

Some fear trolleys may not do enough for downtowners

By CATHERINE LACKNER

Miami's Downtown Development Authority is to look next week at how to leverage motorized trolleys funded by a federal stimulus to serve the scores of newcomers residing downtown and new businesses are springing up to meet their needs.

A system to move people around efficiently is logical, say authority directors, and the city trolley system might be the vehicle with routes within the development district's boundaries.

Directors want to bring riders to the city's restaurants and to destinations like the American Airlines Arena, the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts and Mary Brickell Village. And,

they say, it's important that trolleys run nights and weekends as well as the workweek.

Noting at the authority's last meeting that tentative trolley routes have already been set, "The schedule is a daytime schedule," said Jay Solowsky, the authority's outside counsel. "One purpose of the trolley is to move people between businesses, restaurants and event venues."

"A lot more people would ride the trolley at night," suggested board member Oscar Rodriguez.

"We agree," said Javier Betancourt, authority manager of urban planning and transportation. "We've asked the city to expand the routes, but the city doesn't have enough funding. We'll

continue to push."

Proposed trolley routes cover an ambitious map, stretching from Southeast 26th Road on the south to Northeast 40th Street on the north, with legs reaching southwest on Coral Way to Ponce de Leon Boulevard in Coral Gables and west on Northwest 20th Street to Northwest 27th Avenue.

But downtown authority members say they fear not enough emphasis will be given downtown and its unique problems like getting crews off cruise ships to shop in the central business district.

"We need it all," said board member Neisen Kasdin. "We have thousands of people living downtown who would use this trolley, but the routes have been based on politics instead of demand. It's street funding. Why should the routes

be divided into five districts?"

"In the previous administration," said Miami Commissioner and authority chair Marc Sarnoff, "each commissioner got what he wanted," so the routes were split by city district, not according to need.

"The routes aren't set in stone," said Mark Spanioli, senior manager of planning, design, transportation and services. "There's a lot of flexibility there."

The city will pay for the buses with money from the federal jobs stimulus, he said.

"Maybe we could look at adjusting other routes," Mr. Kasdin said. "But at some point so many people want so many routes it doesn't make sense."

The board decided to revisit the issue Feb. 19.