
June 16, 2009

[Miami Trolley Revisited](#)

Posted by Adam Mizrahi On June - 16 - 2009

The new downtown trolley funded by stimulus dollars is coming soon to downtown. The DDA has announced the possible route for the proposed trolley. According to the DDA:

A proposal to introduce a rubber tire trolley service along Downtown Miami's Biscayne Boulevard-Brickell Avenue corridor has widespread support among area stakeholders, according to a survey conducted by the Miami Downtown Development Authority (DDA). Seventy-one percent of the nearly 600 respondents who took part in the online survey believe "there is a need for a Downtown trolley along Biscayne Boulevard and Brickell Avenue," and 79% anticipate utilizing the service once it is implemented.

- 21% of survey respondents claimed public transit as their primary method of transportation
- 49% would ride the trolley during normal business hours; 56% during lunchtime; and 58% to-and-from special events
- 67% favor extending a Biscayne-Brickell trolley to connect to Miami's Midtown and Design Districts

The Brickell-Biscayne corridor rubber tire trolley proposal calls for a route linking Miami's Central Business District, Arts and Entertainment District, and Brickell Financial District. The trolley would stop at key destinations including American Airlines Arena, Mary Brickell Village, Bayfront Park, the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts, the future Museum Park, major residential and commercial buildings, as well as Metrorail and Metromover stations along the route.

Javier A. Betancourt, the Miami DDA's Manager for Urban Planning and Transportation, believes the rubber tire trolley will complement Downtown Miami's existing transit infrastructure. "The number of people who live, work, and visit Downtown Miami is growing at an exponential rate. More than 30,000 people reside here and another 190,000 commute in each day for work, making Downtown the largest employment center in the State.

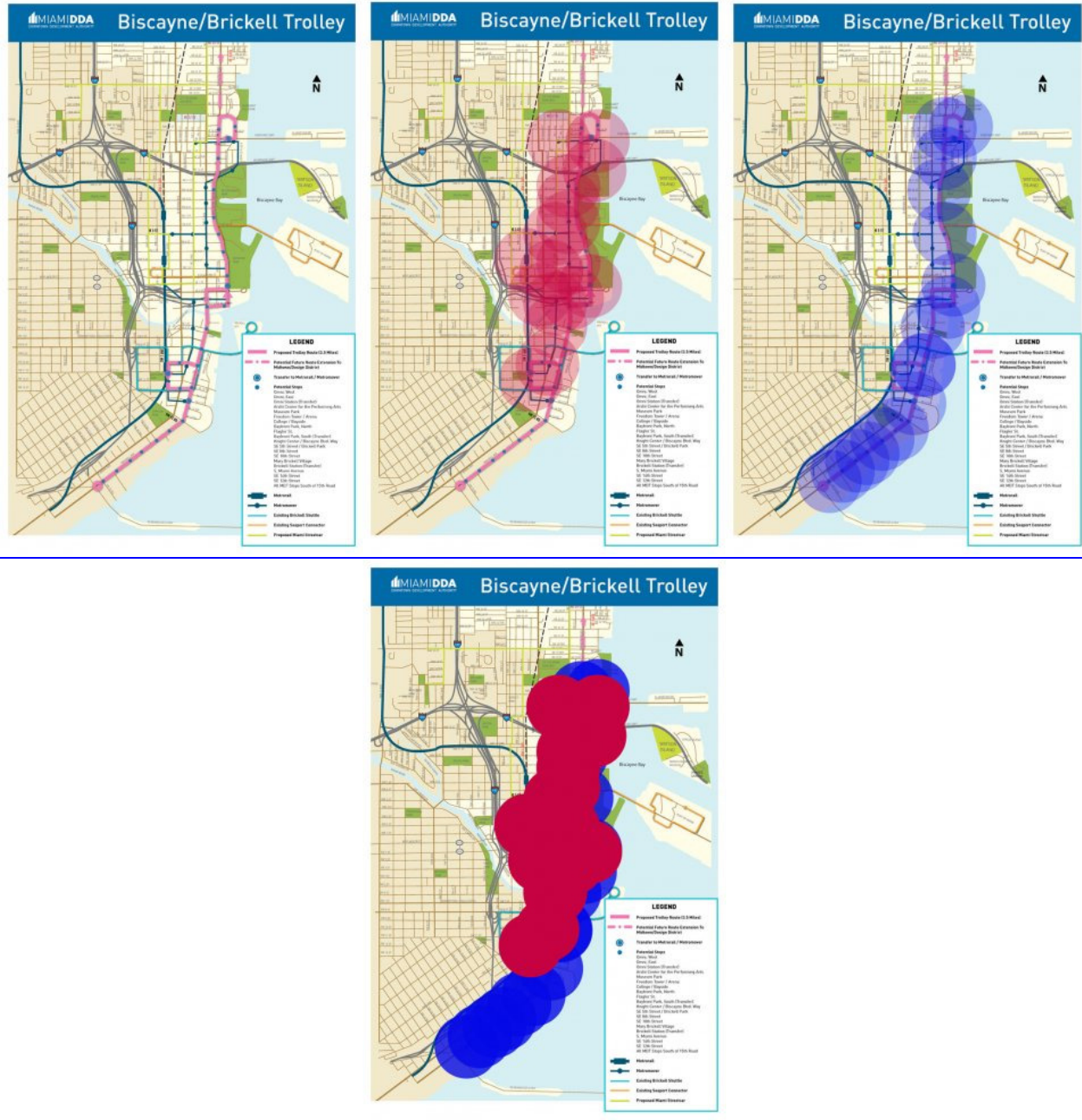
In a [previous post on the subject](#), I spoke about the redundant service this new trolley will offer. Unfortunately, much of the trolley route is already serviced by the Metromover. Personally, I am afraid that what looks like a good idea is really just a waste of money and publicity stunt. While some of the other trolley lines proposed around Miami are perfectly legitimate, most of the proposed downtown trolley mirrors existing Metromover lines. This means that any gains in transit ridership within downtown will most likely come at the expense of lower ridership on the existing Metromover service.

By using 1/4 walking radius around the existing and proposed stations (1/2 mile diameter circle), one can visualize the redundant service being proposed. It is generally assumed that the most efficient transit oriented development should be within a 1/4 mile (or 5 min walk) from a transit station to be most effective.

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(Top-Left) - Existing Metromover route and the proposed trolley route. (Top-Right) - 1/2 mile circle around each Metromover station. (Bottom-Left) - 1/2 mile around each proposed trolley station. (Bottom-Right) - Overlap of Metromover and Trolley Service.

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By looking at these images one can easily see that much of the proposed downtown trolley route is already serviced by the existing Metromover. Metromover stations in and around downtown and their accompanying 1/4 walking radius already reach much of the urbanized areas of Downtown/Brickell. Except for the south end of Brickell, which definitely needs transit service, most of the trolley route provides little improvement in transit reach. Furthermore, being that the Metromover already is within 1/4 mile of the bay — having placed the trolley line farther east on Biscayne Blvd means that the much of the 1/4 mile radius around the proposed stations falls into the bay where the fish live.

Rather than compete with existing Metromover service for what is now a limited amount of riders I personally would have liked to have seen trolleys (if that really is the best we can come up with) that extend existing service from Downtown Metromover stations to urbanized areas outside of Downtown such as the Design District, Wynwood, Little Havana, and areas west of Brickell. As the proposal stands now, there are very few gains in transit service to the area — few users will gain service that they did not have before! Many of the attractions listed in the survey above, such as the American Airlines Arena and Mary Brickell Village, are already serviced by the Metromover nearby. What is needed are extensions similar to what was proposed for the south end of Brickell Trolley — graphically speaking the blue on the map should extend beyond the red, not overlap it.

It is very unfortunate that the DDA and other officials chose to use our very limited funds to mirror existing service rather than bring much needed NEW service to areas such as Midtown Miami or West Brickell. Proposals such as the streetcar to Midtown have been dead in the water — trolleys could have been a good temporary alternative and case study for the proposed streetcar. Although there are proposals to one day extend the trolley to the Design District — in my opinion this should have been done first. It seems silly to overlap existing service in Downtown to satisfy a handful of people when areas around Downtown have terrible accessibility into the core of the city. Midtown Miami is in desperate need of such service — after all 67% of respondents in the survey above, the highest percentage in the survey, wanted this service!

In a city like Miami, with such limited mass transit one of the best ways to improve transit is to extend the reach of the service to new users — not to mirror existing services. Metromover and existing buses are not being used to capacity — why then I ask are we adding so much more capacity to such a limited area? What is needed is to bring new and existing services to a whole new audience (Midtown Miami, Little Havana, West Brickell). Trolley riders coming from outlying would have added a much larger customer base to the existing Metromover.

While I do understand that the trolley will provide yet another option for Downtown that some people will use — limited funds must be used to make a more comprehensive and far reaching service before we double and triple existing services. For the same amount of money and service, trolley lines could have provided NEW service to neighborhoods around Downtown that complement and work with the Metromover stations to bring more customers.

Trolley lines coming from Midtown and the Design District could have fed into the OMNI Metromover station where users could have easily transferred to reach the rest of Downtown. In the south, trolleys feeding the south (as the proposal does now) and west ends of Brickell could have connected with one of the stations at the southern end of Brickell.

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Unfortunately, as it stand now the trolley will not “support Metrorail and Metromover services by providing riders ‘door-to-door’ service to popular destinations throughout the district,” as Mr. Betancourt said, in my opinion it will cannibalize riders from those services. What is needed are solutions that will bring greater efficiency and higher ridership to existing services — low ridership after all has doomed many attempts to expand service. Adding more capacity to such a limited geographical area will not accomplish that.