

# Metromover stations, hybrid buses to receive stimulus

By RISA POLANSKY

With \$54.8 million in newly released federal stimulus aid in hand, Miami-Dade Transit is set to begin a bevy of infrastructure and modernization projects designed for not only immediate improvement but also long-term savings.

"We are spending the money to provide more efficiencies to our system so operating costs can go down," Director Harpal Kapoor said in an interview Monday.

The county is to spend \$16 million to upgrade power stations to adapt to new cars with higher voltage requirements "so we don't need to run our trains slower" as new ones come in, he said.

About \$8.7 million of the stimulus is to go toward nine

new, 60-foot-long hybrid buses to serve congested Kendall.

To fix downtown Metromover station elevators and escalators — and provide canopies to protect the moving stairways from the elements — the county plans to spend about \$7.1 million of its stimulus pot.

Now, the department is constantly dealing with escalator issues, many due to erosion.

Adding covers will protect both passengers and equipment, saving money in the long run, Mr. Kapoor said.

Seven mover stations are to see improvements: Government Center, Miami Avenue, Bayfront Park, First Street, College/Bayside, College North and Arena/State Plaza, said Susanna Guzman-Arean, who handles

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**Debra Owens**

transit's strategic planning and performance management.

About \$7.5 million is to go toward upgrading signage and graphics for the Metrorail system, needed now to integrate a new leg under construction from the Earlington Heights Station to the Miami Intermodal Center.

An added \$2 million is to fund equipment for a new

electronic signage system complete with wireless Internet components to provide free Wi-Fi at Metrorail stations.

Modernizing systems for functions such as dispatch and tracking is to cost \$6.2 million in stimulus aid "for the latest technology," Mr. Kapoor said. "This is 1980s technology which we are using right now."

Other infrastructure and modernization initiatives, such as digital closed-circuit televisions on Metromovers and new hybrid cars for staffers, round out the transit department's stimulus spending plan.

Of the full \$64.5 million the feds handed to the county, \$9.7 million is to be divided among 24 municipalities.

County attorneys are reviewing draft agreements for each local government.

The county anticipates presenting them to the municipalities within a month, said Debra Owens, special assistant, federal affairs.

Those agreements are to in-

clude administrative fees.

Municipal leaders initially balked at paying the county to administer the stimulus program, but "we are responsible for everything which happens here," Mr. Kapoor said — and the federal money could be at risk should something go wrong.

Also, the county department isn't responsible just for administering the program initially, but also for keeping tabs down the line.

For example, Mr. Kapoor said, if a city uses stimulus funds to buy a trolley, Miami-Dade Transit is responsible for monitoring the trolley until it stops running.

County commissioners took transit officials' word for it and in May agreed the department could charge municipalities an up-to 5% administrative fee.

Despite the early protests, the municipalities have gotten on board, Ms. Owens said.

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