

Local leadership crucial to driving transportation industry

BY RISA POLANSKY

Car, bus, plane or train, we all rely on transportation to get where we need to go.

And behind the scenes, leaders countywide are steering efforts to improve the journey.

"There is one person that is very interesting that could have changed the direction in favor of transportation in this county," said Sonny Holtzman, head of local consulting firm Holtzman Group and founding chairman of the Miami-Dade Expressway Authority.

Assistant County Manager **Ysela Llori** was appointed two years ago to manage and coordinate Miami-Dade County's transportation programs, and ever since, "I've seen the county take a professional interest in transportation," Mr. Holtzman said. "Here's finally somebody - let's call her Mrs. Transportation in the county - that can be the go-to person for all transportation issues. We never had that before."

Ms. Llori brings with her experience in Tallahassee and Washington, DC - vital now as federal stimulus money heads down the pike to the county level.

"She brings with her a vision and an overall view, kind of a global view, of what transportation really is," Mr. Holtzman said.

Before getting behind the wheel at the county, Ms. Llori served as the Florida Department of Transportation's assistant secretary for intermodal systems development.

Prior, she handled operations and planning in part of the Washington, DC, region for the Virginia Department of Transportation.

Now, in Miami-Dade, she oversees myriad transportation projects, from air to street to sea.

"I'm responsible for making sure that the mayor's transportation agenda moves forward in working with the commission and with outside partners to get our transportation priorities funded and implemented," Ms. Llori said. "It's everything from the [planned Port of Miami] tunnel to traffic circles. It's a wide gamut of activities, and it's incredibly interesting and it's very challenging and it's lots of fun, frankly."

Because of her Florida Department of Transportation background, "I'm well versed on the policy framework for transportation funding and decision making in general," she said. And after working in DC, she's familiar with "how Washington deal-making occurs."

As a bonus, she also has banking experience, so "I understand the bottom line in putting together financial deals," Ms. Llori said.

Top local priorities now: "We need to get the tunnel back on track. We need to get this interchange of 826-836 done... we need to finish the important work that's going on in the airport with the expansion of the North Terminal.

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"We need to get the 25th Street viaduct funded. We need to get [the] MIC-Earlington Heights [Metrorail extension] constructed and open... we need to continue to work to improve our bus and our transit service in this county."

Florida Department of Transportation District Secretary Gus Pego also cited a county official as an outstanding transportation player here.

Miami-Dade Aviation Department Director **José Abreu's** long career in transportation has truly made its mark on the community, Mr. Pego said.

Mr. Abreu is a former state head of transportation, serving for 2½ years as secretary of the Florida Department of Transportation under then-Gov. Jeb Bush.

Prior, he spent 18 years working his way through the state transportation agency.

In 2005, he began as Miami-Dade's aviation chief.

"I have witnessed firsthand José's very interesting career that continues to shape the transportation industry," Mr. Pego said.

In his years in the local district, Mr. Abreu was "intimately involved" in port tunnel studies and initial development of the Miami Intermodal Center, Mr. Pego said.

As secretary, Mr. Abreu helped shape and implement the state's Strategic Intermodal System.

"Today, as director of Miami International Airport, he inherited many challenges," Mr. Pego said. "Nevertheless, he has improved the airport, delivering a massive capital improvement program and is changing the MIA culture to one of customer service, one customer at a time."

Mr. Abreu cited improving customer service as a top goal in his role as aviation director.

Cost control and augmenting non-aeronautical revenue are



José Abreu impacts transportation as head of Miami-Dade Aviation.

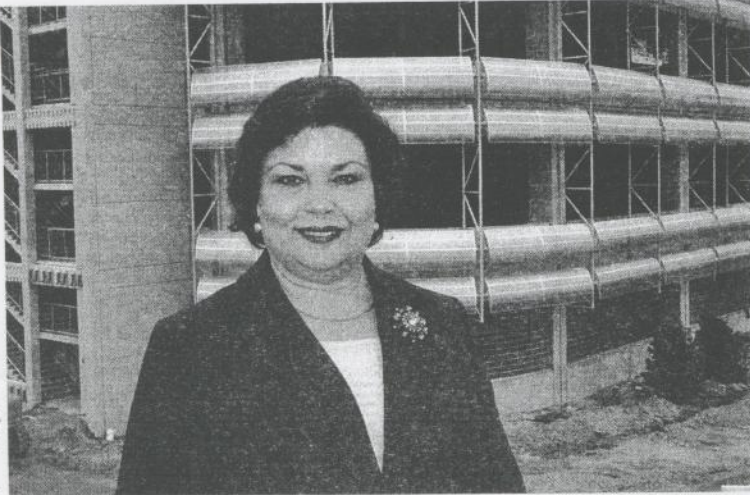


Photo by Maxine Usdan

Ysela Llori has brought vision in her role as 'Mrs. Transportation' in Miami-Dade County for two years.

other top priorities, he said.

But "certainly my No. 1 goal": completing airport capital improvement projects.

"Finishing up the capital improvements here at the aviation system is critical," he said. "In fact, it is the critical path to the viability of the airport systems."

Mr. Abreu also had his own transportation players to honor.

Both **Maurice Ferré** and **Walter Revell** stand out as transportation leaders through the years, he said.

Mr. Ferré, a former state legislator, Miami-Dade county commissioner and Miami mayor, "really is a visionary in transportation," Mr. Abreu said. "He's been preaching multimodalism before the phrase was popular."

As mayor, "he promoted transportation and he advocated the right transportation projects in Washington - he still does. He's just a big picture person...he sees the opportunity for connectivity as a policymaker."

Transportation is a critical responsibility of policymakers, Mr. Ferré said.



Maurice Ferré says policymakers must lead in transportation.

"I believe that people in local government - city, county, state - have as a primary responsibility the building of infrastructure... I've always believed that."

Over the years, Mr. Ferré has focused on various transportation initiatives, including the planned tunnel to the Port of Miami - "an idea I had 30 years ago," he said - and downtown's Metromover system.

Professionally, Mr. Ferré is founder of local business consulting firm Office of Maurice Ferré.

He also sits on the board of the Miami-Dade Expressway Authority.

"My current big project is bus rapid transit. I think that's going to completely, completely change the face of Miami in the next 10 years," Mr. Ferré said.

Transportation means more than mobility and decongestion, he said. "It's an economic development tool - that's what it really is."

Walter Revell, another iconic transportation player suggested by Mr. Abreu, says the same.

"He's also a visionary," Mr. Abreu said. "The man is amazing."

Mr. Revell, chairman and chief executive officer of Revell Investments since 1984, was the first state transportation head brought in from outside when the Florida Department of Transportation was created in the 1970s.

"I was the first new outsider to be secretary of transportation for the state of Florida," Mr. Revell said. "Beyond that, I



Walter Revell has been active in transportation for 52 years.

have worked in transportation for 52 years. I'm 74 years old and still very active."

In the past 35 years, Mr. Revell has served as chief executive officer of two consulting engineering firms.

He's been a member of the Florida Council of 100 since 1972, "where transportation has been a continuing priority over the years," he said.

In the early 1980s, Mr. Revell served as chairman of the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce, then the Florida Chamber of Commerce - both "heavily involved in transportation."

Also in the 1980s, he helped create Floridians for Better Transportation "as a major advocacy group for transportation."

Today, Mr. Revell serves on several corporate boards across the country, including NCL Corp., the holding company for Norwegian Cruise Line.

He's a principal management adviser to Florida's Turnpike Enterprise and an adviser to several companies in the industry.

"It's been a wild ride," Mr. Revell said. "Particularly, I have approached transportation from the economic development side. This is jobs. It is a massive supply chain with all types of vendors and suppliers serving contractors and subcontractors, and then it provides safety, service and mobility for the communities and our citizens."

For Mr. Revell's work over the years, "he's an icon," Mr. Abreu said. "We should honor our history."