

CITY OF SOUTH MIAMI
TROLLEY/CIRCULATOR
FEASIBILITY STUDY

EXECUTIVE REPORT



August 2007

OVERVIEW

The City of South Miami Trolley/Circulator Feasibility Study, sponsored by the Miami-Dade County MPO (Metropolitan Planning Organization), analyzed the feasibility of establishing a local bus circulator or trolley service within the City of South Miami. The study began in late 2006 and was completed in June 2007.

Demographic analysis identifies areas within the City of South Miami where circulator service could benefit its communities.

South Miami is a relatively middle-income community with a high level of automobile ownership and use. The 2000 Census specifies about 1.9 vehicles per household and that only 5 to 6 percent of residents use transit to get to work. A smaller percentage of residents walk or bicycle to work. Nearly 75 percent of resident drive alone to work.

About 15 percent of households have residents 65 or older. Seniors are heavily concentrated in the area north of SW 72nd Street. Households with children are scattered throughout the City, except in those areas south of 72nd Street, particularly east of South Dixie Highway. South Miami's northeast census area has slightly lower auto usage than other parts of the City, although 75 percent of those residents drive, without passengers, to work. In all four census areas, there are more vehicles per household than workers.

The Miami-Dade County Planning and Zoning Department currently estimates 13,000 workers in the City of South Miami, a large majority of these working at or near South Miami General Hospital. Approximately 3,400 daily Metrorail boardings were logged at the South Miami station in February 2007. These boardings are much higher than those reported in the 2000 census by City residents. This suggests that transit is used more frequently by local workers and may well be close to 25% of work trips...a reasonably high ratio. These South Miami Metrorail station boardings are considerably higher than boardings recorded for the University of Miami Metrorail station and just slightly less than those at the Coral Gables' Douglas Road Metrorail station.

GENERAL FINDINGS

The City's previous endeavor to operate a Pilot Trolley in the first half of 2005 provided important data for analyzing service characteristics and rider behavior. Extensive discussions and meetings were conducted with City of South Miami; the City of Coral Gables; the University of Miami; the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA); City Commissioners; MPO staff; and the Technical Advisory Committee.

The 2005 City of South Miami Trolley System Pilot Project offers insight about service characteristics and rider behavior.

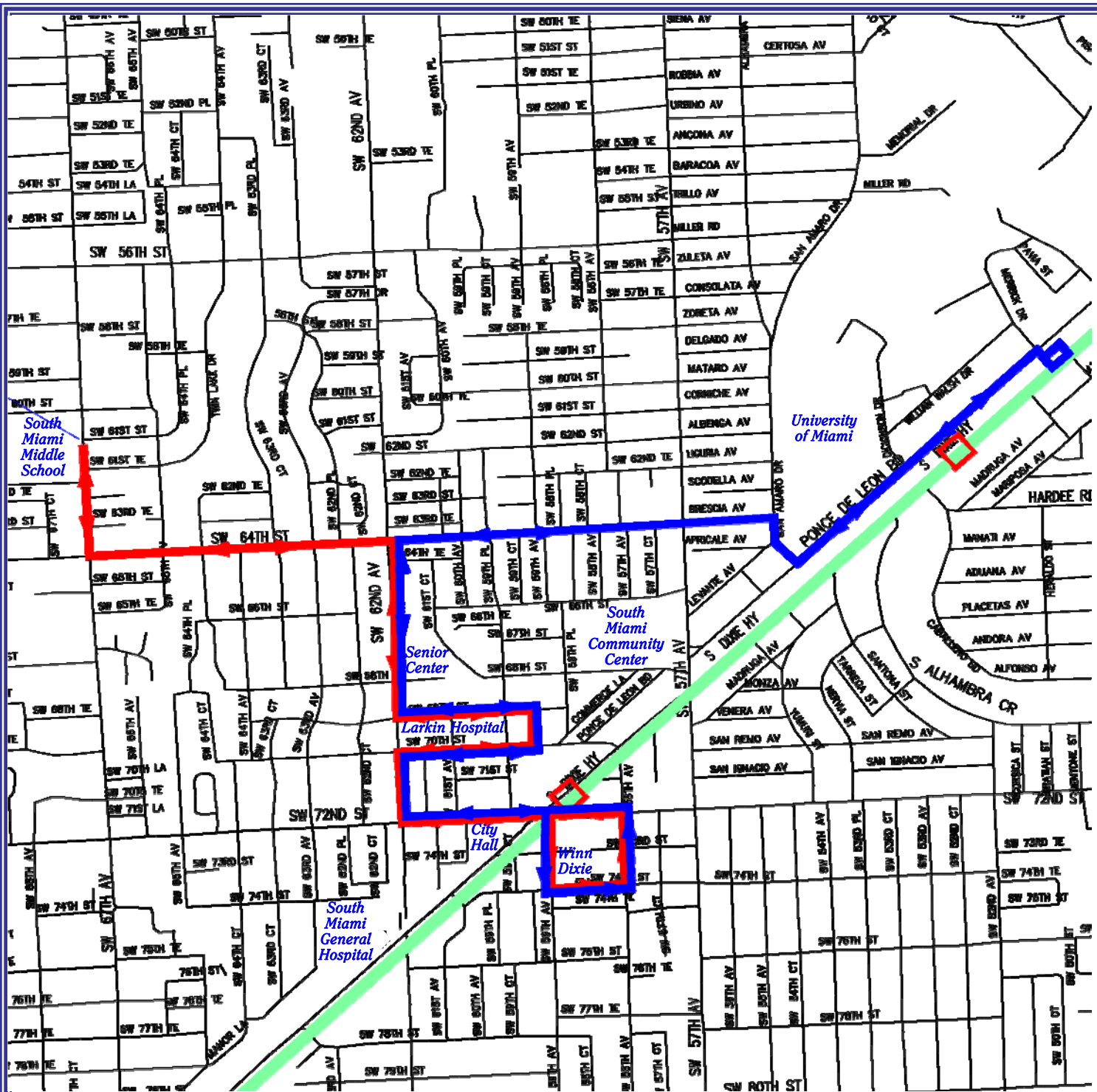
A community workshop, focused individual surveys, and several one-on-one meetings provided exceptional input to further assess the demand and feasibility for a trolley/circulator service. Potential routes were time tested; existing MDT and adjacent services were studied; and various potential service concepts explored.

Since City of South Miami residents perceive few travel issues and there is a relatively high transit usage rate by outside workers, the objective of the study was to focus on the City's unmet transportation service needs. Available data and input from the community and its stakeholders provided the following insights:

1. Community perceptions of the need for a circulator bus service varied, ranging from no support to great enthusiasm for providing services for very specific travel reasons, such as for seniors and schoolchildren.
2. Suggestions for routes were not very specific compared to the discussions about locations that need service.
3. City residents firmly assert that the service be free.
4. Uniformly, respondents think bus service should operate Monday-Friday during normal business and school hours and possibly longer into the evenings. There was no demand for weekend service.
5. The Technical Advisory Committee maintains that new circulator service represent non-served and under-served travel markets as new service, and not be in conflict with existing transit services (Metrorail, Metrobus).

Stakeholders voiced very specific ideas about circulator service locations.

- ♦ Feedback to an employer survey (including hospitals and the Shops on Sunset shopping complex) was weak.
- ♦ Discussions with the merchants group indicated no unmet needs.
- ♦ The City of Coral Gables has considered a proposed Riviera bus route from the Douglas Road Metrorail Station along Ponce de Leon, crossing South Dixie Highway and proceeding through the Riviera neighborhood onto Red Road and Sunset Drive in South Miami, and back. This proposed route serves only a few blocks of South Miami's business district and not residential areas.
- ♦ The University of Miami sees great potential for a circulator connection between the University Metrorail station and the Sunset Drive (SW 72nd Street) business district.
- ♦ South Miami Middle School officials revealed that only one-third of their student population comes from South Miami. Most live within walking distance and are not entitled to school bus service.
- ♦ CRA members expressed a strong desire for middle school bus service and a transit connection between the Sunset Business District and the CRA area. Service into Coral Gables was mentioned.
- ♦ The Senior Center representative cited a need for access to the Sunset Business District, shopping areas (i.e., Dadeland), and medical centers outside the City. Seniors need morning service on an accessible vehicle to run daily errands.
- ♦ City Commission members stated that service must be high quality; used by residents; and be supported and promoted by comprehensive outreach and a marketing campaign. Commission members have diverse views on service routes and stops.



PROPOSED TWO ROUTE CIRCULATOR SERVICE

LEGEND:

- Route A
- Route B
- Metrorail Line
- Metrorail Station



NORTH

Scale: 2" = 1/2 mile

6. All stakeholders unanimously agreed that any service be privately run and operated.
7. A set budget for future service was not voiced by stakeholders and officials. The City of South Miami currently allocates 20 percent of its People's Transportation Plan (PTP) funds toward area circulator bus (about \$35,000 to \$40,000 annually). Miami-Dade County municipalities with circulator bus systems generally use more than 20 percent of their PTP funds and some use general funds to support their municipal circulator bus system operations.

PROPOSED ROUTES

Based on input from communities and stakeholders, an optimal service route and schedule was developed to provide Monday through Friday service to identified target groups and areas. Routes A and B, as illustrated on the map to the left, were identified to serve the Middle School and the University of Miami from the Sunset business district.

Route A would operate during the 9:30 AM to 2:00 PM service period, serving the University of Miami campus and the Sunset business area. It would operate via Ponce de Leon onto SW 64th Street to SW 62nd Avenue to the

Optimal service for South Miami would run Monday through Friday and serve the Middle School and the University of Miami from the Sunset business district.

South Miami Metrorail Station to the Sunset Business District and back. Service from the Senior Center and Larkin and South Miami hospitals, via the Metrorail station to Sunset Drive, would be provided by this route.

Route B service would be time-limited to transporting students to and from school in the morning and afternoon. No midday service is necessary and would be wasteful. Route B would operate in the early morning (7:00 AM to 9:00 AM) and mid-afternoon (2:30 PM to 4:00-4:30 PM), and would connect the area between Red Road and SW 62nd Avenue with the middle school on Ludlam Road (67th Avenue). It would also provide transport from the Senior Center and the Metrorail station to the Sunset Business area. In the morning, the route would continue to SW 62nd Avenue and proceed to the South Miami Metrorail station and the Sunset business district. The return would occur along the same route in the afternoon. This service can be suspended or modified when school is not in session.

Both Routes A and B run through the Sunset Drive business district, with stops near the Winn-Dixie grocery store and the CVS pharmacy. Both routes continue past the South Miami Metrorail Station and stop near South Miami General Hospital (Sunset Drive and SW 62nd Avenue). From the hospital stop, they run north on SW 62nd Avenue, with stops near Larkin Hospital, the Senior Center, the Lee School, and the U.S. Post Office, before proceeding to either the University of Miami or the Middle School.

The return southbound service would follow the same route.

One bus can make two round trips per hour on these routes. One bus can provide service every 30 minutes; two buses could provide service every 15 minutes.

Municipally-contracted bus services in South Florida cost about \$40 to \$50 per hour of operation using standard vans. The City can offer inducements to help reduce the direct costs. A one bus system with about 2000 service hours will cost about \$100,000 annually; two buses twice that.

RELATED ISSUES AND OBSERVATIONS

A link with the University of Miami campus could reduce severe traffic congestion in the Sunset Business district during lunch time hours.

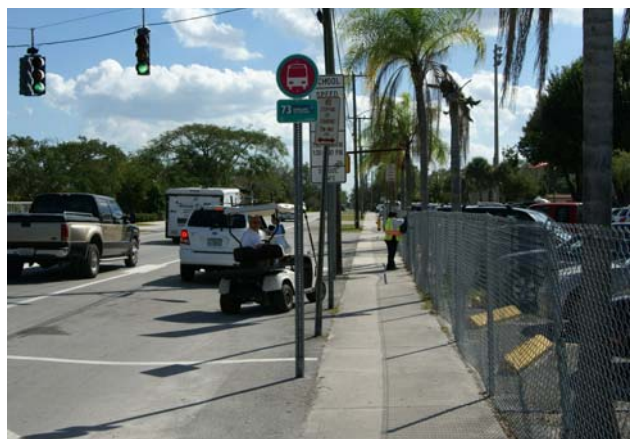
A circulator service can potentially address other existing mobility-related opportunities and constraints in South Miami.

There could be a market for moving students from the area around South Dixie Highway and Red Road to Ludlam Road where the schools are located. At most, the walk is 10 to 15 minutes and service is only needed twice daily (before school opens and after it closes).

The employment concentration in South Miami is very close to the Metrorail station (within a 3 to 4 block radius). This is optimal walking distance

since shuttle bus connections will normally be slower in total time than walking. Direct pedestrian and vehicular access from the Metrorail station to SW 72nd Street was severed several years ago and should be restored.

The City needs to provide sidewalks, shelters, lighting, and other amenities throughout the community to make transit access and stops (and pedestrian activity) more desirable.



The Senior Center does not have a bus shelter or suitable transit waiting area.

CONCLUSIONS

- ◆ There are no critical unmet transit needs identified by City residents.
- ◆ Travel, to and from the Middle and High Schools, is viewed as a problem. The local school district does not consider the path from residential areas to school property as a long enough distance to provide student transportation.

A transit connection to the University of Miami campus could reduce mid-day congestion along Sunset Drive. The University runs evening service a few nights weekly, but there is no mid-day service.

PERCEIVED UNMET NEEDS

COMMUNITY NEED	SUBSTANTIATION
To transport middle and high school students from the Red Road area to the Ludlam Road area.	The school district does not provide busing to areas close to the schools. The Middle School estimates that 300 to 400 students live in the City and they do not have bus service. Walk times are only 10 to 15 minutes and are probably quicker than a circulator bus service can provide.
To offer better shopping opportunities for seniors from the Senior Center on SW 62 nd Avenue.	The closest grocery stores, pharmacy, and other essential services are all located east of South Dixie Highway in the Sunset Drive business district. There are no similar retail services west of the highway. There is a need to get residents west of US 1 to the area. The major South Dixie Highway (US 1) crossing operates poorly and is dangerous.
To provide a better link from the University of Miami campus to the Sunset Drive (SW 72 nd Street) business area.	The University runs a shuttle connection on Friday and Saturday nights from the campus to the Sunset Drive business area. This service gets substantial use. The University believes that upgrading this connection (particularly during weekday lunch hours) could relieve area traffic congestion and create a neighborhood link that does not currently exist.
To connect with the Coral Gables trolley system at the Douglas Road Metrorail station.	This need was mentioned by several interests. Existing Metrorail and Metrobus services link South Miami, at the South Miami Metrorail Station, to the Douglas Road Metrorail Station. It was not clear that there is an unmet demand, other than the presumption of a free service versus existing paid service. During peaks, Metrorail runs every six minutes.
To connect the South Miami Metrorail Station with South Miami General and Larkin Hospitals.	There are 3 to 4 blocks between the South Miami Metrorail station and the South Miami General and Larkin hospitals. Given the proximity of these sites, a circulator bus might not be the best transportation improvement from the Metrorail Station. There is not a direct pedestrian connection between the Metrorail station and the South Miami General Hospital via SW 72 nd Street. The abandoned redevelopment scheme for the parcel south of the station eliminated southerly access for pedestrians and vehicles.
To improve the vehicular and pedestrian crossings of Red Road and Sunset Drive at South Dixie Highway.	These two crossings are unsafe for pedestrians and operate poorly for vehicles. A grade crossing, from the Metrorail station over the highway, is programmed to be built in 2010. Traffic issues need to be addressed as part of an intersection capacity and operations study.

- ♦ Crossing South Dixie Highway is unsafe for pedestrians. A pedestrian overpass will be in place about 2010. The Senior Center on SW 62nd Avenue is a mile or more from the commercial areas so a circulator connection could be useful.
- ♦ The distance from the South Miami Metrorail Station to the hospitals and the business district is walkable. A circulator service is not likely to gain a large number of riders given the distance and frequency. Better pedestrian access from the south to the South Miami Metrorail Station is needed. An existing employee entrance to the South Miami General Hospital traverses below the Metrorail guideway and could serve as another direct pedestrian link.
- ♦ High levels of transit use require high levels of service. Most cities in Miami-Dade County that operate circulator service spend several hundred thousand dollars annually, typically in excess of their respective PTP funding. State funding for circulator transit service to cities is generally restricted for community development, rather than transportation, purposes. Very few cities have on-going state funding assistance. Considerable PTP and general fund allocations finance municipal transit service operations.

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