

## Public Transit Day magnifies South Florida's mass transit woes

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Carlos Gimenez's commute to work was different on Friday.

The Miami-Dade County mayor eschewed his normal arrangements and instead used public transportation, becoming just one of dozens of elected officials and county residents who pledged to participate in an initiative dubbed Public Transit Day.

An idea born out of a social media initiative called "100 Great Ideas," the all-day event aims to bring awareness to the inefficiencies of Miami-Dade County's mass transit systems, long bemoaned as inaccessible, unreliable and unkempt.

"It's an educational experience for our city, for leaders and engaged locals to reflect on the state of the transit system, to try it personally and to increase empathy and knowledge for the community," wrote Rebecca Fishman Lipsey, CEO of social entrepreneurship bootcamp Radical Partners and an organizer of Public Transit Day, alongside Urban Impact Lab.

While riding the Metrorail to Brickell with Gimenez, Department of Transportation director Alice Bravo and fellow Public Transit Day organizer Marta Vicedo of Urban Impact Lab, Lipsey said the hope is public leaders will "more viscerally understand the urgency of making mass transit system improvements a top priority."

It is certainly top of mind for businesses, whose bottom lines are frequently impacted by mass transit inefficiencies and traffic gridlock on South Florida's main roadways.

Without functional mass transit, workers struggle to get to work on time. The phenomenon impacts productivity in the workplace due to lost work hours and stressed-out employees. It hinders businesses' bottom lines and, overall, it impedes economic growth of both Miami and the tri-county region.

Vicedo highlighted the role public transportation plays in economic development.

"Mass transit plays a multifaceted role in our city's growth," she said. "It impacts our economy, health, equity and environment. The city becomes more competitive and livable with better transit."

"[There's] a growing awareness that the current situation isn't sustainable," said lawyer **Mitchell Bierman, a partner with Weiss Serota Helfman Cole & Bierman in Coral Gables** and an expert on transportation and infrastructure. "We can't build expressways wide enough to accommodate all cars and allow people to move from place to place in a reasonable amount of time. This is having an impact on business, tourism and our prosperity."

A 2015 study done by the American Highways Users Alliance said that three of the nation's 50 worst traffic bottlenecks were on stretches of the Palmetto and Dolphin expressways, which are main routes, not only for commuters, but also for cargo.

"The primary issue we face stems from the distances people have to commute and our ability to provide transit options that are faster and/or more convenient than using automobiles," Bravo said in an April interview with the *Business Journal*. "We need to be able to attract people to public transportation by making it clean, safe, reliable and convenient."

Increasing ridership is another objective of Public Transit Days, says Vicedo.

"We've seen so many people today who have never used public transit, so they have now become more transit literate as a result of Transit Day," she said. "And getting people on transit is the highest measure of success is ridership. Then ridership translates to advocacy — people engage and begin to advocate for the system."

Those participating in the all-day event have been invited to share their experience on social media by using the hashtag "#publictransitday." There also is a website dedicated to Public Transit Day where riders can submit reflections.

"Leaders and locals all have a role to play in shaping the future, and this event is all about having a shared community experience so that we as a whole can reflect upon the best course forward," Lipsey wrote on 100 Great Ideas' Facebook page. "We won't agree — that's expected. But we can learn together, dialogue together, generate ideas together, and stand together to push for progress."



From left, Miami-Dade County Department of Transportation and Public Works Alice Bravo; Miami-Dade County Mayor Carlos Gimenez; Radical Partners CEO Rebecca Fishman Lipsey; and Urban Impact Lab strategy director Marta Vicedo. Together they rode the Metrorail from Dadeland South to Brickell on Public Transit Day, Dec. 9, 2016.