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Subject: **Citizens' Independent Transportation Trust members not willing to put more money into Orange Line; doubt it will get fed support**

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Citizens' Independent Transportation Trust members not willing to put more money into Orange Line; doubt it will get fed support

By Risa Polansky

Federal money to extend Miami-Dade's Metrorail in a planned Orange Line North Corridor isn't likely anytime soon, members of the Citizens' Independent Transportation Trust say — and until it comes, they plan to oppose pouring any more cash into the long-intended project.

They voted unanimously last week on two measures, one resolving not to approve or authorize more work orders or expenditures related to the Orange Line and another banning future Orange Line-related trust resolutions until the Federal Transit Administration rates the project acceptable for federal funding or until the county commission and trust can agree on a "financially feasible" budget for the endeavor.

Neither rule applies to the line's Miami Intermodal Center/Earlington Heights segment, which doesn't rely on federal funding.

"I don't think anybody thinks it's (the application for federal funding) going to get approved" for the North Corridor, trust Chairman Miles Moss said. "Why spend money on something that's not going to happen?"

A Miami Today report in January said the county spent \$44 million on consultants over the past three years to study the Orange Line and other transit rail extensions. The county was expected to be asked to spend another \$13 million in consulting fees in fiscal 2008-09 and possibly more in succeeding years, the report said.

County commissioners this month deferred until September action on measures such as fare and parking rate hikes, designed in part to ease federal concerns that Miami-Dade wouldn't be able to build new projects as well as maintain services.

Still, they agreed to resubmit an application for the funding by this month's deadline although the last one was denied.

Mr. Moss called it a "waste of time."

Trust member and former chair Marc Buoniconti also questioned sending an application "just for the sense of sending one in."

But without at least submitting the application, "there's no moving forward" on the project, Assistant County Manager Ysela Llort pointed out.

Still, "sending in this is a little bit irrepresentative," Mr. Buoniconti said, considering the commission did not formally approve revenue-raising initiatives.

A pro forma laying out transit plans for the next 30 years — including the North Corridor project — only balances its budget by assuming the county will take measures that would generate more than \$9 billion over the three-decade period, including contributing to transit an additional \$5.4 billion from the general fund.

Other assumed measures include fare increases, higher parking charges, a gas-tax hike and phasing out the People's Transportation Plan surtax contribution to municipalities, beginning in 2015.

The trust, charged with overseeing and reviewing transportation and transit projects tied to the half-cent surtax county voters approved in 2002, had been pressing for the document, suspicious of severe funding issues.

They voted to support all of the pro forma's assumptions except the measure that would eliminate all surtax funding to cities by 2017.

Trust member James Reeder predicted it would cause a "small Hiroshima."

"I'm not a fan of this at all," Mr. Buoniconti agreed.

He said also that he doubts all of the budget-balancing measures will pass commission muster.

"This pro forma is not going to happen. Let's not kid ourselves."