

Transportation and Hospitality Summit Explores Better Options for Marco

By Maria Lamb

On Marco Island, most of us take the issue of reliable public transportation for granted. But for those who don't have a car and need to get to work every day, this can be a big challenge.

On August 25, 2021, a Transportation and Hospitality Summit was hosted by Marco Beach Ocean Resort in partnership with the Florida Restaurant and Lodging Association (FRLA), Blue Zones Project, Collier County Public Transit, Commute Connector and Commute Enterprise with about 35 attendees.



Michelle Arnold, Director of CAT and Megan Greer of Blue Zones Project.

Lois Croft, Southwest Regional Director for FRLA, welcomed the attendees with District One Collier County Commissioner Rick LoCastro delivering a brief remark that "public transportation is a very important issue." He encouraged the participants to share what they hear today and that the organizers are looking for feedback.

There are two bus routes that service Marco Island. According to Omar DeLeon,



Welcome remarks by Lois Croft, Southwest Regional Director for Florida Restaurant and Lodging Association and District 1 Collier County Commissioner, Rick LoCastro.



Participants in the Transportation and Hospitality Summit hosted by Marco Beach Ocean Resort.

Collier Area Transit (CAT) Manager, Route 121 is an express route that provides service between the Immokalee area and Marco Island. It is largely used to service the hospitality industry. It starts with an early morning trip from Immokalee to Marco Is-

land and an afternoon return trip.

Possible changes discussed are to add a second service in the early evening to accommodate workers who might want to work additional hours but are limited due to the transportation.

For now, most of the workers are hurrying out the door to catch the 4:50 bus home. Adding a second bus to alleviate congestion or using two smaller size buses were discussed.

According to DeLeon, there are opportunities to make adjustment to the timing to align better for both employers and employee needs.



Breakout discussion group (from left): Jacquie Koon of CJ's on the Bay, Councilor Rich Blonna and Elena Ortiz of CAT.

Providing alternative solutions for the workforce is Commute Connector, a program of the Florida Department of Transportation serving 12 counties in Southwest Florida. According to Allison Evanitz, Program Manager, this works like a large carpool where they connect commuters with other commuters to share rides to work. For information on Commute Connector's programs and services, please contact Allison Evanitz, Program Manager: Allison@commuteconnector.com.

Arlinda Karuli of Commute with Enterprise also provided information on their program where they connect coworkers who live near each other and supply a recent model



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Marco Island Trolley

- This fixed-route would travel along Collier Boulevard on Marco Island and connect to Route 21.
- Hop-on/Hop-off
- The Island Trolley would provide a frequent service along a busy corridor and thus help mitigate the need to drive and help reduce congestion and parking demand.



Island Trolley with a pilot scheduled for the weekend of Thanksgiving.





Route 121 CAT on its way to the 4:55pm pick up at JW Marriott.

SUV or van, and everyone benefits from the savings. For more information contact: Arlinda Karuli at Arlinda.Karuli@ehi.com.
Dianna Dohm, Executive Director for the Marco Island Chamber of Commerce, has been working intimately with all the presenters on issues of transportation and help with the staffing crisis.
Rich Blonna, City Councilor, was quite impressed by the different strategies offered by CAT, Commute Connector, and Enterprise to help meet the transportation needs of businesses and residents on Marco Island. They provided very tangible solutions to help our hotels and restaurants get their workers to work and back home

safely utilizing affordable public transit.
Michelle Arnold, Director of CAT, announced plans for an Island Trolley pilot for the weekend of Thanksgiving. According to Councilor Blonna, it is projected that between 100 to 150 new homes will be built on Marco Island next year and in the years to follow. The On-Island Trolley will offer alternative ways for residents to dine out, shop for groceries and other essentials, visit the doctor, get to the beach without having to use their cars and worry about traffic or finding a parking spot.
Dohm sees the Island Trolley as a great benefit to both businesses and residents. Parking is an issue on Marco and an island

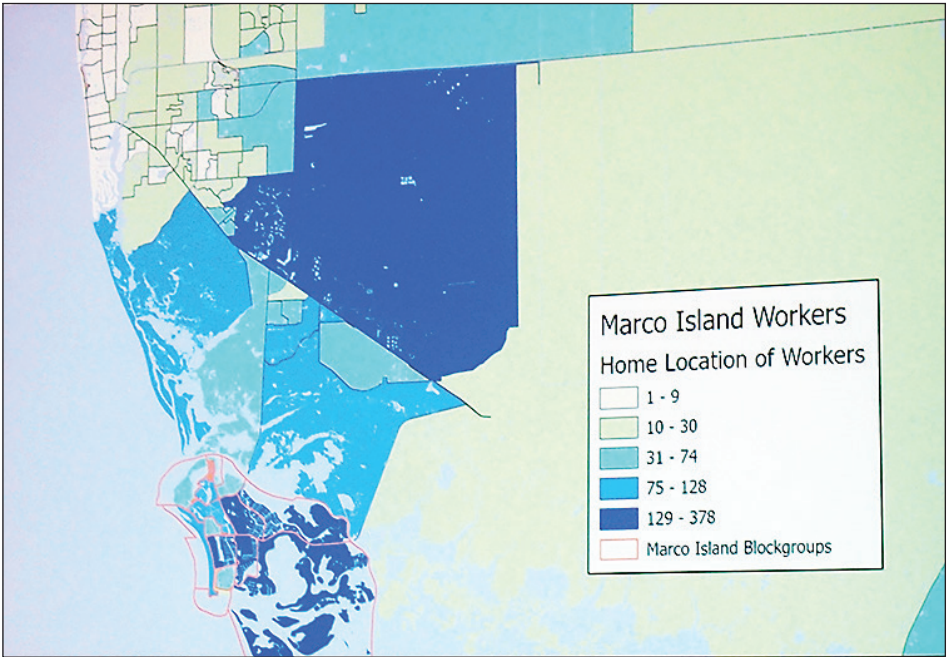
- Route 21 - Marco Island Circulator servicing between US41 and throughout Marco Island
- Route 121 - Morning & afternoon express route providing service between Immokalee & Marco Island



Route 21

Route 121

Information on two CAT services to Marco Island - Routes 21 and Route 121.



Home location of Marco Island Workers.

trolley would allow people to move about the island with ease.
Nanette Rivera, a resident, proposed that the Island Trolley offer routes during different hours of the day with a morning focus on helping the workers get to their job destinations; mid-morning focus on the beach, tourist destinations and supermarkets; late afternoons to get workers to parking locations and later in the early evening, focus on taking riders to restaurants and evening entertainment.



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Source: The Weather Company



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