

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item E-1
September 26, 2017
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Raul Valdes-Fauli
Vice Mayor Pat Keon
Commissioner Vince Lago
Commissioner Frank Quesada
Commissioner Michael Mena

City Staff

City Manager, Cathy Swanson-Rivenbark
City Attorney, Craig E. Leen
City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman
Deputy City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Esteban Bovo, Jr., Chairman of TPO
Aileen Boucle, TPO Executive Director

Agenda Item E-1 [9:04:07 a.m.]

Presentation by Aileen Boucle, Miami-Dade Transportation Planning Organization (TPO) Executive Director, regarding Strategic Miami Area Rapid Transit (SMART) Plan.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: And now we are going to take something out of order. Chairman Bovo is here and also the Executive Director of the Miami-Dade Transportation Planning Organization Aileen Boucle and I'd like to call on our TPO member, Commissioner Lago to introduce this next item.

Commissioner Lago: Thank you Mayor, thank you on behalf of the Commission. It's a distinct honor to have Chairman Bovo here, he's been an incredible public servant over the past, I would say, decade to decade and-a-half. He's been serving this community with distinction, not only at the local level, but throughout the state and it's also a pleasure to introduce a new friend of mine

who I had the pleasure of being briefed by last week as a new member of the TPO, something that this Commission has been fighting for, for the last three years, because finally we are going to have a say on how transportation is defined, because it will be defined over the next few years as a result of the efforts of the County Commission, especially Chairman Bovo. So, I want to take the opportunity first off to thank the County Commission, the MPO which is now the TPO, our dear friend Commissioner Suarez, I don't know if it's too early, but maybe we can call him Mayor Suarez for the City of Miami, for helping us get on the TPO and being staunch advocates of the City of Coral Gables. So with that I'd like to, not only acknowledge them, but ask them to please say a few words and talk a little bit about the SMART Plan.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Welcome.

Chairman Bovo: Thank you Mayor, good morning, thank you Commissioner. Just following up on that presentation of that part-timer who is learning Mandarin, teaching the Bible, wanting to work part-time, I feel totally inadequate at this part. At a very young age he seems to have gotten it, so God Bless him. First and foremost, Commissioner Lago, welcome to the TPO, today will be your first, I guess, official meeting as we have an emergency meeting today to deal with issues of transportation; and in conversations that the Commissioner and I have had and perhaps with many of you feel the same way, the transportation really becomes the number one issue for Miami-Dade County. It really speaks to sustainability, economically of Miami-Dade County, it speaks to our ability to be able to project ourselves into the future and really give an opportunity for future generations to continue to call Miami-Dade County home. I will tell you that I feel that we have failed generations by not attending to this issue in a more aggressive fashion. We now come to realize that everyone in Dade County has an issue that impedes their ability of quality of life and that is traffic. We are stuck in a quagmire of traffic. Today is another perfect example, it rains, we don't have alternatives, you need to use your car, and we are stuck in this gridlock, a continued gridlock and it's not going to get any better unless we are willing as elected officials to take bold steps and those bold steps are what our Executive Director will present to you today, which is the SMART Plan. Today, I'm only here as a warm-up act for her, she has dedicated countless hours, not only to hone in on the plan, but also more importantly which is the one item that we need to be always mindful of is, how do we pay for it? The half-penny which all of us in Miami-Dade County contribute to transportation has fallen woefully short of the promise that was made to the voters of Miami-Dade County and while I didn't make that promise, I'm going to work tirelessly and I ask you to join us to make sure that that promise is fulfilled. The half penny was promised to expand our system of transportation and take people to where they want to go. We have failed them in that vision and I think it's up to us now to take that promise back and make sure it's a reality, and it's one thing that everyone on the TPO, every single member of the TPO is swimming in the same direction on this issue. We want to make sure that in short

order a vision is laid out and more importantly that we start taking the bold steps to make it a reality and with that, with your permission Mayor, will introduce Aileen Boucle.

Commissioner Lago: Mayor he made a very good point and I don't want to get into too much detail about the half penny and that is something critical that when I speak to residents, they always ask me, whatever happened to the half penny?- what happened so many years ago?- I think it was 1993, correct?

Chairman Bovo: No. No. The half penny was introduced in, I think it was 2002.

Commissioner Quesada: It was 2002.

Commissioner Lago: Excuse me, I have my dates wrong, but the interesting thing about it, is that they talk about the half penny and then they commence to talk about now about another half penny. Listen, I think we are on the same page and that's why I respect you so much. Chairman Bovo is straight to the point, calls it how it is. I will not support another half penny; I don't think anybody else on this Commission will support another half penny until we deliver on the first half penny. So, let's concentrate on the first half penny; and the critical part about the SMART Plan and I know that the Executive Director is going to go over this, this is why when we met this weekend we had a nice discussion for over an hour. People need to understand, need to realize, the reason we have hundreds of thousands of cars travelling through the City of Coral Gables is because there is no transportation options.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: 700,000 a day.

Commissioner Lago: 700,000 cars bifurcate through our City on a daily basis. We need to get all on the same page like the Chairman said, and deliver on the first option of the SMART Plan. It may not correspond to our City of Coral Gables directly, but at the end of the day it will bring extensive relief, because the SMART Plan is for everyone in Miami-Dade County; it's not just for one section of our community. So thank you Chairman; I appreciate your candor as always, it's very refreshing.

Chairman: Thank you. Before I turn it over, I think the important thing that we see as she makes this presentation is that while the SMART Plan speaks to different corridors throughout our entire County, the most critical to do is at least one corridor. We need to take a bold step one corridor and then the commitment is to continue, not stop at corridor, but make a continued effort to continue to grow this effort; and this, in my opinion, will be what all of us in the long run will be able to hang our hats on. If we want our children to stay in this community and thrive in this community then we need to create the footprint for them to say, I'm going to stay here, jobs are

here, transportation is here, education is here, all the quality of life issues that we sought. With that I'll turn it over to Aileen.

Ms. Boucle: Thank you Chairman Bovo, Mr. Mayor, members of the Board and new Board Member Lago and welcome. Thank you for the resolution before you today for support of the SMART Plan. It is critical that we speak as one voice as a region when we look at how other metropolitan areas have developed transit plans and obtained new federal transportation funds, they have one thing in common, they speak with one voice, they form a coalition and they advance their projects. So, the resolutions that we are receiving from Coral Gables today and from other municipalities help to send that message to the federal and state level that we have a plan and we are speaking with one voice. I have a PowerPoint presentation to give you a little bit of a history of the SMART Plan. On this first slide as a history, last year in February the TPO Governing Board passed unanimously as a resolution that transit and transit support of projects are the number one priority in Miami-Dade County. That particular resolution set forth a series of actions. Following in April of last year, the Board unanimously adopted the SMART Plan stands for the Strategic Miami Area Rapid Transit Plan. I'd like to emphasize that this is the first time in decades that the County's long range transportation plan has been adopted, formerly adopted priority one and funded for environmental phase a comprehensive transit program. I have a short, very brief two minute video that will present an overview of the entire plan. I think the video is on a separate player, so...

[Video Presentation]

Ms. Boucle: So, that was an overview of the plan; this is just a map. What I'd like to really emphasize today is that a very critical item was approved by the TPO Board in June of this year. Since the adoption of the SMART Plan in April of last year, the TPO has been diligently working on developing a finance plan, a funding plan for this program, and in June of this year the TPO Governing Board under the leadership of Chairman Bovo authorized and approved funding as follows: \$75 million dollars have been allocated to the SMART Plan between 2020 and 2022, that will be for preliminary design and right-of-way and starting in fiscal year 2023 the TPO has allocated \$30 million dollars a year for a 30-year period through 2053. This is the first wave of funding, the first commitment on the table toward the SMART Plan, and the reason why that's critical is because it now allows us to pursue federal match, federal and state match, which brings in new federal and new state transportation funds here to Miami-Dade County in order to move this plan forward. So, we are going to be seeking funding as we move forward. This slide is just a summary of the six corridors. Another key component is that this is a multi-agency effort. Last year we travelled to the largest regions that were the most successful with transit and from the outside looking in, we had a unique strength that we didn't realize that we have here in Miami-Dade County and it's that we have multiple agencies that the TPO can assign corridors to,

which means we can advance multiple corridors at the same time, so we are not limited to one agency or one or two corridors. We, through Chairman Bovo's leadership have, in June, requested a critical partnership with the Miami-Dade Expressway Authority and they came back to the TPO Board in July and they have taken the east-west corridor, which is one of the six corridors in partnership for funding of design, construction, operation, and maintenance, and will be pursuing immediately by the end of the year an express bus service on a dedicated lane as phase one on the east-west corridor. Under Chairman Bovo, we are also seeking funding partnerships with the Florida Turnpike, also with the State and of course, federal funding. So, these are just the agencies involved. So, this slide really says why the SMART Plan is critical. In its aggregate, if you put a two mile radius along just the six rapid transit corridors, not even the express bus service routes that will be supporting it, but just the six corridors alone within two miles have one point seven million (1.7) residents living within a two mile radius of these six corridors. That is significant because Miami-Dade County has a higher than national average in terms of internal county mobility needs, and what I mean by that, if you see this pie chart, significantly above national average here in Miami-Dade County, 77 percent of our residents leave their residential district in the morning and drive within the County to their employment, which gives in another district within the County; and as Coral Gables knows very well this is traffic that comes through, too, and through the City of Coral Gables, not just the City of Coral Gables, but all other municipalities around the County. So, having a comprehensive transit plan, whether or not that transit alignment is specifically within the boundaries of one residential district or another, it's important that all six corridors get built, because at the end of the day we have 77 percent of our residents leaving one district to seek employment here in the City or in other areas of the County. So, mobility options are required for that. This graphic just shows the time savings. When you have the base network built, which is what the SMART Plan is, you have significant travel time savings along the alignment versus your current option, which is driving. If you look at just the south corridor alone, commute today is 150 minutes starting from the southern terminus of the South Dade corridor all the way to downtown with current conditions and traffic. With the transit alignment in place, it would be just about an hour for that commute, given the distance and time. In addition to that, we are looking at shuttles for the first and last mile access in order to increase ridership and further provide mobility to decrease that time. I think what's important here is to say that this is a partnership and that's why it's so important for us and we are grateful to be here today and have support from the City of Coral Gables. We will be seeking funding partnerships and also support in vocalizing our SMART Plan at all levels for funding; and right now our partnership with Coral Gables includes multiple municipal grant programs that we work closely with your staff and we are very proud to do that. Coral Gables has shown always very innovative, aggressive transportation ideas that they presented to the TPO Board for funding and we are happy to have participated in these grants.

Chairman Bovo: I just wanted to close by saying that number one; the City should be congratulated in its efforts in its trolley system. By all accounts the response has been very, very positive, folks that have taken to it, not just residents, but also folks that come and visit the town, folks that are working in the town.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Sorry to interrupt you, but our trolley system started with a grant from the MPO in the 90's. I served on the MPO at that time and we have the MPO to thank for that grant and for that study.

Chairman Bovo: Well it's been a great example and actually it's been an example to the County on how efficient smaller segments, smaller systems can be, and one of the things that we thought in terms of when you feed the corridor you don't need these buses that go across town. We are not a community that gyrates to buses, it's a reality. The buses are in the same traffic patterns and for any of these bus systems to really work and be efficient, they need their segregated lanes and that really then deals with inconveniencing the car, which is another divide that we would have to cross. It can't happen without the partnership of the municipalities and I want to share with you and let you know that across the entire County every single city has in one form or another bought into the concept and the conversation; and you'll hear moving forward talk about train versus non-train and whatnot, all these are healthy conversations to have and I think important conversations to have, but as I said earlier, we will get to the point where decisions need to be made and that's what people are expecting and that's what I hope that in the near future we are taking votes that anoint a corridor and more importantly starts giving time specifics in those corridors will be initiated.

Commissioner Lago: Chairman if I may, just to give a little bit more background to the Commission, I'll be very brief. There's been a huge transition in the TPO over the last few years under Chairman Bovo's leadership where we are no longer talking about cities and areas in this County that are saying, I want my area first. Now it's an approach of, we obviously have to deal with a massive issue, which is setting back this area in South Florida and people understanding that we may have to make certain concessions and put our own personal needs on the backburner for a few years, so we can address the larger issues. For example, the south corridor, which is primed and ready to go.

Chairman Bovo: And Commissioner to that point, I represent District 13, I often call the Brooklyn of the south, Hialeah, Miami Lakes, northwest 8th; there is nothing in the SMART Plan that goes into that corridor.

Commissioner Lago: I wanted you to talk about that, because you don't say that enough and I want people to understand that as the Chairman, you are making decisions that again, may not

benefit the people who are voting for you, but what you are doing is you are making decisions on behalf of South Florida, which is again, going to pay dividends across the board.

Chairman Bovo: Well I haven't told the people of District 13 that the corridor doesn't go through their neighborhood, they don't know this yet, but anyways, we feel that folks in my district benefit from a better traffic and transportation process. We feel that folks from my district will be able to use the system to get to work. There are many residents in my district that for example, work in Coral Gables in your restaurants and some of your businesses, work in Miami Beach and would probably benefit from not having to take their car and spend money on parking or what have you. I think these are the quality of life issues and I'll close by this, you know perhaps none of us, none of us here this is not for us, this has to be for future generations. We are all slaves to our cars, it's the way we've been weaned, and because our County has historically failed in addressing this issue of transportation in a way it should have been addressed a long time ago, our habits are going to be very difficult to change, but we see a generation coming that Uber generation, that Lyft generation that doesn't want to buy a car, that's looking at alternative ways of moving around, perhaps smarter than we are, smarter from the standpoint of overhead that they are cutting out from car maintenance, insurance and what have you, and it's that generation I think that has been very vocal in pushing this conversation, and I think again, and this will sound corny, but I think we owe it to that generation to do the work that needs to be done now, make the hard decisions now, and then perhaps let them build upon it when it's their turn.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you very much. Chairman it's an honor to have you with us and share your wisdom with us and thank you very much Aileen for being with us. Thank you.

Commissioner Quesada: Just briefly I just want to say. I've been super impressed by both of you this morning, you know sometimes sitting here we don't get as involved with the MPO and obviously it's a little bit different now, but hearing your approach and what you want to do is everything I want to hear and the plan looks great.

Commissioner Lago: Commissioner that one hour session I spent with Aileen the other day was pretty impressive. She provided...

Commissioner Quesada: I don't want to take more time away from them, I just want to keep pushing forward, and they are doing a good job.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: We are not impressed with you, we are impressed with them. (Laughter)

Commissioner Lago: You have to be impressed by them.

Commissioner Quesada: Just make sure he doesn't slow you down at the meetings.

Commissioner Lago: I talk a lot. So, they showed me two interesting things that I've never seen before; number one, a financing strategy, which again it was a massive sheet; and the second one was an understanding of what other municipalities throughout the United States are doing, and it was impressive to see what L.A., what Houston, what Seattle, and the funds that they are using to achieve their goals, the multi-prong attack. It really puts things into perspective that the TPO really has a grasp and is going to finally deliver after 30 years of back and forth.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Hialeah of the north, Brooklyn. (Laughter)

Commissioner Quesada: If you ever need anything from us please don't hesitate. Thank you so much.

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

Commissioner Lago: Thank you so much.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you everybody.

[End: 9:27:41 a.m.]