

MIAMI TODAY

Chamber, asking members if they ride transit, cites progress

By CATHERINE LACKNER

"Who came here on public transit today?" asked Sergio Abreu, incoming chair of the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce's Transportation & Infrastructure Committee. About half of the roughly 25 people in the room raised their hands.

He was speaking at a committee meeting during which members laid out tentative goals for 2017-18. The goals will be refined and amended in coming weeks before the chamber's official goals-setting conference June 6-7.

"We can't rely on everybody else to take transit," said Mr. Abreu, who is director of local government, community relations and economic development at Teco Energy. "Talk about it, tweet about it, tell your friends. Ridership is important. We can spend billions on a transportation system but if nobody uses it, what's the point?"

"We've made progress," said Mitch Bierman, outgoing chair and a partner in the Weiss Serota Helfman Cole & Bierman law firm. "There are steps being taken on all six corridors of the SMART plan," he said, referring to the Strategic Miami Area Rapid Transit plan. "The SMART plan has to be in the middle of our goals."

And, in fact, many of the tentative goals dealt with the plan, including advocating for funding, and encouraging private-sector consultants to expedite the required project design

and environment studies.

"We have incredible momentum now," said committee member Charles Scurr, executive director of the Citizens' Independent Transportation Trust. "It's important that the momentum continues."

The Miami-Dade Transportation Planning Organization, which created the SMART plan, hasn't yet identified which mode of transportation will be used on any corridor, but the public perception is that at least some corridors will get train service.



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But trains are 19th century technology, said committee member David Capelli, CEO and founder of Tech Miami. "We can just go straight to autonomous vehicles."

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The committee added to its SMART plan goal that the latest

technology and innovations be included in any plan put forward.

"South Dade cities are excited that Metrorail might be extended to them," Mr. Bierman said. "All Aboard Florida wouldn't be investing in trains if there weren't a need for them. Trains are going to be needed, whether there are autonomous cars or not."

Among the things chamber members can do is to raise awareness of the public transit options that exist now, committee members said, so another goal is to organize events

and forums — in conjunction with transit agencies and policymakers — to educate the public.

Mr. Bierman suggested employers schedule transit days during which they offer incentives for employees to use any transit, other than their own cars, to get to work.

"How can we help protect our local agencies?" Mr. Lowell asked. Both the Miami-Dade Expressway Authority and the extension of All Aboard Florida from West Palm Beach to Orlando are under attack in the State Legislature.

"We need to show up to the game and ask the companies who build infrastructure to be there with us," said committee member Jose Fuentes, who is senior government relations consultant for the Becker & Poliakoff law firm. "They're the ones that will benefit."

"We should get with our brothers and sisters in other chambers," particularly in the counties in which

All Aboard Florida is facing opposition, said Vicky Leiva, committee incoming vice chair and a lawyer in the Bilzin Sumberg firm.

Among other goals discussed were to establish and nurture communication between local transit agencies, including the South Florida Regional Transportation Authority and All Aboard Florida. The group also wants to make Brickell walkable, and it will support the Citizens' Independent Transportation Trust's 2017 Transportation Summit, to be held Sept. 28-29.