MIRACLE MILE & SALZEDO



Coral Gables is building its municipal mobility hub with consideration of changes now in the offing.

\$40 million Gables mobility project targets electric, self-driving vehicles

By ABRAHAM GALVAN

Coral Gables city commissioners got the opportunity to see official renderings and a glimpse of how the Coral Gables Mobility Hub is going to change and elevate the city into the future.

During last week's city commission meeting, design and architecture firm Gensler presented in detail all the features the estimated \$40 million mobility hub at 245 Andalusia Ave. is to offer for residents and visitors when it's completed in the first quarter of 2024.

The hub is to have an internal drive-thru lane for ridesharing services, retail and bicycle storage. It will also offer dockless vehicle parking, bike share docking stations, a wi-fi lounge, e-Commerce Logistics for drone package deliveries and pop-up coffee shops.

The first level is reserved for electric vehicles, with charging stations in all spaces. Intermediate levels will be self-parking that can accommodate self-driving vehicles in the future. The open-air rooftop is to feature landscaped areas, venue space, café restaurant, lounging areas and areas to practice sports.

"As we move forward with mo-

bility, we know there's going to be changes, there's a big debate in the industry, whether that's 10 years from now, whether it's 20 years from now, but it's coming," said Kevin Kinney, Coral Gables' parking director. "It will happen, and it may be a generational thing and it may be our kids or my grandkids that have to see it through."

The city has already signed an agreement with Weitz Company to manage the construction of the mobility hub. Construction is scheduled to begin in September of next year.

"If you tell me we're going to build this foundation and we're going to build this incredible building," Mayor Vince Lago said, "and we can possibly have two floors of commercial space that could bring significant money and attraction to the community, we could bring world-class tenants that would want to be in such a facility like this. We just want to keep our options open and just show that we're interested in doing whatever staff can dream up. Let's just talk about it," he continued.

The cost-benefit of adding commercial floors needs to be considered, said Vice Mayor

Michael Mena.

"What kind of income will that generate, what's the cost of it? You're already incurring the costs for building the existing proposed structure, how much more is it to build another floor and how much can you generate on that? Those are all things we need to tackle," the vice mayor said.

Push the envelope to what's allowed to see what can be done is necessary, said Commissioner Kirk R. Menendez. "It's better to make decisions, forward-thinking, instead of looking back and wishing you had taken that step. I'm looking forward to seeing the price tag and how we're going to do it, but definitely, we need to do something. Our Miracle Mile area needs it."

"There's a lot of opportunity moving forward. Let's start gathering ideas and possible costs," Mayor Lago added. "This concept that you basically showed us evolves into the possibility of retooling the parking hub, what is built in 5, 6, 7 years from now into something else like a commercial or office space floors. That is what will make us all proud and we could potentially be the first city to take on a structure of this magnitude."

Cargo bikes get new spark

By LAUREN LAMB

The electric cargo bikes that were put into action in May 2020 for a one-year pilot program are going to stay. Downtown Development Authority chairman Manolo Reyes gave approval to the project with DHL Express, a shipping and courier delivery company.

"The pilot was quite a success, and I'd like to extend it to other companies such as Federal Express," Mr. Reyes said. The goal was to avoid traffic and blocking roads downtown when companies had deliveries.

The cargo bikes can pull up to 400 pounds. They are used only to de-

liver goods, packages and services. To avoid traffic, the cargo bikes can be parked in loading zones, or if that parking isn't available, they will park in bicycle parking areas along sidewalks to unload their cargo. They may park on the street only if they don't block traffic and do not reduce the sidewalk width to less than three feet.

"It has received a lot of praise," Mr. Reyes said. The cargo bikes' pilot program was restricted to downtown Miami, Brickell and the Coral Way corridor, he noted, but "I'd love to expand the electric cargo bikes to more places because it was so successful in reducing traffic and congestion."



DHL Express cargo bikes to stay.

Airport expects spike in international travel

By MONICA CORREA

With the return of international travel for vaccinated non-US citizens nationwide, Miami International Airport expects a spike in overall passengers following a steady increase in air traffic since the lowest numbers of the pandemic.

The Biden administration announced Oct. 15 that the US will lift international travel restrictions for fully vaccinated travelers Nov. 8 for about 39 nations previously restricted since 2020. According to the Miami-Dade Aviation Department, six of those nations, including China, Mexico and Brazil, were among Miami International Airport's busiest tourist markets in 2019.

Greg Chin, director of communications for the Aviation Department, said the lifting of international travel restrictions will make a huge difference in the increase of overall flying passengers at MIA.

"Our domestic traffic has rebounded at 95% compared to 2019," Mr. Chin said. "It's the international travel that it's still down at 50% compared to what we saw in 2019."

MIA's latest airport statistics mark July with an 836.34% increase in total international passengers compared with last July, and a 248.8% increase in total domestic passengers. Last year, 152,055 international passengers flew to and from Miami in July, and this July 1,423,749 did so. For domestic travelers during the same month, 684,332 passengers traveled last year, compared to 2,386,922 this year.

In 2020 Miami International had 7,406,579 international travelers, down 66.91% from 2019, and a domestic passenger total of 11,257,279, down 52.18% from 2019. This combined for a total loss of 59.36% in overall air travel revenues.

The Aviation Department foresees for the fourth quarter a larger wave of passengers to MIA, with already 7.7 million of its 22.8 million total passengers through August traveling internationally, according to the department.

Last year, MIA ranked second in international passengers flying and first in tons of international freight. In 2019 it ranked third in international passengers and first in tons of international freight, according to global data from the Airports Council International.

"We really benchmark ourselves against 2019 traffic — as far as determining when we rebounded — because 2020 was at its worst, when we were down 95% and started to creep up as the year went on," said Mr. Chin. "Everything compared to last year is better."

Domestic travel at MIA is 5% lower than 2019, but published airline schedules are showing a 10.1% increase in departing seat

capacity from October to December compared to 2019 levels.

American Airlines remains MIA's busiest carrier, Mr. Chin said. American is to increase its flight schedule to the most at the airport since the pandemic hit, with 340 daily flights by December, he said. According to a press release, American Airlines will add two new international destinations and six new domestic routes during November and December, offering a total 130 non-stop destinations.

Frontier, which is among MIA's top carriers, will launch nine new non-stop routes from Miami, including new services to Aruba and the Turks and Caicos, for a total of 41 non-stop domestic and international destinations, according to the Aviation Department.

Spirit Airlines, which began serving MIA Oct. 6 with nine destinations, will expand on Nov. 17 to 28 cities and in January will add three more international destinations to total 11 international and 20 domestic destinations. "That will be another huge boost and it already has been, so far," said Mr. Chin.

Other top performing airlines by seat sales are Delta, Southwest, Jet Blue and United, he added.

"We've been the busiest airport for international passengers in the US, even with the downturn of international traffic," Mr. Chin said. "Even with 50% of what we were doing [in 2019], we're the leading airport in the US for international passengers."

According to the Aviation Department, MIA and four general aviation airports — Miami-Opa-locka Executive Airport, Miami Executive Airport, Miami Homestead General Aviation Airport and Dade-Collier Training and Transition Airport — generate \$31.9 billion for Florida's economy and contribute 275,708 jobs directly and indirectly.

MIA has been recognized by the Airports Council International's airport health accreditation program for its health measures and procedures following the Covid-19 pandemic.

"We continue to have signage throughout the airport at all our check-in counters, reminding people to wash their hands and about the mask mandate, which is a federal requirement," Mr. Chin said. "We also continue to have audio messages playing around the airport as a reminder."

"We know tourism is a huge driver of business revenue and jobs in our community," Mr. Chin said. "More flights and more passengers mean more tourists spending in our community; it means more job availability because companies need to hire more people in hotels, restaurants, transportation. It's a win-win for our community when we have more visitors coming to Miami-Dade County."