



YOUNG PEOPLE'S POLICY PRIORITIES

Transportation That Works

Miami owes its beginnings to innovation in transportation. In 1891, Cleveland native Julia Tuttle decided to move to South Florida to start a new life after the death of her husband and purchased 640 acres on the north bank of the Miami River in what is now downtown Miami. At that point, our community was rural and sparsely populated, and Tuttle wanted to be a leader in starting a city here. To do that, she knew a railroad was needed to connect the city to other parts of the country and attract development - and decided to reach out to Henry Flagler, a railroad tycoon. While at first he was not interested, after the Great Freeze of 1894, the crops of the Miami area were the only ones in Florida to survive and he saw the use of expanding his railroads to South Florida. On July 28, 1896, Miami was officially incorporated as a city with a population of just over 300.



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Transportation is the fabric that binds any city together and connects us to one another, as well as to our jobs, schools and places to have fun. The effectiveness of our transportation systems impacts all of us. In Miami-Dade, and South Florida more broadly, a vast majority of people depend on their cars to get around. This has a lot to do with the fact that Miami came of age and exploded in population at the same time that owning a car became very common in the US and highways were expanded across the country. In 1920, 43,000 people lived in Miami-Dade – by 1960, it was 935,000. In 1920, about 30% of US households owned a car – by 1960, it had reached 80%. Our community was developed in a time where the car not only became more and more common, but the way we built our cities changed because of it and we had no idea that there would be negative effects to this new technology.

Because, truth is, there comes a point in the evolution of a city-region when the car is no longer an effective way to get around. Once a metro region hits the size of more than 5 million people, traffic grinds to a halt,



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roads become congested, and the velocity of urban life slows down. There is simply not enough capacity for everyone in the region to get around in a car. You've probably noticed this – how much time in your life has been lost to a traffic jam on the Palmetto or I-95?

South Florida is regularly rated one of the worst areas in the nation in terms of traffic congestion. (Shocker!) According to a 2019 FIU traffic report, the Greater Miami area has the 12th worst traffic congestion in the country and 13th longest median commute times. Drivers lose an average of 105 hours per year sitting in traffic, at an average cost of \$1,470 per driver. Traffic congestion isn't just annoying, it harms our economy – it means time wasted in traffic rather than being productive or enjoyed, people who can't access jobs because they're too far and makes any sort of delivery or travel slower and more expensive. We all know people who spend over two hours every day on their commute. In all, South Florida loses \$4 billion per year from traffic congestion, which amounts to 3% of the region's \$120 billion in annual wages and salaries.

Our traffic issues also harm our environment by adding pollution to the air. Studies show that this immense amount of traffic results in almost 1.9 billion pounds of carbon dioxide emitted in Miami alone. The Environmental Protection Agency has actually ordered the state to curb air pollution in its six most urban counties, including Miami-Dade and Broward. We know how devastating climate change could be to us, and we cannot afford to deepen the problem like this.

Many people think the answer to these problems is to build more highways and roads or widening them, but the consensus from researchers who have looked at this is that this does not solve these problems, and investing in this way can be a waste as they eventually get filled up too.

We have a lot of cars, highways and traffic in Miami-Dade – we do not have a lot of public transportation. Only 3% of commuters use public transportation – a lot less than usual in metropolitan areas of our size, where it tends to be 13% on average! We know this – many of us have never used public transportation in our community, or have only done so a few times. The public transportation we do have, tends to not be very reliable or good. The Transit Alliance, a local organization, has

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found about 75% of the Miami-Dade Transit bus routes don't come more frequently than every half hour, and only five County routes arrive every 15 minutes or less. Most people are waiting 30, 45 or 60 minutes for a bus. That's a long time to wait in Miami's burning heat, especially since only one in four bus stops provides any shelter. Further, about 500 bus runs start late each month, and hundreds are "ghost buses," that never make the scheduled run at all – over a three-month period, the group counted 2,103 "ghost buses."

In a County that's as geographically spread out as ours, it means those who do not have cars are severely restricted in terms of where they can go for schools, jobs or even cultural or recreational activities. It forces many of us to have a car, and I don't know about your personal budget, but mine would look better without car payments, insurance and gas. And for those who can't afford one, it means endless hours navigating our unreliable transit system. In Miami-Dade, commuters essentially must choose between battling heavy traffic or spending what seems like endless hours navigating an unreliable transit system. Our current system of public transit lacks the connectivity and efficiency to help us travel in a fast and reliable manner, reducing our options.

Many residents and organizations have encouraged the County to invest in our public transit system, to provide Miamians more options beyond just cars. Using public transit is cheaper and also provides opportunities for people who can't afford to own a car. It reduces pollution, is a much safer mode of transportation and can be an incredible boon to the economies and attractiveness of cities, as space used for roads, parking and cars can instead be used for parks, businesses or housing. It can help people visit places that otherwise would have been impossible to. The small business owner, the person struggling to make ends meet, the person who wants to go to college and some friends who want to visit an art museum all win by us being able to move around more efficiently.

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However, we have been made promises that were not kept, and given plans that were not executed. Despite overwhelming support for public transportation to be funded instead of several new highways in the 1970s, Miami's Metrorail system was not operational until 1984 and has not yet reached the scope which was promised over 30 years



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ago. In 2002, Miami-Dade residents understood there was a need for local funding to support transit so they voted in favor of the People's Transportation Plan, in which a half penny transit tax was introduced to fund the Metrorail Orange Line expansion in the short term with a promise to add 90 miles of track and 50 stations for the Metrorail, including to efficiently connect South Dade to downtown. 18 years later, there's only been one extension – to the airport, three miles in length. The County has talked about connecting Miami Beach to the mainland for decades with public transportation, and it has not happened yet. In 2016, a new plan was introduced, known as the Strategic Miami Area Rapid Transit (SMART) expansion plan. It outlined six corridors in need of premium transit lines throughout Miami-Dade county, such as an east-west line likely following the Dolphin expressway and a beach corridor line to connect South Beach to Midtown and Downtown Miami. It's an awesome plan – but the County has not been serious about taking the steps and allocating the funds to actually make it happen.

However, inroads are being made. The Transit Alliance launched a Better Bus Project campaign that redesigned our current bus network (which hadn't been done in 30 years) to increase access to frequent routes and efficiency, as well as connections to other transportations options. Miami and Miami Beach are considering plans to expand their free trolley systems. Miami is encouraging “urban in-fill” housing, adding more housing in places that are close to downtown, to create more density which makes neighborhoods more walkable and public transportation more viable. We need to figure out how to implement the SMART Plan, but it would be a great framework for the County. Bus Rapid Transit, which is a way of building infrastructure that allows buses to travel faster than other cars on the road, is in the works connecting South Dade to downtown. The Rider's Alliance is working on Candidate Report cards on transit

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If we continue to build on the options, we can have a lot more Miamians be able to move around their County in a way that is affordable, safe and efficient, and we'll all be better for it.