Study Area Context

The primary study area encompasses the western third of the navigable section of the Miami River, which per federal regulation extends 5.5 miles inland from Biscayne Bay. The channel was dredged to a depth of -15 feet mean low water in a project ending about 10 years ago. That dredging helped facilitate marine shipping movements by removing accumulated sediment. The larger shippers responded with some larger vessels, whose movements must consider tidal movements in their passage of the river.

The marine shipping industry is mostly situated on the western reach of the federally navigable section of the river, west of NW 27th Avenue, in unincorporated Miami-Dade County. Per the Miami River Urban Infill Plan, this western reach is designated with mostly marine industrial land uses; the middle section accommodates numerous boatyards and allows certain mixed-use redevelopment; and the eastern section accommodates the dense, high-rise development of downtown Miami and the Brickell district. The marine industrial land use designation along the river and the industrial uses along the Downtown Lead railroad spur along NW 23rd Street are important to the river shipping interests and industrial tenants, given escalating land values across the county. These development pressures are moving upriver, from the Wynwood district east of I-95, along NW 36th Street, and from the Palmer Lake area on the west side of the river near Miami International Airport. Preservation of the marine industrial land uses is essential to the continued viability of the "working river".

There are 11 low-level lift bridges and five high-level fixed-span bridges along the navigable river. The US Coast Guard establishes rules for lift bridge operations, and there are morning, noon, and evening restrictions on the opening of the four easterly bridges in the downtown area. Tug boats and vessels under tug boat tow are exempt from these restrictions, although the shippers report they work to avoid the peak traffic periods.

Marine shipping movements are much lower in number than the recreational boat movements on the lower river. At the Brickell Avenue bridge, for those vessel movements requiring bridge lifts, there are an average of 114 (23%) cargo-related movements per month, while there are 380 (73%) recreational vessel movements per month. There is an uncounted number of additional recreational vessels not requiring a bridge lift. At the NW 27th Avenue bridge, cargo vessels account for 42% of the 148 average monthly movements.

With its marine shipping terminals, proximity to western Miami-Dade freight and logistics hubs, and existing railroad access, the study area has future synergistic opportunities in addition to its own organic growth. However, it is confronted by older, smaller, and less modern industrial building stock, and somewhat deteriorated marine and upland infrastructure. Improvements to roadways, rail crossings, and supporting facilities were identified and recommended through the conditions and needs analyses. Improved connectivity to the regional network and preservation of the marine industrial land uses are important ingredients to the continued viability of this freight and logistics asset. This freight plan provides a blueprint for addressing the transportation needs of this Miami River industrial and shipping district, and for capitalizing on the opportunities which lie ahead.

Carlos A. Castro
District Freight Coordinator
Carlos.Castro@dot.state.fl.us
The Port of Miami River is an important element in the Miami-Dade County freight and logistics setting. It provides essential shipping services to shallow-draft ports across the Bahamas and the Caribbean. The focus of this plan is to enhance the competitiveness of this corridor as a major trade engine in South Florida.

Overview

The Port of Miami River, the name given to the collection of shallow draft shipping firms that have a long history of marine trade with the ports of the Bahamas and the Caribbean, is an important element in the Miami-Dade County freight and logistics setting. The Miami River shipping community was once billed as Florida's fifth largest port, with nearly $1 billion in goods shipped from nearly 30 terminals. Current shipping volumes are nearly 400,000 tons per year across a much shorter roster of shipping firms, and have been trending up since the Great Recession. The river, with both its marine shipping terminals and recreational boatyards, remains a significant economic engine in South Florida.

The Miami River Freight Improvement Plan was conducted by the Florida Department of Transportation – District 6 with the goal of enhancing freight mobility for the shippers and terminals along the Miami River. Key objectives include inventorying existing and future mobility issues and needs, evaluating the river’s capacity, assessing the potential for short sea shipping, mitigating traffic congestion and safety issues, developing a prioritized list of improvement projects, and enhancing the viability of marine logistics on the Miami River.

This freight plan followed these steps in identifying needs and issues and formulating plan recommendations:

1. Conduct agency, partner and stakeholder engagement
2. Review existing plans, data, and policies
3. Inventory existing freight infrastructure
4. Evaluate existing and future conditions and needs
5. Assess market opportunities including short sea shipping
6. Conduct river capacity analysis
7. Develop proposed improvement actions
8. Prioritize recommended improvements

Carlos A. Castro
District Freight Coordinator
Carlos.Castro@dot.state.fl.us

Summary:
MIAMI RIVER FREIGHT IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Roadway

Transit

Marine

Bicycle

Intermodal

Map ID # | Ranking | Project Type | Project Name
--- | --- | --- | ---
5 | 1 | Roadway | Monitor implementation of ongoing “Iron Triangle” Study recommendations by FDOT.
20 | 2 | Roadway | Conduct trained circular flexibility study to serve North Lake and western Miami River corridor.
31 | 3 | Roadway | Improve Miami River navigation channel opening and aids.
12 | 4 | Roadway | Tunnel PSML Study for Braddock Avenue Bridge.
22 | 4 | Roadway | NW North River Drive railroad crossings.
24 | 4 | Roadway | Upgrade private diversionary rail crossings on NW North River Drive.
5 | 7 | Roadway | Monitor NW 35th Street Corridor Planning Study.
10 | 7 | Roadway | Improve signal coordination along NW 27th Avenue.
18 | 9 | Roadway | Route 36 extension to Dania Boulevard.
16 | 10 | Roadway | Route 27 running time adjustments.
17 | 10 | Roadway | Route 32 running time adjustments.
12 | 12 | Roadway | Measure and manage traffic signal green time and coordination to improve vehicle operations along Miami River.
14 | 12 | Roadway | Install a Port of Miami River a synchronizing sign system for both NW North River Drive and NW South River Drive.
7 | 12 | Roadway | Upgrade NW 27th Avenue/West North River Drive intersection.
19 | 12 | Roadway | Route 32 bus lanes/medians and lighting.
1 | 16 | Roadway | NW South River Drive at NW 35th Street intersection.
2 | 16 | Roadway | NW North River Drive at NW 35th Street intersection.
26 | 18 | Roadway | Investigate potential PFI warehouse sites or development as priority sector lead.

Project Location Map

Project List

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<th>Long Term (10 or more years)</th>
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| 20 | 1 | Develop truck staging area near NW 37th Avenue.
| 29 | 10 | Continue implementation of Miami River Greenway.
| 15 | 2 | Implement programmed bascule bridge maintenance and reconstruction projects.

Plan Recommendations

The plan identified a wide range of improvement actions to facilitate freight mobility in the study area. Using a set of evaluation factors, these actions were prioritized into three implementation timelines, as described below:

- **Short Term (1-5 years)**
- **Medium Term (5-10 years)**
- **Long Term (10 or more years)**

The table to the left lists the proposed actions, their ranking within implementation categories, the project timeline, and the project name and description. The map identification number refers to the location of the project in the map on the facing page. Besides freight-oriented projects, the list also includes actions oriented toward worker access to the jobs in the study area.

Other Recommendations

The plan also formulated other recommendations that did not involve physical improvements, but which recognized several policy-oriented actions intended to contribute to freight mobility in the Miami River corridor. These include:

- Continue coordination with the Miami River Commission in terms of preserving marine industrial zoning per the Miami River Urban Infill Plan.
- Request prioritization of power restoration by Florida Power & Light for lift bridges after storm events.
- Pursue designation of the Miami River as a Marine Highway under US DOT program provisions as administered by the Maritime Administration.
- Preserve rail-served industrial properties along the Downtown Lead rail corridor.
- Conduct an updated economic impact study of Miami River commerce.
- Investigate possible formation of a Community Redevelopment Authority (or a Community Development District) to support implementation of study recommendations.