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Hialeah to become last Tri-Rail stop for two years while new Miami Airport Station is built

Officials say they save \$11 million, build new station faster if existing airport station is closed

By Michael Turnbell

The Hialeah Market Station this spring will become the new stop for American Airlines employees and others who take Tri-Rail to Miami International Airport.

The change will take place in about two months when Tri-Rail closes its Miami Airport Station, the last station on the south end of the line, to help speed up construction of a new station that will be located just east of the airport.

The new station will be part of a sprawling complex called the Miami Intermodal Center, a \$1.7 billion travel hub that includes a rental car center that opened in July 2010.

Officials say the existing station's proximity to the new station would require flagging crews to protect workers on the track and inevitably slow commuter trains.

The Florida Department of Transportation says it can save \$11 million in construction costs and money spent on flagging crews plus finish the new station two years sooner if the current airport station is closed.

“With all the construction that's going to be going on, it's just better for our passengers that we're out of there,” said Tri-Rail spokeswoman Bonnie Arnold.

The transportation department has agreed to pay for the cost of relocating functions of the Miami Airport Station to the Hialeah station, including trailers to house a ticket office and restrooms, extending the platforms and providing shuttles to take riders to and from the airport.

Initially, officials planned to close and move the station by March 11. But now they expect the closure to occur later in the spring because some details have to be worked out with Jacksonville-based CSX, which operates freight trains on the tracks.

Arnold said the station change, which will last about two years, won't add much time to commuters' trips. "We figured the difference between taking off the time you'd spend on the train

riding to the Miami Airport Station and riding the shuttle from Hialeah to and from the airport would add about 3 minutes to the trip," she said.

The Miami Airport Station handled about 38,785 passengers in December, making it one of the busiest along Tri-Rail's 72-mile line that runs from the airport to Mangonia Park, north of West Palm Beach.

The new airport station will bring connections to all mass transit under roof, including Amtrak, a new Metrorail extension, an automated train called the MIA Mover running to the airport terminals and perhaps high speed rail to Orlando and Tampa in the future.

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