

Airport's Metrorail link on track to meet target of 800,000 users yearly

By LOU ORTIZ

The new Miami-Dade County Metrorail Orange Line to Miami International Airport is averaging nearly 2,000 daily passengers since service began July 28, county officials said.

Before service on the 2.4-mile track to the airport began, the county estimated that 800,000 to 1.2 million passengers a year would use the system.

"The average weekday use is about 1,890 passengers since the beginning of August," said County Transit Department spokesperson Karla Damian. "The forecast for boardings at the airport station was predicted at 1,850."

"Keep in mind," she said, "that these numbers would need to be developed over the course of six months to one year. Also, these numbers would be realized after the full implementation of capital improvements at the Miami Intermodal Center."

"These improvements include inter-city bus service (e.g. Greyhound), and rail service from Amtrak and Tri-Rail," Ms. Damian said. "They are expected to be in place at the end of 2013. It is, therefore, premature to make comparisons using these particular forecasts at this time."

The Miami Intermodal Center also includes a Rental Car Center, Airport Mover and access road and highway improvements. The roadway improvements have been completed and the intermodal center is under construction. The Rental Car Center opened in 2010 and the MIA Mover in 2011. The intermodal center station is expected to open next year.

Ms. Damian said the Transit Department has fully integrated the Metrorail airport link in the system.

"We were able to successfully integrate the new 2.4-mile extension from the Miami International Airport Station to the existing rail line," Ms. Damian said.

All of the world's leading cities — London, Tokyo, Paris, Sydney — have rail links that connect their international airports to the urban core.

In the U.S., cities with rail links to their airports are rather exclusive, with Miami joining Chicago, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Portland, Seattle-Tacoma and Washington, DC, in providing the rail service to passengers.

The county broke ground on the Metrorail airport link project in May 2009 with cost totaling \$506 million. The Florida Department of Transportation provided \$101.3 million of it, with \$404.7 million from the county's Citizens Independent Transportation Plan.

The plan, which voters approved Nov. 5, 2002, collects a half-percent surtax on sales for transportation projects.

"We are pleased to see more and more local residents and tourists using our new Metrorail service to go to and from the airport,"

said County Transit Director Ysela Llorca.

"This new rail service is having a positive impact not only on transportation, but is also providing redevelopment opportunities along the existing rail stations," she said. "In terms of transportation and the local economy, everyone wins."

Called the Orange Line, the airport link is the 23rd station on the Metrorail system. Commuters can ride the Orange Line uninterrupted to the airport from Dadeland South heading north to the airport. However, commuters riding the Green Line south from the Palmetto, Hialeah, Northside, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Brownsville stations must transfer to the Orange Line at the Earlington Heights station.



Photo by Maxine Usdan



Photo by Marlene Quaroni

A Metrorail train arrives at the system's 23rd station at the Miami Intermodal Center serving the airport. "We are pleased to see more and more local residents and tourists using our new Metrorail service to go to and from the airport," said county Transportation Director Ysela Llorca, citing its economic impact.

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