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New car rental center expected to bring dramatic change to MIA

The first major component of a huge transportation hub near Miami International Airport opens early Tuesday, bringing dramatic change to the way travelers use MIA.

By Al Chardy

Picking up or dropping off someone at Miami International Airport has always been an adventure, as traffic congestion and tight security combine to deter lengthy or warm welcomes and farewells.

Those interactions could begin to become less stressed when the first major component of a huge transportation hub -- still under construction -- opens early Tuesday just east of Miami International Airport.

A rental car center will be operational then, for the first time bringing under one roof all the major and many of the smaller car rental companies that offer vehicles at MIA.

The opening of the rental car center will mark completion of the first major phase of the \$1.7-billion Miami Intermodal Center travel hub, which by 2015 will connect in one site virtually all county modes of transportation: aircraft, cars, Metrorail, Tri-Rail, Amtrak and perhaps in the future high-speed rail.

The MIC, as the travel hub is known, is one of three major transportation projects underway in South Florida -- along with the \$1.8-billion reconstruction of Interstate 595 in central Broward, and the \$1-billion construction of a tunnel under Biscayne Bay to the Port of Miami.

Starting Tuesday at 3 a.m., people who rent cars at MIA will no longer have to meander through back streets to return the vehicle at hard-to-find locations. They can just drive into the new rental car center just east of MIA, drop off the vehicle, then hop onto a new rental car shuttle service and get to the terminal.

‘A LONG JOURNEY’

The new system will replace the multiple rental car shuttle buses now operating at MIA, one of the key contributors to traffic congestion on the MIA road network.

Reducing congestion at and around MIA and linking modes of transportation in one hub have been key concepts behind construction of the MIC, which includes the rental car center, the still-

under-construction Miami central station and transit services and major upgrades on roads leading to the airport.

“This has been a long vision, a long journey since the concept became reality,” said Gus Pego, Florida Department of Transportation District Six secretary in Miami.

FEWER TRAFFIC JAMS

Private car traffic also contributes to MIA's dense congestion. While traffic involving private cars will not be shifted to the MIC, transportation officials believe that once transit services are available at the hub, traffic tie-ups at MIA will be reduced.

“By moving all the major rental car agencies over to a central location, we're decongesting the airport by 30 percent,” Pego said.

Once the MIC is all finished, likely in 2015, someone arriving at or leaving from MIA will not need to be picked up or dropped off at airport terminals.

They can start or end the journey at the MIC, since the terminals will be connected there via an automated train that will be called MIA Mover, still under construction.

The MIA Mover station will be housed at the Miami central station, which will also house new platforms for Metrorail, Tri-Rail, Amtrak and eventually perhaps a high-speed rail to Orlando and Tampa.