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Free Miami shuttle service could potentially patch holes in county transportation

MIAMI - There are new, free rides roaming downtown Miami. Those behind it think their shuttle could take care of complaints about long walks to work or home and potentially patch holes in [Miami-Dade County transportation](#).

"We want to move as many as we can," Manolo Reyes, City of Miami Commissioner and Chairman of the Miami Downtown Development Authority. "We're starting with this and I don't know where we're going with this. It's a good start."

Miami DDA partnered with the company FreeBee to run electric-powered shuttles with room inside for at least five people. The downtown circulators roll around downtown 11- to 13-hours a day, seven days a week. It is a fixed route that passes by parking lots, Government Center and Biscayne Boulevard's brightest lights.

"It's a good thing," Alex Paccini, a visitor from France said. "When you are a tourist, (it is) perfect."

Reyes expects residents and downtown workers to benefit most. In the long term, Reyes expects long walks from the [bus](#) or parking lots to be history.

It comes as the county offers free bus fares through the end of the year as part of the rollout of Miami-Dade County's Better Bus Network. It changed schedules for 26 routes and discontinued 33 others including the 115 Mid-North Beach Connector in Miami Beach.

In October, some riders complained.

"It's not good for the workers," one rider told CBS News Miami in October.

Miami-Dade County's then-Assistant Director of Transportation Carlos Cruz-Casas told CBS News Miami that Metro hoped to find partners.

"One of the things we need to start moving forward with is understanding what are those elements, what are those smaller gaps that we need to fill and start looking (at," he said. "What are options we have available? (The City of) Miami Beach is a great example. Miami Beach has a strong municipal trolley service and a strong on-demand transportation service with Freebee and there's an opportunity for us to work collectively here and to start enhancing the experience here regardless of jurisdictional boundaries."

Reyes thinks Miami DDA's pilot program could help squash wait times with the circulator downtown.

"No more than 10 minutes, 10 (to) 15 minutes and it could be faster," he said.



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The shuttle is a week old. However, already wait times for passengers are off the mark. CBS News Miami tried to use it Monday night. It took 28 minutes for a pickup.

That is twice as long as Deyondre Whipple spends waiting for buses downtown.

"Honestly, I feel like that's a little bit too much of a wait time, though," Whipple said. "It should be there at least five or 10 minutes."

So far, Miami DDA's fleet includes three shuttles.

"We're getting information," Reyes said. "If we have to tweak it here, tweak it there, it will be tweaked to make it as efficient as possible."

He is confident service will improve and perhaps become a model that Metro and other communities copy.