

MIAMI TODAY

WEEK OF THURSDAY, AUGUST 11, 2016

A Singular Voice in an Evolving City

WWW.MIAMITODAYNEWS.COM \$4.00



**MDX boasts of
safer expressways, pg. 9**

TRANSPORTATION

**Beach Corridor project
given Priority 1 status, pg. 11**



DOWNTOWN PRICES STEADY: Miami's Downtown Development Authority has released its mid-year 2016 report, and it contains some good news for renters and potential buyers. Conducted by Integra Realty Resources, the report covers the period from January to June 2016, and says that prices "will continue to hold for new, under construction, and delivered inventory." There are exceptions, of course: Brickell City Centre raised prices on average by 9% this quarter.

DORAL MOVING SLOWLY TOWARD ONE-WAY STREETS: City of Doral officials have yet to conduct a study approved by county commissioners in March regarding turning some of the city's two-way roads in one-way streets. The city has received a grant from the county's Metropolitan Planning Organization that stipulates that the city match 20% of the value of the study, said Doral City Manager **Edward A. Rojas**. The item is up for approval later this month, he said, after which the study meant to determine the feasibility of the traffic clearing measure will be conducted.

RENTS DROPPING: Rents in Miami were down by 0.4% in July, according to a report this week by Apartment List, an online company that publishes renter and house-related news stories. The median rent price for a two-bedroom apartment for August is \$2,350 and rent for a one-bedroom is \$1,860, 1.1% lower than they were in July 2015, according to the report. Rents in coastal cities continue to be the nation's most expensive, the report says, with New York City and San Francisco boasting the highest rents in the nation.

SPOTLIGHT ON SMALL BUSINESS: The City of Coral Gables, in conjunction with the Coral Gables Chamber of Commerce and the Business Improvement District of Coral Gables, has launched a campaign focused on encouraging retail shoppers to "shop local" at small businesses unique to the city. The first event tied in with last weekend's Florida 2016 Sales Tax Holiday, but Family Day on Aragon – a free block party – and the Summer Sidewalk Sale will be hosted on Aug. 13 and Aug. 20.

WHEELS DONATION: City commissioners approved donating a Ford E350 one-ton Econoline van to Attachable Inc., a 501(c)(3) non-profit. The 2004 vehicle, declared as surplus by the city's chief procurement officer, will be used to enrich the community, a staff report says. Attachable Inc. aims to improve the lives of youth facing challenges within the juvenile justice system, local economy and educational system, the report says.

THE ACHIEVER



Photo by Marlene Quaroni

Admiral Kurt Tidd
US Southern Command leader stresses close partnerships
The profile is on Page 4

New trolley routes draw big numbers

By JOHN CHARLES ROBBINS

When Miami city commissioners return from the August break Sept. 8, they will again take up the idea of expanding the city's popular trolley service city-wide.

And they are bound to be buoyed by impressive ridership numbers on the city's newest routes for its free trolley service.

The city launched trolley service in Little Havana, Coconut Grove and Wynwood on March 1.

Collin Worth, a transportation analyst with the city's Capital Improvements and Transportation Program, provided Miami Today with ridership tallies that show steady growth on the new routes.

The new trolleys added more than 53,000 riders to the city's monthly overall ridership for March. In February, city trolleys carried 311,056 riders. When the numbers were tallied for March, the new routes coupled with other increases in ridership totaled 407,851.

Of the three new routes, the service through Little Havana is by far the most popular, followed by Coconut Grove and Wynwood, based on monthly ridership counts for March-June.

The Little Havana route saw 40,585 riders in March, 55,796 in April, 64,184 in May and 71,754 in June.

The Wynwood trolley attracted 3,593 riders in March, 5,126 in April, 5,847 in May and 5,888 riders in June.

The only slight drop in ridership was experienced on the Coconut Grove route between May and June; however a new connection with neighboring Coral Gables may grow those numbers going forward.

In March the Grove trolley service handled 9,692 riders, 14,857 in April, 15,847 in May, and 14,430 in June, according to city officials.

It was May 2015 when commissioners directed the launch of three new routes within six months. It took more than nine months for the changes to be implemented.

Consulate General of Italy in Miami kept busy

By CAMILA CEPERO

Vacationing Italians love Miami, pg. 23

An unprecedented 500 Italians a month are registering as foreign residents within the Consulate General of Italy in Miami's jurisdictions throughout the Southeast US and Caribbean, said the consulate, with most settling in to call Florida home.

Aside from Florida, the jurisdiction of the Consulate General of Italy in Miami includes Georgia, South Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi, Puerto Rico, US Virgin Islands, Bahamas, Jamaica, St. Maarten, St. Eustatius, Saba, American Virgin Islands, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands and Turks & Caicos.

From 2013 to 2016, registrations in the jurisdictions increased by nearly 24%. Specifically, there was an increase of 9% over 2013-2014 and 2014-2015, and an increase of 5% was registered in the period from 2015 until July 2016.

"About 500 people a month are registering," said Italian Consul General Gloria Marina Bellelli. "This increase is due to new people coming directly from Italy but also from families with dual nationality coming from Central and South America – especially from those countries characterized by a high degree of social, political and economic

instability, such as Venezuela, Brazil and Argentina," she said.

The consulate only keeps track of Italian citizens who register as foreign residents with the Registry of Italians Resident Abroad.

As of July 2016 there are 32,597 Italian residents in the consular jurisdiction, with 27,743 of those (85%) in Florida – a 7% increase in the state since 2014.

Of the Italian residents in Florida, 53% are male, 46% are female, 7,222 (26%) are in Miami, 745 (3%) are in Orlando and 494 (2%) are in Tampa.

"We have noticed during the last six months specifically that the number of Italians is rapidly increasing, and that's because of the Italian economic situation," Ms. Bellelli said.

"This has been a growing trend since the 1990s and has been very strong during the last three to four years... [during which] there have been more Italians investing in Miami and doing business here," said Nevo Boccacera, executive director of the Italy-America Chamber of Commerce Southeast.

"Most of the Italians who came here in the past were restaurateurs and pizza makers," Ms. Bellelli said. "Nowadays, a major part of

Italians are still employed in the food service industry, however there are also professionals, in particular lawyers – the demand for lawyers is high due to immigration – entrepreneurs, artisans, engineers and architects – due to the high activity level in the construction industry."

Additionally, she said, Italian students come here for educational exchanges and professors come to teach at local universities, particularly for medical programs.

"Italians come here because they always hear about Miami and that you live well," Ms. Bellelli said, "so they say, 'let's think about going there because we will live well, the weather is OK, the lifestyle is OK and we can find a job.'"

"I would say that New York has been historically the gateway for Italian businesses but during the last five to six years, Italian economic agencies have started to look at other cities. I would say Miami, after New York, is the most popular," Mr. Boccacera said.

"What's important is that there is an attraction to this part of the world for Italians," Ms. Bellelli said. "The connection is very strong between the two countries."

AGENDA

MIAMI-DADE COUNTY TAKES ON THE ZIKA VIRUS ...	2	COUNTY REPORT DETAILS SKYTRAIN DERAILMENT ...	10
TASK FORCE PROMOTES AFFORDABLE HOUSING ...	3	TRI-RAIL ON TRACK FOR DOWNTOWN MIAMI LINK ...	14
VIEWPOINT: CAN'T PREPARE FOR DISASTER AFTER ...	6	CHINESE SHOWING INTEREST IN CITY OF NORTH MIAMI ...	16
CORAL GABLES HOPES FOR SEAT AT THE MPO TABLE ...	9	'PERFECT STORM' IMPACTS OUR HEALTH COSTS ...	18

Plans for Tri-Rail's downtown link on track for inclusion

By CATHERINE LACKNER

With most of the partner agreements in place, final details are being smoothed out for Tri-Rail commuter service to steam into downtown Miami before the end of next year.

"We are looking at insurance issues we'll have to deal with in the future, and we got All Aboard Florida to give us a tour of its Miami station," said Jack Stephens, executive director of the South Florida Regional Transportation Authority, Tri-Rail's parent.



Jack Stephens

"It's amazing. By this time next year they expect to be in service [to Fort Lauderdale and West Palm Beach] and told us we would not be far behind in completion of our part of the station," he said.

That means Tri-Rail trains could be in service as early as the fall of 2017 "which is what I'm hoping for, assuming no glitches," Mr. Stephens said.

The insurance underwriters were impressed by progress on the station, he added. "For two years, we have been saying, 'This is coming.' Now we can say, 'This is what it looks like,' and see if we can get good prices on the insurance we will need."

The authority must obtain insurance for the 8.5-mile segment of track that it will share with All Aboard Florida and Florida East Coast Railway, which will continue to ship freight on those tracks, he explained.

Authority staff is focusing on "critical path items" that need to be resolved, one of which is the agreement with the Southeast Overtown/Park West Community Redevelopment Agency. There are no real conflicts, Mr. Stephens said,



Alice Bravo

"but it is the most complex of the agreements, and the CRA is working it out with the city."

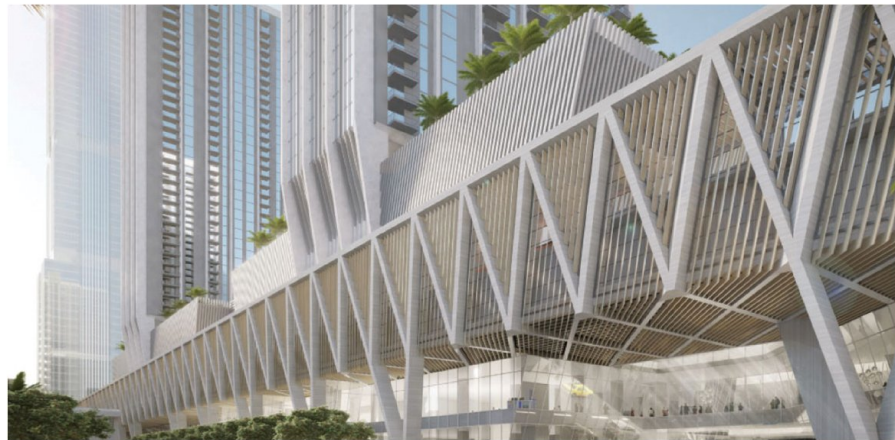
All of the money to support the project has been pledged "but money won't begin to move until we get a bill from All Aboard Florida" for what it has spent so far on the station, Mr. Stephens said. That bill will be split on a percentage basis among the partners, a process that could begin as early as next month, he said.

The project hit a bump when the Florida Department of Transportation pulled out over insurance concerns, but it still is supported by Miami's Downtown Development Authority, Miami-Dade County, the Citizens Independent Transportation Trust, the City of Miami, the Bayfront Park Management Trust and both the Omni and Southeast Overtown/Park West community redevelopment agencies.

After the state transportation department bowed out, the South Florida Regional Transportation Authority agreed to accept more of the financial burden, but none



Tri-Rail trains could be in service as early as the fall 2017, joining the Brightline Passenger rail service at MiamiCentral in the urban core.



Tri-Rail will be a main player at the new MiamiCentral, now under construction at the site of the old depot West of NW First Avenue.

of the other parties were asked to contribute more money than was previously agreed.

On May 2, Alice Bravo, director of Miami-Dade's Transportation and Public Works Department, advised all of the parties that agreements had to be finalized quickly or All Aboard Florida might withdraw its offer to have commuter service operate out of MiamiCentral, the downtown station to be shared by All Aboard Florida and Tri-Rail.

All Aboard Florida, a wholly owned subsidiary of Florida East Coast Industries, "has advanced construction of the commuter rail platforms and is incurring significant costs since the station has gone vertical and columns have been erected," Ms. Bravo's letter said. "If we are not able to execute agreements by the aforementioned date, All Aboard Florida has advised us that they will be forced to cease construction on the commuter rail infrastructure."

"Without a definitive plan of action and inter-agency coordination to pursue new agreements, we could forfeit this unique opportunity to bring commuter rail to the central business district," Ms. Bravo's letter had warned. Fortunately, the crisis was averted and work never stopped on MiamiCentral.



The heart of downtown Miami will again welcome trains, along with retail, residential and office space.