



THE SUN TROLLEY

A TRANSIT SYSTEM THAT IMPACTS THE COMMUNITY
IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE

BY ALEXANDRA ROLAND
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JASON LEIDY

It is 3:30 p.m. on a Friday afternoon and the Sun Trolley “Convention Connection” route is packed. Spring breakers, snowbirds, vacationers and the occasional local climb aboard the yellow and red community bus and find themselves traveling through the bustling South Florida traffic.

Sisters Tracy and Leslie from Ontario, Canada, wave at the driver from a bus stop on the 17th Street Causeway, board the trolley and pay their 50-cent fare. “It is an easy way to get an orientation of Fort Lauderdale,” Leslie said.

This quaint mode of transportation, instituted by the Downtown Fort Lauderdale Transportation Management Association (DFLTMA), weaves through the veins of Fort Lauderdale and has been doing so for quite some time. Formerly known as “Lolly the Trolley” and the “City Cruiser,” this community bus system was instituted by the DFLTMA in the early 1990s. In the mid-2000s a new red and yellow biodiesel fleet, now on the street today, was introduced to the Fort Lauderdale public.

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With a total of five different routes, the Sun Trolley provides both a practical and eco friendly way for visitors and locals to get around in style. From the inner city residential area of the northwest to Fort Lauderdale’s famous beaches, from the classic Las Olas strip to the bustling courthouse spot, the Sun Trolley serves its community and serves it well.

That is exactly the purpose of this transit bus system, said Patricia Zeiler, managing director of the DFLTMA. She explained that the mission of the trolley is two-pronged, focusing on ecotourism development and increasing the mobility of Fort Lauderdale’s residents in a safe and efficient way. “We are addressing carbon emissions, especially right here along the river,” Zeiler said. “(The Sun Trolley) is clean, safe, inexpensive and efficient.” The buses run on biodiesel fuel and each vehicle comes equipped with a bike rack so even after disembarking the trolley, commuters can continue with their eco friendly way of traveling.



Patricia Zeiler



Sharon Midi, Sun Trolley driver



Sun Trolley Routes

“We want to let folks know that there are alternatives to single car, single driver,” Zeiler said. Downtown frequenters and area businesses understand the value of a parking space. The DFLTMA’s idea is to save those spots for potential customers instead of local commuters. By utilizing this community bus system, the riders are essentially freeing up parking spaces for the benefit of area businesses and commerce.

Luke Moorman, a member of the advisory board for the DFLTMA and fourth generation owner of Carrol’s Jewelers on Las Olas, said he thinks that the Sun Trolley has the potential to bring traffic — good traffic that is. “It serves as a conduit from the beach to Las Olas,” Moorman said. That movement of people brings shopping tourists which essentially means more spending on the boulevard.

“Tourists are looking for connectivity,” Zeiler said. “They want to be active and mobile.” The Sun Trolley does just that.

Sharon Midi has been driving Sun Trolley buses since 2006 and is familiar with all of the routes. “Saturday at around 12 is the busiest time,” she said of the Convention Connection route. Two trolleys circulate a path from the Harbor Shoppes to the beach and back. Midi said that some tourists just ride for the experience. Her other regulars use it for local transportation.

This transit system also boosts underserved communities. According to Zeiler, the Northwest Circulator Extension is one of the most used routes. “That bus is 100 percent full and we are really helping folks,” she said. The northwest route travels north of Broward Boulevard, hitting stops like the African American Research Library on Sistrunk and the main bus terminal near Andrews Avenue just east of the train tracks.

Downtown office workers also find the Sun Trolley time saving and practical. Instead of using their automobiles to travel to area restaurants, employees beat the noontime rush and ride the Sun Trolley to and from local lunch spots.

Attorneys use the bus system to return to their offices after court. Denise Baker, a Fort Lauderdale-based lawyer, has used this method of transit to go between her office in the 110 building off of Broward Boulevard to the courthouse on Southeast Sixth Street. “The trolley is a welcome sight on the return trip from the courthouse to the office, especially if I have to carry heavy files after a long day in court,” she said. “It’s also an inexpensive alternative to costly courthouse parking.”

However, the Sun Trolley has seen a decline in riders in some areas. The schedule for the Las Olas route was

cut within the last few years according to Zeiler and that change has affected ridership. The Las Olas system only runs with limited hours on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays and due to a lack of presence throughout the week, Zeiler is worried that potential riders will forget that the trolley is there for them to use.

Additionally, funding for the community program is limited and hard to obtain. Yet, with so many relying on the Sun Trolley for transportation, Zeiler said she remains “cautiously hopeful.”

Alan Hooper, chair of the board of directors for the DFLTMA, said that as community residents become more aware of the various routes, ridership will increase. “We are working harder at improving our operation, marketing and awareness,” he said. “I want to see our Downtown become a better place and when you can connect it with the beach and other areas, that is a good thing. I think there is a real future.”

Board members like Hooper and Broward County Mayor Ken Keechl stress that the public has to support the community bus effort. “In addition to government funding, the future also depends on the local community

and commerce supporting the trolley service,” Keechl said. “Along with possible future grants and local support, the trolley has a fighting chance to continue its service to the community and that is what the public wants and needs.”

Now it is 4:30 p.m. on a Friday and the Sun Trolley waits at the Winn-Dixie

plaza at Sunrise Boulevard and Powerline Road. Dora Anthony speed walks to the waiting bus, dodging sporadic raindrops, before she climbs aboard with a shopping bag. Anthony, a senior citizen, takes the bus to her doctors’ appointments at the clinic and to the store every other Friday to do her grocery shopping. “This is the only way to get around, the only transportation,” she said.

From tourists to students, senior citizens to business professionals, from the Riverwalk to the beach, the 17th Street Causeway to Powerline Road, the Sun Trolley’s impact is far-reaching and exemplary. Zeiler said: “It makes a unique statement about our little Fort Lauderdale village.”

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Sun Trolley

(954) 761-3543

www.suntrolley.com

Many of the routes are free or cost as little as 50 cents to ride.