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Metrorail line to Miami International Airport almost complete

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A Metrorail train heads in to Government Station, Wednesday, April 13, 2011.
(Marice Cohn Band/Miami Herald file photo)

One of the most expensive and complex transportation projects currently under construction in South Florida will be finished this year: the Metrorail extension to Miami International Airport.

The new line of the elevated train, from Earlington Heights Station to a new public transportation center under construction just east of the airport, will be in operation in the spring. It will be formally called AirportLink and is the first significant Metrorail extension since the system was inaugurated in 1984.

"AirportLink will provide a fast, reliable Metrorail link to MIA for millions of residents, visitors and employees who travel to and from MIA every year," a Miami-Dade Transit press release said. "With this project, Miami-Dade joins the ranks of the great urban zones in the world with fast public transportation systems connecting to their airports."

The opening of the new line will be the first to extend Metrorail to the airport, precisely the place where Miami-Dade transportation engineers originally wanted to take the elevated train system that currently only travels from Dadeland in south Miami-Dade to the Palmetto Station located in the northwest area of the county close to Hialeah.

For multiple reasons, including political ones, the original Metrorail was never taken to the airport and eventually only went as far as the Okeechobee Station in Hialeah. It was not until 2003 that a small Metrorail extension was approved, from Okeechobee to the Palmetto Station west of the Palmetto Expressway.

The extension to the airport is 2.4 miles between Earlington Heights Station and the public transportation center known as the Miami Intermodal Center east of MIA, which will include Metrorail, Metrobus and Tri-Rail services, as well as taxis and national train services such as Amtrak. The intermodal center is expected to open to the public in 2013.

The construction of the new Metrorail line was funded partly by a half-cent transportation tax, estimated at \$404.7 million, and a contribution by the Florida Department of Transportation of \$101.3 million, according to the MDT press release.

The construction of the new line began in 2009, basically along State Road 112, the highway that goes from Interstate 95 to the airport.

Read more here: <http://www.miamiherald.com/2012/01/02/v-print/2570929/metrorail-line-to-miami-international.html>

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