News Clip

From: *Civil Engineering Magazine*, October 2011

Subject: **Transportation**

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http://www.asce.org/CEMagazine/Article.aspx?id=23622320581

Transportation

The Miami Intermodal Center, a massive transit hub designed to reduce traffic congestion at Miami International Airport, moves closer to completion as the MIA Mover leaves the station for the first time.

By Kevin Wilcox

The $2.2-billion Miami Intermodal Center (MIC) took another step toward completion on September 9, 2011, when the first cars of the Miami International Airport (MIA) Mover, the Sunshine State's newest automated people mover (APM), began shuttling passengers down a dual, 1.25 mi track that connects the center to the airport.

The MIA Mover is an elevated light-rail system that can transport more than 3,000 passengers and their luggage to and from the airport per hour. It was designed to reduce curbside traffic at the airport by 30 percent while accommodating the rapid population growth of the Miami Dade metropolitan area for decades to come.

The complex assignment of designing and building an APM so close to a bustling international airport was accomplished by a joint venture of the engineering firms Parsons, of Pasadena, California, and Odebrecht USA, of Coral Gables, Florida (POJV).

Approximately 70,000 cars and buses passed through the MIA Mover corridor each day during construction, so maintenance of traffic made construction logistics a challenge. As a result, much of the work was done at night, when traffic was lighter, according to David Leverenz, P.E., F.ASCE, a vice president of Parsons and the POJV project executive, and Luiz Simon, an Odebrecht project executive, in written answers to questions from Civil Engineering magazine online.

The MIA Mover uses eight rubber-tired vehicles supplied by Mitsubishi Heavy Industries America, Inc., of New York City, traveling on raised concrete plinths that were cast on top of a flat guideway. The cars are directed by a guidance system in which small wheels on the sides of

the vehicles travel along longitudinal rails, which provide input for steering the wheels of the cars and keeping them in proper position.

Although POJV was spared any serious storms during the three years of construction on the APM, the system is designed to shut down in dangerous weather and the fixed facilities are constructed to withstand 145 mph winds, according to Leverenz and Simon.

The MIA Mover connects two elevated stations, one nestled between two parking garages at MIA, the other at MIC. The MIA station, at 32,500 sq ft, connects passengers to the airport's terminals via existing automated walkways. The other station, designed and constructed by the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), is located at the Miami Central Station (MCS), a part of MIC that is under construction after an official groundbreaking September 27, although the portion that serves as a rental car center (RCC) is complete.

At 3.4 million sq ft, the RCC is the second-largest rental car facility in the United States. By connecting to the RCC, the APM obviates the need for the airport's previous shuttle bus services, reducing emissions and congestion at airport curbs.

Eventually the MCS, which is scheduled to be completed in 2013, will provide travelers with access to a bus depot, hotel courtesy buses, taxis, Amtrak trains, and Miami's Metrorail, via a 2.4-mi extension that is scheduled to be completed in 2012. Adjacent parcels of land offer several sites for future commercial development as well.

As if completing the MIA Mover on time and on budget wasn't enough, the effort is the only construction project in Florida to earn the Voluntary Protection Program (VPP) Star status from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) for outstanding efforts by employers and employees to achieve exemplary job-site health and safety performance.

VPP is a long process, so POJV started early through engagement of their project safety committee, which included representatives of all major subcontractors, according to Simon and Leverenz. VPP starts with a strong safety program and a workplace culture that genuinely values safety—that understands that it's more than simply compliance with regulations. The planning, training, meetings, inspections, reporting, rewarding, and documentation which VPP recognizes all contributed to this safety culture.