

# Southeast Florida Transportation Council

## *Regional Models of Cooperation Case Study Series*

### **Miami MPOs Integrate Project Planning and Implementation Processes**

Effective transportation provision by multiple agencies for a single metropolitan area requires close collaboration. For the three MPOs in the Miami Urbanized Area, the Southeast Florida Transportation Council (SEFTC) provides a forum to create shared transportation plans and initiatives. In the past decade, the Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach MPOs have collaborated on multiple aspects of the planning process, including long-range and freight planning, public involvement, project prioritization and selection, regional modeling, and the implementation of highly-used bus express lanes.

#### **Motivation for Establishing the Collaboration**

The Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach MPOs collaborated on transportation efforts for many years before the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) suggested combining the three agencies into one MPO. However, because each MPO is located in its own county and has different styles of development—Broward has the highest population density of the three, Miami-Dade is highly transit-based, and Palm Beach has the lowest population density with the least traffic—the agencies asked to remain independent to more easily address their unique contexts. The MPOs proposed formalizing their coordination efforts as a way of further integrating their planning processes. In 2006, Chapter 339 Section 175 of the Florida Statutes established SEFTC to address regional transportation challenges through coordinated planning.



Miami-Dade/Broward 95 Express Bus.  
(Courtesy Miami-Dade MPO)

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#### **Collaboration Structure**

SEFTC receives staff support and recommendations about technical decisions from the Regional Transportation Technical Advisory Committee (RTTAC), which includes staff from the three MPOs, FDOT Districts 4 and 6, the Florida Turnpike Enterprise, the Miami-Dade Expressway Authority, the four local transit agencies, and the two area Regional Planning Councils. The MPOs also take turns leading the SEFTC subcommittees, which address issues including travel demand modeling, public involvement, and freight planning.

The three MPOs also rotate hosting duties for the quarterly RTTAC meetings. Palm Beach MPO established a contract with a consultant to compile agendas and minutes for the meetings, while all three MPOs contribute funding for the service. The regular meetings help the MPOs' staff to establish stronger relationships and enhanced the frequency and level of communication with each other. This allows them to tackle day-to-day planning challenges quickly (by phone) rather than waiting for the next official meeting to bring up issues.



To identify their shared goals and objectives, the MPOs created a Regional Network map that shows key corridors on which to focus SEFTC's efforts and resources. Over the course of three years, the MPOs refined the map to ensure it represents each agency's interests and values, and it now serves as a shared framework to guide their plans and meetings.

The MPOs measure the success of their initiatives by compiling monthly reports on factors like ridership and by soliciting feedback from the public on a regional scale. For instance, the partners encourage individuals in the Miami Urbanized Area to provide comments on transportation infrastructure and services in all three MPOs, as the region's residents often travel between MPOs for work and recreation and thus understand the transportation system on the regional scale. SEFTC's consultant attends public meetings in each MPO to document these cross-jurisdictional comments for incorporation in SEFTC's next regional transportation plan.

### Collaboration Accomplishments

In 2010 and 2011, Miami-Dade MPO and Broward MPO introduced the first two express bus routes on Interstate 95. After three years, monthly ridership increased by over 400% and overall transit ridership increased by 145%. Recent studies show that, since 95 Express service began, travel speeds on Interstate 95 have increased by 200% on local lanes and 300% on the express lanes. Tracking monthly ridership data and travel speeds has enabled the MPOs to demonstrate the benefits of 95 Express and promote the creation of more managed lanes. Not only has traffic improved in the Miami-Dade area, there are more interconnecting routes between counties. For example, the MPOs are currently planning to expand 95 Express service to include routes between Broward and Palm Beach Counties. The project's success has also encouraged many other major metropolitan areas in Florida to begin implementing managed lanes.

Another significant benefit from SEFTC's collaboration is the ability to quickly address regional issues through established means of communication and decisionmaking. For example, the partner MPOs settled a joint contract for a new activity-based transportation model within 90 days after deciding to adopt the model. The activity-based model has allowed them to more accurately predict the regional effects of proposed projects. The MPOs have also developed a shared inventory of non-motorized infrastructure throughout the region to improve cross-jurisdictional, car-free travel.

### Challenges and Lessons Learned

While the MPOs have done a good job working across county boundaries, the lines demarcating FDOT Districts pose another challenge to successful collaboration. Miami Dade is in FDOT District 6, while Broward MPO and Palm Beach MPO are both in District 4. This boundary requires the MPOs to establish cooperative relationships with multiple partners at the state level as well as the local MPO level. The MPOs have begun to address the challenge of working across FDOT District boundaries by proactively communicating with each district about its plans and priorities.

The MPOs are still working out ways to improve their data-sharing capabilities across its member MPOs. While the partners recognize the benefits of a shared database or SharePoint site, they instead rely on their close relationships and communication strategies help them address any challenges that may arise. For example, Broward MPO and Palm Beach MPO recently used their experience working together on SEFTC to help coordinate traffic signal timing across MPO boundaries on one of the region's major arterial roads.



The MPOs plan to further improve cross-jurisdictional cooperation by developing metrics to quantify the benefits of working together on a regional scale. The partners know intuitively that they accomplish more through collaboration, both because they can complete larger projects more cheaply than several smaller projects and because jointly applying for grants gives them a greater likelihood of success. However, they want to show the public and FDOT the exact cost savings of these benefits.

SEFTC presents an intriguing example of collaboration across three counties and several MPO and State DOT district boundaries. Through joint transportation planning, the three Miami area MPOs provide more efficient and effective multimodal service for their region.

