

THE PORT THAT MIAMI FORGOT

The Point of Beginning

The historic first trade synthesis occurred in Miami when the Flager railroad was built to the harbor's edge. In that place, in due course, cargo transfer between land and sea was accommodated by the dredging of channels and the construction of wharves, piers, and railroad sidings. And, naturally, as water ripples out evenly from a dropped stone, the town grew up around the port area and the railhead. There was nothing to prevent it from spreading in all directions, and spread it did, thus encircling the port and contributing to the future traffic congestion of the City of Miami.

When the Florida real estate and resort boom had settled down to a more or less steady rhythm, as it did in the 30's, and Miami was becoming self-conscious about her civic appearance, public opinion began to operate to put the port's back to the wall. It seemed outrageous and unreasonable to many Miamians to have the railroad-track and commercial waterfront squalor so close to their fine hotels. Then Biscayne Boulevard began to bear its full share of the load as part of U. S. Route 1, and aesthetic distaste was reinforced by traffic congestion. Increasing hords of automobiles poured down the east coast of the Peninsula and were caught in constantly recurring "log jams" by the port railroad classification and switching operations which took place on and across the highway. The alternative, track approaches along the sea to the port area, was unthinkable in Miami where Sun, sea and beach are the very reasons for existence.

The Central Problem Posed

The surface congestion dilemma has faced all modern port cities in varying degrees. New York, while possessing an almost inexhaustible amount of water frontage, also faced and faces continually mounting transportation congestion. Baltimore and Philadelphia, in the same way, must solve conflicting surface streams of traffic. Any big metropolis must solve this problem, or die. Solution is never final but must change with changing conditions.

The obvious solution, in the case of Miami, would seem to be to move the main port plant elsewhere. If, when the problem was first realized, only one clearly more suitable port area had

existed, it might then have been accomplished. But there are, in the Miami area, many possible port areas - none ideal, as the present site is not ideal - and the decision to move was not made, and cannot ever be made without unanimous determined action, and without cooperation from all local, County, State and Federal agencies concerned. And a very high degree of justification would have to be found for any of these agencies to abandon investments already made, channels already dug, and projects already initiated.

The Commercial Port Area

The use of waterfrontage is divided between public and private operation, as follows:

The Port of Miami consists of five major categories of water terminals:

- 1) The Municipal Docks located at the shore end of the deep-water channel on the west side of Biscayne Bay, roughly from N.E. 9th Street to N.E. 13th Street, and extending to Biscayne Boulevard.
- 2) Privately owned terminals north and south of the Municipal Docks, and forming, with them, a solid commercial terminal frontage from MacArthur Causeway to Bay Front Park.
- 3) Privately owned terminals on Causeway and Fisher Islands in the harbor along the deepwater channel.
- 4) Privately owned terminals and marine servicing establishments located along the Miami River and the Miami Canal.
- 5) Various small boat and pleasure yacht docks maintained by the Miami Department of Yacht Docks, and by private concerns, at various points in Biscayne Bay and in the Miami River.

The Municipal Docks are administered by a Port Director under the City of Miami Department of Port Operation and Development. The private terminals are privately run and regulated, with movement of shipping into and within the port area being arranged by mutual cooperation and "commonsense" agreement between the Port Director and the various private terminal operators.

Related Waterfront and Land Use

Leaving aside the question of putting to active port use other waterfront areas under municipal jurisdiction, the utilization of the present active acreage is not 100 percent effective or revenue-producing, nor is it wholly consistent with overall city zoning and land use programs.

The principal ocean port area, along the west shore of Biscayne Bay from MacArthur Causeway to Bay Front Park, is also the principal source of criticism by many public and private agencies and individuals, as it is a region of weeds, flimsy unpainted structures of unspecified function, petroleum storage tanks, piles of hazardous construction materials, a confusion of trucks, tractors, rusty iron, crumbling dock piles and - facing the Boulevard - filling stations, lurid billboards, and clip joints. Such an area represents - and to the outward eye is - all that the respectable citizen and merchant does not want in his neighborhood. And to make it worse, this conglomeration is set like a boil on the boulevard right between a fine auxiliary retail section represented by some newly built and building department stores and office buildings, on the north, and beautiful Bay Front Park with its fine hotels facing, on the south. In fact, regardless of its present disreputable appearance, the port's Biscayne Boulevard frontage has a land use value of a thousand dollars a front foot.

The Port Railway Problem

Leading off from this present unnecessarily unattractive port nucleus are railway tracks, including the Municipal Railroad tracks between N. E. 10th and 11th Streets, and the Florida East Coast tracks between N. E. 6th and 7th Streets. These tracks cross Biscayne Boulevard at street level and, incredible to relate, consist not merely of double tracks, but are used for railroad car classification and assembly, which activities are carried on at any time of the day or night, thus stopping traffic along the Boulevard from two to ten minutes at a stretch. Thus, whether you are delivering merchandise from Sears Roebuck to a customer in south Miami, or are on your way in the family car from Detroit, Michigan, to Key West, you wait at this point until the switching operation of the moment is accomplished before you can proceed on your way.

In addition to the incredible traffic ineptitude of these rail crossings at highway level, the railroad rights-of-way leading west away from the waterfront have become blight areas, un-

assimilable by any municipal land use projection. A trip along the tracks shows that warehouses, both in heavy and slight use, are well mixed with totally unused structures, and that long sections of track frontage have mushroomed with low-class negro housing. Thus, it seems, the wholly unnecessary blight of the port has stretched out, by similar land-use neglect, into the city proper, wherever its facilities and auxiliary facilities have gone.

It is probably unnecessary to point out that warehousing in the most heavily assessable portion of a city is uneconomical, and that port warehousing to be properly located must be directly adjacent to and a part of the port operation. It is also obvious that slum-type housing is disastrously out of place in the heart of the city.

Other Waterfront Areas and Their Use

In addition to the principal port area described above, there are water terminal areas at various island and causeway points in Biscayne Bay, and along the Miami River and its tributary canals.

The MacArthur Causeway and Fisher Island stations are not subjects for civic concern at the present time, since the installations there are properly located and maintained and no congestion of traffic is caused by their presence.

The Miami River waterfront is variously utilized as to types of port operations, but, in general, the River area presents a picture of mixed commercial and residential use, with signs of very lax regulation either by public or private agency. The use of the Miami River for water traffic poses the additional land traffic problem of movable bridges and seems, in this area also, to render the city the unwilling victim of its port.

Harbor Utilization is a Joint Investment

Water terminal functions and installations in the Miami area are of vital concern to the City of Miami, the County of Dade, the State of Florida, and the Federal Government of the United States. Therefore, in various aspects, the cooperation, or active concurrence, of each of these agencies is necessary for proper allocation and utilization of port and waterway areas. In addition, the private citizen, the ultimate beneficiary, is responsible in his

role of consumer, retail or wholesale merchant, or private industrialist or agriculturalist, for knowing the economic justification for water traffic, and for giving his support (in his various roles) to appropriate programs for the encouragement and aggrandisement of the Port of Miami operation.

The Port of Miami is a Neglected Civic Property

It would be incorrect and highly misleading to suggest that the many privately owned and operated water terminals in and around Biscayne Bay are poorly operated and maintained. Quite the contrary is true. However, private terminal operation suffers from - and on the other hand sometimes extracts undue financial advantage from - the municipal port terminal inadequacies of plant and administration.

Whether the reader accepts the aesthetically depressing picture of the port painted in preceding paragraphs, or whether he sees the port operation in its true light - weighing all factors and acknowledging all present and potential benefits - there is no disagreement with the single fact that as a port of call, or as a terminal for scheduled water traffic, or as a harboring and servicing area for pleasure craft, the Port of Miami is in an unsatisfactory condition.

The physical condition of the municipal piers, wharves and docks is one of extreme delapidation. The size and construction of the slips, piers, aprons, and transit sheds are insufficient and outmoded in the light of modern port terminal construction.

The approaches to the port by rail constitute a major street traffic nuisance, while trackage within the port area is not sufficient for the expeditious handling of increasing exports of heavy machinery and fabricated metal products. The street and highway approaches for trucks are inconvenient for present load and quite insufficient for cargo traffic in the near future.

The terminal and marine servicing facilities located on the Miami River, while not universally delapidated, contribute their share to the heterogeneous, and therefore municipally unstable land utilization picture - and constitute another street traffic complication.

Accommodations for pleasure craft, once so well served at the Royal Palm Basin, but now located at less commodious marinas in Biscayne Bay and Dinner Key, are insufficient and inadequately

maintained by competitive standards, and thus Miami has lost much of this revenue to other localities.

Several of the privately owned terminal facilities in the main port area are inappropriately located, serving to crowd normal port operations and constituting, in one instance, a real municipal safety hazard.

A Seaport is a State of Mind

Cities of the past which grew up around and through the activities of a sea port were naturally aware of their ports as their own original reason for existence. Their public and private revenues were derived from the sea, and port-mindedness was a natural concept to their citizens and their governing bodies.

At present, the stream of trade cargo along world trade routes is so diverse, its flow and regulation so complex, and its media so numerous in type and purpose, that the individual, and even the community surrounding a port, is prone to dismiss the whole operation from mind, and minimize trade benefits as he deprecates trade necessities.

The citizens of Miami are not representative of this type of economic ignorance. If they were, such a survey as that represented by this presentation would be a futile gesture. On the other hand, the concept of the port as not merely a "dour necessity of trade," but actually as a part of the City's dowery in terms of economic stability, and cultural and recreational benefits, has not been fully visualized by Miamians in general. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that only in recent years have any of the port cities of the United States become aware of the collateral values of their ports as economic assets and as objects of public pride and sources of public entertainment and display, the benefits of which accrue to the city without financial outlay beyond that which is already necessary to achieve sound progressive port operation.

This value is clearly to be seen in the case of airports. The National Airport at Washington is a sightseers' Mecca second only to the National Monuments and the Government buildings. Everyone likes to see the planes take off. Does the fact not suggest itself, that everyone also likes to watch ships dock and load and sail? It is a natural synthesis, then, to provide observation areas for "portside superintendents." If, in addition, food and drink and certain selected types of retail opportunities be provided, then the perfect combination of profit and recreation is achieved.

The Port of Miami Has Natural Advantages

Simply as a civic feature, the Port of Miami has certain special endowments. It is not tucked away in a "Limehouse Dock" area. Its municipal terminal stands in a blaze of what could well be "glory" on Miami's finest thoroughfare, close to the heart of the principal retail, park, and hotel center of the city.

Traffic must move, and the port activities must function. The wise city resolves that since it can't do without its port, it must live with its port. The Army "housekeeping" rule applies here. Any undesirable object shall be removed from the area. If it cannot be removed, paint it! In civic terms that means, if it is not feasible to relocate the port, clean it up, repair it, modernize it, and work out an orderly program designed to change it from a physical liability into a cultural, physical, and - above all - economic credit to the city.

Certainly one of the principal complaints against the port could be transformed into commendation simply by improvement in the housekeeping of the port area. This may seem a superficial suggestion, but public spirit and citizen- and visitor-approval are not negligible in their effect. And, as a good housekeeper does not stop with cleanliness and order - as many husbands have cause to know - but goes on to repairs, alternations, and improvements of all kinds, so housekeeping at the port is one good place to start.

County and State Equities in the Port of Miami

Dade County is geographically very nearly co-existent with the Greater Miami Area, and, thus, within the frame of its own jurisdiction and functions, it is co-responsible for, and co-benefited by port operation.

The State of Florida, as one of the principals in the Federated group of the United States of America, is and must be extremely zealous in aid of all profitable, or potentially profitable, establishments of whatever nature within her boundaries. The power of the State rests directly upon the prosperity of her citizens and the prosperity of all regions within the State must be the subject of long-range and impartial State concern. A seaport as a public servant utility and a channel for trade should have appropriate State consideration.

Federal Interest and Responsibility

There is no need to dwell on the zealous promotion of river, harbor, and coastal improvements which has characterized the Corps of Engineers of the U. S. Army in carrying out all missions assigned to it by Congressional directive since - and even before - the first Rivers and Harbors Act. The Engineers, however, can move only in legally specified ways, and, except in certain projects of overwhelming importance to national welfare, their activities can be initiated only by decision and application of local interests. However, in the case of Miami, Federal assistance for certain harbor and installation improvements is overdue and awaits only concerted local decision and tenders of unequivocal local action to be implemented.

Apart from the Port of Miami Federal Project now on the books - though inactive and unlikely to be revived in its present form - the Miami area is of concern to the Federal Government in many ways. To mention only a few, Government Cut and the Miami Ship Channel are federally created and maintained deepwater channels from the open sea to the central port area. The Intracoastal Waterway, which cuts through Biscayne Bay and Florida Bay, is part of the federal project designed to provide protected shipping along the Atlantic coastline of the United States. The Florida Inland Navigation District, made up of eleven east coast Counties, cooperates with the Federal Government relative to this waterway, from Jacksonville to Miami. The deep water anchorage which exists outside Biscayne Harbor is of value to all ocean shipping, including Naval vessels, and the Miami River is a subject of federal interest as a navigable waterway, as a small-boat hurricane refuge channel, and as a key part of the Federal-State Flood Control project.

Port Inadequacy is Part of an Overall Problem

Port facilities at the municipal docks have received little maintenance and almost no capital improvements since 1940. Critical deterioration has been repaired only just before - and sometimes not until - complete unusability has occurred. There are several reasons for this, which are worth stating only because they suggest certain methods of improvement.

From the 1920's and continuing to the present, Miami has been involved in a pattern of real estate promotion and tourist, resort, and new-inhabitant expansion. As is characteristic of any extraordinary growth phenomenon, basic considerations - in this case, municipal problems and objects of concern - have been somewhat

sidetracked and neglected while the rush is on. Miami's boom has been continuing, and through it all, Miami has kept pace only with difficulty with the primary capital improvements required for metropolitan development.

Any city which grows phenomenally reaches a point where basic facilities must be enlarged, while the tax base to provide them is insufficient. New traffic-handling street systems, water runoff and sewage facilities, fire and police protection, and public welfare and education systems - all are enormously costly in construction and initiation stages, while real estate assessment and attraction of assessable commercial and industrial establishments do not keep pace with minimum metropolitan needs.

The port of Miami has been the victim of this lack of local funds, on the one hand, and of the concentration of local interests on the resort and new-housing phase of the city's life, on the other.

Miami, and the southern Florida area in general, have also been victims of the resort-city development pattern combined with a real estate boom and bust psychology. To some, this suggests that Miami is a papier-maché kind of city, rather than what it has come to be. Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach promoters have helped this false thinking along by referring to the "Gold Coast" part of Florida. The banking implications of this false concept outside of Florida have not always been helpful, and have affected Miami's credit rating for sale of bonds for capital improvements. Ultra-conservative investment capital centers in other parts of the country have been hard to "sell" at times, as a result. This situation, now fully realized by responsible Miamians, is being successfully reversed, since the economic reality of a large metropolitan area with growing assets of all kinds, including airports, seaport facilities, increasing light industry, and increasing position in the international trade picture, means better interest rates in financing efforts on behalf of municipal capital improvements.

Port Miami Has Played a Passive Role

A port is a state of mind, as has been suggested previously, and Miami has not learned to consider its ocean terminal as a vital organ, nor have Miamians universally come to realize their port's added, and now immeasurable, value in terms of the Caribbean-Latin American - European trade complex.

In addition to an early lack of port-mindedness in Miami, the

War years further reduced active local participation in port operation, since commercial traffic was completely halted by Navy utilization of port and harbor facilities. When the Navy withdrew in 1945, except for one installation kept until 1947, it was clear that the trade picture had also changed. Coastwise shipping had been decimated for the time, but, on the other hand, there was a new South Atlantic - Caribbean pattern emerging.

However, the challenge to either restore the old or create new trade patterns was hardly recognized by Miamians. Port promotion was dealt with as a luxury and not as an operational need. And this occurred in a city where promotion of other kinds has been developed into an art. Port promotion and traffic solicitation had few advocates and this function of the port was forgotten with the same nonchalance as was the condition of her docks and terminals. The Port of Miami has suffered in the overall Miami picture from too many other urgent local needs which had sponsors and/or better advocates. The result is the spectacle of a good going business operation allowed to exist but not allowed to grow, simply because of the lack of a will to decide on the way, and then pay the price.

Instability of Relationship to Sovereign Authority Brought Operational Stagnation

Original harbor improvements were made in the 1890's by the Florida East Coast Railway, the Federal projects being started in 1902 and carried on in cooperation with the F. E. C., the City of Miami, and other local private interests, up until the present. The City of Miami, rather than Dade County, has been the moving spirit in port development, and in 1943 a genuine port authority was created by State legislation and titled the "Greater Miami Port Authority." This official body was authorized to take charge of the local cooperation and works aspects of the soon-to-be-authorized new Federal project which is familiar as the "Virginia Key Project."

At this point, the "resort" side of Miami's personality overcame the conservative economics element, and the project was abandoned at local insistence. The Greater Miami Port Authority was abolished by the State Legislature in 1945; and in its place was created the Dade County Port Authority which was authorized to administer both water and air ports in the County. However, the water port division of the Authority was never organized. The jurisdictional controversy ended in a stalemate. The result has been frustration. The lack of decision and/or leadership has been used as an argument for inaction in port matters, and the port has been present, but not a favored member of the family, at the Budget Banquet.

"Holding the Port"

"Holding the Port" is not enough. A defensive position inevitably deteriorates. A sound offensive campaign is the way to make the most of any valuable civic property. And a flourishing port will be another link in the chain of sound capital assets which, in turn, will open to Miami vistas of new economic plateaus.

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