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Intermodal center proceeds, rental car center ahead of plan

By RISA POLANSKY

After more than 15 years of planning, all elements of the \$1.7 billion Miami Intermodal Center project adjacent to Miami International Airport are rolling right along, its project manager says.

The project has four major components: a consolidated car rental center, a people mover connection to the airport, a ground transportation hub and area roadway improvements.

"All the elements are close to being implemented. We've constructed a number of items like the roadway and the rental car center.... overall this program that was envisioned back in 1993 has taken 15, 16 years, but we're close to the end. We're almost at the point where it's been fully implemented," said Gary Donn, Miami Intermodal Center project manager and director of transportation support for the Florida Department of Transportation.

Roadway improvements are complete. The rental car center is ahead of schedule. The people mover is under construction. And construction on the Metrorail component of the ground transportation hub is to begin May 1.

The aim of the project, Mr. Donn said: "to provide connectivity between different modes of transportation and also decongest the airport area."

Construction of the rental car center rapidly rising along LeJeune Road is running slightly under budget and ahead of schedule, he said.

The shell of the 3.4-million-



Photos courtesy of Florida Department of Transportation

Work on all four components of the \$1.7 billion Miami Intermodal Center project adjacent to Miami International Airport are under way.

two years after construction began.

From there, 16 rental car companies are to begin building out space in what's been described as "a virtual rental car shopping mall."

The \$325 million consolidated rental car center is expected to be operational about a year from now, Mr. Donn said.

All rental car companies operating inside the airport, and many scattered around the surrounding area, are to move into the four-story hub, which is to hold up to 6,500 cars.

Travelers will "have the convenience of being able to rent the car and leave and bring it back to one particular location instead of having to search the area," Mr. Donn said.

And the center is to connect travelers with the airport via a people mover, also under construction.

Miami-Dade Aviation broke ground on the MIA Mover last

year, but the project is facing a funding gap in the approximate \$342 million project.

The mover is to open by September of 2011, Mr. Donn said.

On May 1, Miami-Dade Transit is to break ground on its 2.4-mile Metrorail extension designed to link the existing Earlington Heights Station to the intermodal center.

The \$526 million project is expected to begin operating in 2012.

The ground transportation hub element of the intermodal center, dubbed "Miami Central Station," is to include also stations for Tri-Rail, Amtrak, Greyhound, county buses, taxis, and courtesy buses and shuttles that serve the airport.

It's to be built around the existing Tri-Rail tracks at Airport Station on a 27-acre site east of the rental car center.

Construction on the \$85 million central station is to begin around summer 2010 and take about two years, Mr. Donn said.

current locations on the land set for the station.

Once the car companies move into the new rental car center, demolition and construction on the ground transport hub can begin, he said.

Last month, Vice President Joe Biden and US Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood visited the Miami Intermodal Center site and announced a \$2.1 million allocation from the federal stimulus package to the Greyhound bus terminal set to be built at central station.

The money "filled a funding gap," Mr. Donn said. "It's a small amount, but we would have had to pursue other grants or even looked toward Greyhound to fund it, so it's a good thing to get."

One element of the intermodal product that's finished: \$150 million in improvements to LeJeune Road, completed in May.

"In the past, people have tried to avoid LeJeune Road because of congestion of traffic to the

airport, drainage problems," Mr. Donn said.

To address the issues, the department of transportation realigned LeJeune, and the roadway now links State Road 836, the intermodal center and the airport.

Now, "traffic that wasn't destined for the airport doesn't get mingled in" with airport traffic, Mr. Donn said.

The improvements serve both travelers and area businesses, he said.

"Businesses along that area are benefiting because there is not as much congestion on the road, the drainage on the system is improved, it's going to be landscaped."

And more business is expected in the area.

Also on the books is developing eight acres of nearby property, Mr. Donn said.

"We envision to have office space and hotels."

Details: <http://www.micdot.com>.

