

## People mover project rolls out at Miami International

A groundbreaking ceremony for a people mover marks a major milestone for Miami International Airport.

*By Alfonso Chardy*

Donning hard hats and wielding shovels, federal, state and county officials on Monday picked up piles of soil and threw them to the ground -- a symbolic groundbreaking for construction of an automated people mover, part of a \$1.7 billion rental car and transit hub near Miami International Airport.

Republican Reps. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen and Mario Diaz-Balart joined Florida Department of Transportation district head Gus Pego and Miami-Dade County Aviation Department chief José Abreu in the shovel line marking the start of MIA Mover.

The ceremony marked one of the most significant milestones in the history of the 20-year-old project that was first conceived in 1989. The 1.27-mile-long MIA Mover, expected to carry an average of 3,000 passengers per hour when it opens in 2011, will link MIA with a hub planned to connect all major modes of transportation in the county.

Aircraft, buses, cars and trains would be linked through the Miami Intermodal Center now going up just east of MIA -- where passengers will arrive either aboard rental cars, local buses or Metrorail and Tri-Rail. Then they will board the automated people mover and travel to their planes at MIA.

### CLOGGED ROADS

Operation of the MIA Mover is expected to thin out perennial congestion on airport roads now clogged with rental car shuttle buses, taxis and civilian passenger vehicles dropping off or picking up travelers.

Groundbreaking came one day before the Miami-Dade County Commission is asked to ratify a \$34 million increase in the overall state transportation department project contribution.

Abreu told The Miami Herald after Monday's ceremony that the \$34 million is not an unanticipated increase, but one that had been expected for some time.

"We always knew there had to be an increase," said Abreu soon after the ceremony held between MIA's Dolphin and Flamingo parking garages. "It's a reflection that the original budget was adjusted later."

The item on the agenda for Tuesday's meeting recommends that county commissioners approve a resolution ratifying the additional \$34 million kicked in by the Florida Department of Transportation.

The amount would bring total agency share to \$100.5 million. Total project cost is now estimated at \$342 million, including \$259 million for construction alone.

MIA Mover is being built by Odebrecht construction and joint venture partner Parsons. Automated trains will be supplied through a partnership between Mitsubishi and Sumitomo.

Formally known as Crystal Movers, the system has become a standard for airport and light rail networks in several countries. Cars will travel at about 40 miles per hour and stop and start smoothly on rubber tires.

Once operational, the Miami Intermodal Center, or MIC, as the facility is known, will be one of the largest transportation projects in Miami-Dade County.

Originally envisaged as a vast car-bus-rail hub, the MIC has been reduced in scope over the years.

### PLAN CHANGED

It was once expected to handle all MIA baggage check-in and pick-up, but that service is now off the table.

Officials also initially envisaged expressways linking the hub to State Roads 112 to the north and 836 to the south -- major high-speed roads linking MIA to Interstate 95 to the east and Florida's Turnpike to the west.

But even a smaller MIC is a significant transport center -- one that seeks to realize the longtime dream of South Florida transportation engineers of connecting all modes of travel to give commuters and visitors travel choices.