DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Federal Transit Administration

Preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement on East-West Corridor Transit Improvements in Metropolitan Miami, Florida

AGENCY: Federal Transit Administration (FTA), Department of Transportation.

ACTION: Notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement.

SUMMARY: The Federal Transit Administration and Miami-Dade Transit (MDT) are planning to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for a proposed 10-mile extension of Metrorail from the Miami Intermodal Center at Miami International Airport west to Florida International University. The EIS will be prepared in accordance with regulations implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), as well as provisions of the recently enacted Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users. The purpose of this Notice of Intent is to alert interested parties regarding the plan to prepare the EIS, to provide information on the nature of the proposed transit project, to invite participation in the EIS process, including comments on the scope of the EIS proposed in this notice, and to announce that public scoping meetings will be conducted. (The Summary in a Federal Register notice should generally be just a few sentences long.)

DATES: Written comments on the scope of the EIS should be sent to Ms. Maria C. Batista, MDT Project Manager, by **[insert date that is at least 2 weeks after final scoping meeting and at least 30 days after publication of the NOI, whichever is later]**. Public scoping meetings will be held on [insert date(s)] at [insert time(s)] at locations indicated under ADDRESSES below. An interagency scoping meeting will be scheduled after agencies with an interest in the proposed project have been identified.

ADDRESSES: Written comments on the scope of the EIS should be sent to Ms. Maria C. Batista, Project Manager, Miami-Dade Transit, 111 NW First Street, Suite 910, Miami, Florida 33128-1970. Comments may also be offered at the public scoping meetings. The addresses for the public scoping meetings are as follow:

[address for meeting 1]

[address for meeting 2]

These locations are accessible by persons with disabilities. If special translation or signing services or other special accommodations are needed, please contact the Project Manager, Ms. Maria C. Batista, at [phone number] at least 48 hours before the meeting. A scoping information packet is available on the MDT Web site at:

http://www.miamidade.gov/transit/corridor/ew_corridor/scoping.pdf

or by calling the project manager, Ms. Maria C. Batista, at [phone number]. Copies will also be available at the scoping meetings.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mr. Tony Dittmeier, Transportation Program Specialist, Federal Transit Administration, Atlanta Regional Office at (404) 562-3500.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

The Proposed Project: Miami-Dade Transit's proposed 10.1 mile elevated extension of Metrorail is intended to serve the East-West Corridor in an area bounded generally by NW 25th Street on the north, SW 8th Street on the south, the Homestead Extension of Florida's Turnpike (SR 821) on the west, and NW 37th Avenue to the east. The area extends approximately 1.5 miles north and south of the Dolphin Expressway (SR 836). The project area includes portions of the Cities of Miami, Sweetwater, and Doral, as well as areas within unincorporated Dade County. The proposed project would serve the airport, which is the largest trip generator in the

region, as well as portions of the City of Miami along the Dolphin Expressway, the City of Sweetwater, the City of Doral, and Florida International University. Stations are proposed at the NW 57th Avenue/Blue Lagoon, NW 72nd Ave/Palmetto Expressway, NW 87th Avenue, NW 97th Avenue, NW 107th Avenue, and Florida International University.

Purposes of and Need for the Proposed Project: Recent studies of the corridor to be served by the proposed project revealed the need for transportation improvements, including a wider range of mobility options to meet increasing travel demand within and through the corridor. The project area currently has more than 195,000 residents in 68,000 households and more than 180,000 jobs. Official growth forecasts indicate that this trend will continue with population increasing by 44,000 (23 percent) by the year 2030 and jobs increasing by 60,000 (33 percent). At the present time the roadway network in the corridor is heavily congested; many segments have substantially high accident rates and unreliable travel conditions and times. Moreover, there will be little or no capacity to further expand the roadway network once the planned expansion of the Dolphin Expressway is completed.

The Miami-Dade Metropolitan Planning Organization's (MDMPO's) financially constrained 2030 Long-Range Transportation Plan, approved by its Governing Board in December 2005, and the People's Transportation Plan presented in a 2004 referendum have designated the East-West Corridor as a priority corridor for extension of Metrorail service. In November 2004, the voters of Miami-Dade County approved the People's Transportation Plan and a one-half percent sales tax increase to fund the plan. The People's Transportation Plan includes extension of Metrorail service from the Miami Intermodal Center to Florida International University.

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Alternatives: The proposed project is substantially identical to a locally preferred alternative that was selected by MDT and MDMPO at the conclusion of a Major Investment Study (MIS) conducted in 2003. The MIS is available on the MDT Web site at http://www.miamidade.gov/transit/corridor/ew_corridor/MIS.pdf. Several land use and development changes that have occurred since that time prompt the need for some minor refinements to the alignment and station location options. These refinements, which are being developed in consultation with state and local agencies and the surrounding community, will be explored in the context of the EIS. The intent of the refinements is to stay generally within the original alignment while seeking to enhance ridership potential, reduce costs where feasible, and avoid, minimize, and mitigate adverse environmental impacts.

Other alternatives currently under consideration include a future no-build alternative, which contemplates roadway and transit facility and service improvements (other than the proposed project) planned for and programmed to be implemented by the year 2030. The future no-build alternative includes (1) extension of the Stage 1 Metrorail line from the existing Earlington Heights station to a new station at the Miami Intermodal Center, (2) a fixed guideway people-mover system linking the Miami Intermodal Center and the Miami International Airport, (3) an increase in Tri-Rail service frequencies to 20-minute headways during peak periods between Miami International Airport and Mangonia Park Station in Palm Beach County, and (4) continuing to comply with existing MDT policies regarding bus service and bus headways as demand in the corridor increases into the future. The future no-build alternative serves as the NEPA baseline against which environmental effects of other alternatives, including the proposed project, will be measured.

A third alternative, labeled the Transportation Systems Management alternative, is designed to provide low cost, operationally-oriented improvements to address the project's purpose and need as much as possible without a major transit investment. This alternative, which serves as the New Starts baseline against which the cost-effectiveness of the proposed project will be measured, includes, in addition to improvements identified in the no-build alternative, (1) express, limited-stop bus service along the Dolphin Expressway, (2) enhanced bus service on major east-west arterials, (3) park-and-ride facilities at the same locations as the proposed project, sized to meet anticipated demand, and (4) enhanced bus stations at the same locations as the proposed project's stations.

The EIS Process and the Role of Participating Agencies and the Public: The purpose of the EIS process is to explore in a public setting potentially significant effects of implementing the proposed action and alternatives on the physical, human, and natural environment. Areas of investigation include, but are not limited to, land use, development potential, land acquisition and displacements, historic resources, visual and aesthetic qualities, air quality, noise and vibration, energy use, safety and security, and ecosystems, including threatened and endangered species. Measures to avoid, minimize, or mitigate any significant adverse impacts will be identified. Regulations implementing NEPA, as well as provisions of the recently enacted Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), call for public involvement in the EIS process. Section 6002 of SAFETEA-LU requires that FTA and MDT do the following: (1) extend an invitation to other Federal and non-Federal agencies and Indian tribes that may have an interest in the proposed project to become "participating agencies," (2) provide an opportunity for involvement by participating agencies and the public in helping to define the purpose and need for a proposed project, as well as the

range of alternatives for consideration in the impact statement, and (3) establish a plan for coordinating public and agency participation in and comment on the environmental review process. An invitation to become a participating agency, with the scoping information packet appended, will be extended to other Federal and non-Federal agencies and Indian tribes that may have an interest in the proposed project. It is possible that we may not be able to identify all Federal and non-Federal agencies and Indian tribes that may have such an interest. Any Federal or non-Federal agency or Indian tribe interested in the proposed project that does not receive an invitation to become a participating agency should notify at the earliest opportunity the Project Manager identified above under ADDRESSES.

A comprehensive public involvement program has been developed and a public and agency involvement Coordination Plan will be created. The program includes a project Web site (http://www.miamidade.gov/transit/corridor/ew_corridor/); outreach to local and county officials and community and civic groups; a public scoping process to define the issues of concern among all parties interested in the project; establishment of a community advisory committee and organizing periodic meetings with that committee; a public hearing on release of the draft environmental impact statement (DEIS); establishment of walk-in project offices in the corridor; and development and distribution of project newsletters.

The purposes of and need for the proposed project have been preliminarily identified in this notice. We invite the public and participating agencies to consider the preliminary statement of purposes of and need for the proposed project, as well as the alternatives proposed for consideration. Suggestions for modifications to the statement of purposes of and need for the proposed project and any other alternatives that meet the purposes of and need for the proposed project are welcomed and will be given serious consideration. Comments on potentially

significant environmental impacts that may be associated with the proposed project and alternatives are also welcomed. There will be additional opportunities to participate in the scoping process at the public meetings announced in this notice.

Miami-Dade Transit is seeking New Starts funding for the proposed project under 49 U.S.C. 5309 and will therefore be subject to New Starts regulations (49 CFR Part 611). The New Starts regulation requires the submission of specific information in support of a request to initiate preliminary engineering, and this information is normally developed in conjunction with the NEPA process. Pertinent New Starts evaluation criteria will be included in the Final Environmental Impact Statement.

In accordance with 23 CFR 771.105(a) and 771.133, FTA will comply with all Federal environmental laws, regulations, and executive orders applicable to the proposed project during the environmental review process to the maximum extent practicable. These requirements include, but are not limited to, the regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality and FTA implementing NEPA (40 CFR parts 1500-1508, and 23 CFR Part 771), the project-level air quality conformity regulation of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) (40 CFR part 93), the Section 404(b)(1) guidelines of EPA (40 CFR part 230), the regulation implementing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (36 CFR Part 800), the regulation implementing section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (50 CFR part 402), Section 4(f) of the DOT Act (23 CFR 771.135), and Executive Orders 12898 on environmental justice, 11988 on floodplain management, and 11990 on wetlands.

Issued On: [date signed].

Ms. Yvette G. Taylor

Regional Administrator, FTA Region 4