

DEMOGRAPHIA



MIAMI-FORT LAUDERDALE-WEST PALM BEACH: LINEAR & VISIONLESS

FAST FACTS		Similar To
Metropolitan (Labor Market) Population	5,000,000	Santiago, Madrid, Johannesburg-Soweto
Urbanized Area* Population	4,920,000	Rhine-Ruhr-Wupper, Nagoya, Washington, Buenos Aires
Urbanized Land Area: Square Miles	1,116	Christchurch, Sydney, Vancouver, Las Vegas, Hamilton
Urbanized Land Area: Square Kilometers	2,900	
Population per Square Mile	4,400	
Population per Square Kilometer	1,700	
11 th largest urbanized area in the United States		
Urbanized Area Atlas: <i>Miami-Dade, Broward & Palm Beach Counties Street Finder</i> , purchase at petrol stations.		
*Continuously built up area		

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One of the surprises of the 2000 United States Census was designation of a new urbanized area, stretching 110 miles, as the crow flies, from Jupiter Beach to Florida City. Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach is a combination of three Miami, Fort Lauderdale and West Palm Beach urbanized areas. Over the past 50 years, this combined area has grown at a greater percentage rate than that of any other American urbanized area except for Phoenix and Riverside-San Bernardino (the latter, in reality an exurb of Los Angeles). In 1950, the urbanized area population was under 500,000. Today it is approximately 5,000,000, having added as many people as live in the cities of Chicago and Philadelphia combined.

Among the world's urbanized areas, only one equals the length of Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach. The world's most sprawling urbanized area, New York, stretches about the same distance from northwestern New Jersey to eastern Long Island. Nowhere else comes close.

Geography has forced an unconventional shape on Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach. Of course, it can be expected that property along the beach will be developed. But the area of development does not go very far inland, because of the protected Everglades. The urbanized area is as little as five miles wide (east to west), and reaches 20 miles at the widest.

But the urbanization continues on even farther to the north, presenting geographers with a dilemma similar to that of the southern half of Japan's Honshu. Where does Tokyo-Yokohama end and where does Shizuoka-Hamamatsu begin, or Nagoya, or Osaka-Kobe-Kyoto, Okayama or Hiroshima? At least in Japan, mountains sometimes reach the sea to create obvious boundaries along a more than 400-mile stretch. Florida has no mountains, and in South Florida, not even hills. So, the near-continuous urbanization extends from Florida City, south of Miami, to north of Daytona Beach, nearly 300 miles, though it does not reach nearly so far inland as the similar pattern in Japan (lest anyone should think this geographical similarity is justification for high speed rail, Japan has nearly 80 million people along the corridor, while Florida has perhaps 8).

Talk to people who live in Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach and you'll hear that there is no more land left to develop. Yet the population continues to grow, in all three counties. In Broward County (Fort Lauderdale) the perception is closest to reality. There is little open greenfield land to be developed, since the entire western portion of the county is bounded by the Everglades. Still, however, growth continues, the result of the fact that within the developed area there are undeveloped plots of land, especially in the western sections near the Everglades. Palm Beach County (West Palm Beach) has considerable land to the north and to the west, which is growing, as well and land within the urbanized area.

But perhaps most surprising is Miami-Dade, which also continues to grow strongly. In the northern and middle portions of the county, urbanization stretches from the Atlantic Ocean to the Everglades. But to the south are broad acreages, not a part of the Everglades, in which development is sparse. This is the area that took the brunt of Hurricane Andrew in 1992. There are still scattered signs of the devastation, but for the most part everything has been rebuilt, and more is being built. There are many new housing developments to the south, toward Homestead and Florida City. So it would be wrong to think that natural barriers will be sufficient to contain the geographical expansion of Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach. The area is among the most dense in the United States, and like its more dense cousin, Los Angeles (now expanding to Temecula, Hemet and the Antelope Valley), there is still plenty of room to grow.

Given that post World War II urban areas don't require downtowns (witness San Jose, Phoenix and McAllen) or as the French so accurately characterize them, "hypocenters," Miami has only small town downtowns pretending to be more than they are. That is not to suggest that there are not tall buildings in downtown Miami or downtown Fort Lauderdale. It is, however, to suggest that there are not many of them, and that, all in all, these downtowns contain few jobs compared even to modest sized older urban areas. For example, Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach has no downtown area one-half the size of Portland's, despite the fact that Portland has less than one-third the population. That's the difference between growing in the first half of the 20th century and the second half.

As would be expected in a post-World War II urban area (or in any U.S. urban area that didn't have a hockey team in 1960), of more than 1,000 square miles, public transport plays little role. Virtually no role would be more accurate. No role, however, does not mean that there has not been considerable spending. When Miami's Metro opened in the early 1980's President Reagan noted that it carried so few people that all could have been given a limousine for less. It was this Metro project that held the world record for over-projection of ridership. Miami's public transit establishment told the federal government that the Metro would carry nearly 240,000 riders per day. Twenty years after opening, ridership remains below 50,000, and the entire Miami public transport system may not carry 240,000 (assuming national transfer factors). But Miami's record

was broken convincingly by the Calcutta Metro. Doubtless, the Calcutta Metro would have been recommended for U.S. federal funding if it had applied.

But Metro is not the Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach area's only circus train. There is Tri-Rail, the suburban (commuter) rail line established to provide an alternative to the Interstate 95 motorway during a reconstruction that commenced in the late 1980s. Officials told the community that the trains would continue operating only if they carried 14,000 daily passengers. Most years, the system has carried barely one-half that number, yet it continues to operate.

Altogether, public transport carries less than 1.5 percent of travel in Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach. But the region has plans. In 2002, voters in Miami-Dade approved a sales tax increase to expand the Metro system. Through 2025, Miami-Dade plans to spend two-thirds of all transport revenues on public transport. The payoff? Projections indicate that public transport will achieve not even a "near life experience," with market share of trips projected to rise from 2.7 percent to 2.9 percent. Even Soviet planners had difficulty misallocating resources to this magnitude.

Things are somewhat better in Broward, where public transport officials are planning a rapid bus system. At any level of expenditure this is a "least-worst" strategy in comparison to the urban rail systems that are so mismatched to the travel needs of U.S. urban areas and so well matched to the desires of those who profit so handily from them.

The Broward bus system will not, of course, provide much automobile competitive service. Yet, despite the modeling that shows little or no impact on traffic, the Pinnochios who are promoting it cannot resist claiming that the rapid bus system will reduce traffic congestion. In the last century, unscrupulous salesmen in Florida sold swampland. Today they sell public transport. The nation would do well to require public officials to abide by the same truth-in-advertising requirements that business people must observe (under threat of fine or imprisonment).

New high-rise condominium construction is underway in downtown Fort Lauderdale. At least three buildings more than 20 stories are now under construction. The community, however has become concerned about the impact of densification on traffic --- a very valid concern since U.S. Department of Transportation research indicates that traffic goes up approximately 0.80 per density increase. A moratorium on further residential construction has been put in place.

Traffic is bad in Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach. In a sense, the linear geography creates an effect similar to that of Seattle, where a relatively isthmus with a single freeway is one of the most congested areas in the nation. But in Miami, the isthmus of development is much longer, even if a bit wider. And the population density is higher --- much higher, which means that demand is significantly greater. Like the core of Los Angeles, the Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach core has developed at unusually high densities. For example, Miami and neighboring Hialeah have more than 10,000 residents per square mile. To serve such a dense area requires an extremely high quality roadway system. Also like Los Angeles, the freeway system was developed to the standards required for such high densities.

There are two principal north-south freeways. The most important is Interstate 95, which ends south of downtown Miami, after a 1,850 mile journey from Houlton, Maine on the New Brunswick border. There is also Florida's Turnpike, is a toll road that begins in the Orlando area and continues south to the Homestead-Florida City area. (Why the possessive form instead of the straightforward "Florida Turnpike" is unknown. Maybe Chicago's Kennedy Expressway would

be more beloved if it were called Kennedy's Expressway?) But help may be on the way. The turnpike has now been renamed the "Ronald Reagan Turnpike." Apparently there is no intention to suggest that it is owned by the former president.

There are a number of east-west motorways and others in Miami-Dade. In some cases, they are very wide. In the case of a number of suburban roadways, there is plenty of room in the center for from two additional lanes to even eight. Well traveled Interstate 595, which traverses Broward County to Fort Lauderdale International Airport, has room for expansion.

But the Luddite theologians in the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) adopted a policy (under the late Governor Lawton Chiles) to the effect that freeways would no longer be expanded beyond six lanes. Instead, FDOT would look to "other alternatives" to accommodate the additional demand. What alternatives?

- A high-speed rail system that, even if full, could remove only a relative few of the cars from the road?
- Simply allowing demand to increase without responding with additional capacity?

Of course, the latter is the default option. If similar dogma were to capture education departments of education, communities might be limited to, say 100 classrooms as bureaucrats looked the other way self righteously pretending that more students were simply a reflective of the moral depravity of a society whose values they do not share.

The Miami-Dade transportation authorities know things are bad, and they expect them to get worse. Today, it is estimated that traffic averages 22 miles per hour --- a speed more characteristic of European than American urban areas. But worse, they project that traffic will operate at 13 miles per hour in 2025, worse than Tokyo or Seoul. The Miami area is apparently blessed with "leadership" that would rival that of burning Rome's fiddling Nero. When local planners and public officials stop trying to plan other people's lives and do what they're supposed to -- providing the infrastructure that facilitates the way people want to live, things will get better. Here is an area that, more than most, suffers from the planners hallucinations and leadership bereft of vision. Here also is an urban area likely to face very difficult times as a result.



New Housing Development, South Miami-Dade County



Airport Expressway – Miami



Interstate 75 – Miami-Dade County



Interstate 595 – Fort Lauderdale



Downtown Fort Lauderdale



US-27, Edge of Development, Broward County



South Miami-Dade County

By Wendell Cox

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