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Residents warm to east-west transit plans

By [Michael Turnbell](#), Sun Sentinel

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When commuters from the western suburbs head to Fort Lauderdale or the airport, they drive if they want to get there on time.

In five years, they might be able to make the same trip on a bus or streetcar unlike anything that exists today in [Broward County](#).

Residents say they've warmed up to the idea. That's because state officials dropped plans for a \$1 billion east-west light rail system after nearly a decade of study and little progress.

Residents didn't want loud subway-style trains running by their neighborhoods.

Now state officials say the western half of the route would be served mostly by rapid transit buses. Modern streetcars would be used between the Tri-Rail, downtown Fort Lauderdale and the airport.

"With the price of gas, something like this is going to be needed by 2035," said Linda Anderson, who was among about 40 people who attended two public meetings on the project last week.

Unlike light rail, which operates in an exclusive lane, streetcars usually run in the same lane as automobiles. Streetcar vehicles are powered by overhead electric lines but operate as single cars. They are a bit larger than city buses, but smaller, less intrusive and cheaper to build than light-rail trains.

Neither exists in Broward today. Tri-Rail is classified as commuter rail, which is larger and runs on freight tracks.

"We've taken a step back and listened to the public and tried to give them what [residents] want," said Khalilah Ffrench, project manager for the Florida Department of Transportation.

Two routes are being considered.

Both start at Sawgrass Mills, run through the Sawgrass Corporate Park and east along Interstate 595 to Nova Southeastern University. From there, they differ in how they get to downtown and the airport.

One runs up State Road 7, east on Broward Boulevard by the Tri-Rail station and on to downtown, then south to the airport. The other would run south to Griffin Road, then to the Dania Beach Tri-Rail station,

advertisement



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the airport, downtown and the Broward Boulevard Tri-Rail station.

The state will seek formal approval of the route in fall 2012, the last step before asking the federal government to help pay for the construction. Still to be determined: how the state and county would pay their share and the cost of running the service.

The idea of a premium east-west transit line that moves more efficiently than the bus system was born about a decade ago as a companion to a major upgrade of [I-595](#).

Officials say mass transit will be necessary to keep up with growing traffic demands in 20 years when I-595 can't be widened any more.

Ffrench said a new I-595 express bus service to downtown Fort Lauderdale will lay the groundwork for the future premium buses or streetcars.

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