

Business

Vice President Joe Biden to visit Miami, push transit funds

By Alfonso Chardy

Vice President Joe Biden will be in Miami Thursday and Friday for a series of events that include a speech to labor union officials and a visit to a transit hub under construction near Miami International Airport, where he will likely highlight President Obama's stimulus aid for transportation projects.

The visit includes an address to the AFL-CIO Executive Council in Miami Beach at 11 a.m. Biden is expected to reiterate the White House position that "a strong middle class needs a strong labor movement," according to a statement from Biden's office.

But perhaps the highlight of the visit will come Thursday afternoon when Biden, accompanied by U.S. Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood and Miami Mayor Manny Diaz, tours the Miami Intermodal Center.

The Miami Intermodal Center is a major rental car and transit hub being built just east of Miami International Airport that would connect all modes of transportation: airlines, rental cars, buses, Metrorail and commuter rail.

The statement from Biden's office says the MIC, as the project is known in transportation circles, is "just one example of the hundreds of transportation construction projects across the country" that will receive funds from the stimulus package.

The MIC itself did not figure during a recent special session of the Miami-Dade Metropolitan Planning Organization at which local elected officials voted to recommend projects to be funded by the money the county expects to receive from the federal stimulus package.

Organization members, however, did vote to recommend that of the \$76 million the county expects to get in stimulus transit money it use part of the allocation to advance a project to extend Metrorail from the existing Earlington Heights station along the Airport Expressway to the MIC.

Miami-Dade expects to get the largest portion of the stimulus package in South Florida -- more than \$260 million for roads, bridges, transit and transportation projects. Broward's share is expected to be about \$70 million.

Florida expects to receive about \$1.3 billion in stimulus money for transportation projects.

On Friday morning, Biden plans to visit the Miami Police Department, where he will be joined once again by Mayor Diaz and Miami Police Chief John F. Timoney.

The stimulus money includes allocations of more than \$4 billion for state and local law enforcement and other criminal and juvenile justice services.