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State officials expect big progress next year on transportation hub

By ERIC KALIS

State transportation officials say they will be busy next year as work continues on several major Miami-Dade County projects that have been in the pipeline for many years.

Next year should mark substantial progress on the Miami Intermodal Center near Miami International Airport, said Ric Katz, spokesman for the Florida Department of Transportation.

Planning for the center, which is to be a regional hub for public transportation, began in 1989. The first phase of the project, which is expected to cost \$1.3 billion, should be completed by 2009.

About \$269 million of the first phase was funded by state fuel tax revenue.

Project officials hope work on the first component of the facility—a rental-car center with room for 6,500 vehicles on property bounded by Northwest 25th Street, 39th Avenue and LeJeune Road—will begin with groundbreaking late next year, Mr. Katz said.

The state budgeted \$217.6 million for the center, but the lowest bid received in September came in at \$399.9 million, Mr. Katz said.

The target date for the center's opening is 2011.

Driving at the airport can be "unsafe and difficult," Mr. Katz said. "The center will take all of the rental cars and shuttles out from the underbelly of the airport and decongest the roads leading to the airport."

The core of the intermodal

system next to the rental-car center, Miami Central Station, cannot be built until the center is complete, Mr. Katz said. Project officials are securing construction documents for the station, but groundbreaking is not expected for next year, he said.

Another major component of the facility is extensive improvements being done on LeJeune Road. The bulk of work on the road will be accomplished next year, Mr. Katz said, with completion scheduled for March 2008.

Construction on surrounding Northwest 38th Court and 21st Street should begin next year, Mr. Katz said.

Other transportation projects expected to continue next year include:

- Reconstructing and widening the Palmetto Expressway to improve mobility at the Coral Way and Tamiami Trail interchanges, which began in June 2005. Florida Department of Transportation media specialist Brian Rick said work will continue through 2007 with hopes of finishing in early 2008.

- Continuing the extensive overhaul of the Biscayne Boulevard corridor, including drainage improvements, paving, new traffic signals and landscaping.

- Awarding a contract for the Port of Miami tunnel. The Florida DOT has committed \$600 million to the \$1.2 billion project.

State officials will plan construction on the Palmetto Expressway-State Road 836 interchange, Mr. Rick said, but the overhaul is not expected to begin until the fall of 2008.