

Presentation to Miami Downtown Development Authority Urbanism Committee

September 4, 2025

MIAMIBEACH



Introduction

- Miami Beach is moving forward with the implementation of a new water taxi service to expand transportation options and reduce congestion.
- This service will connect key destinations across Biscayne Bay and within Miami Beach, supporting both residents and visitors.



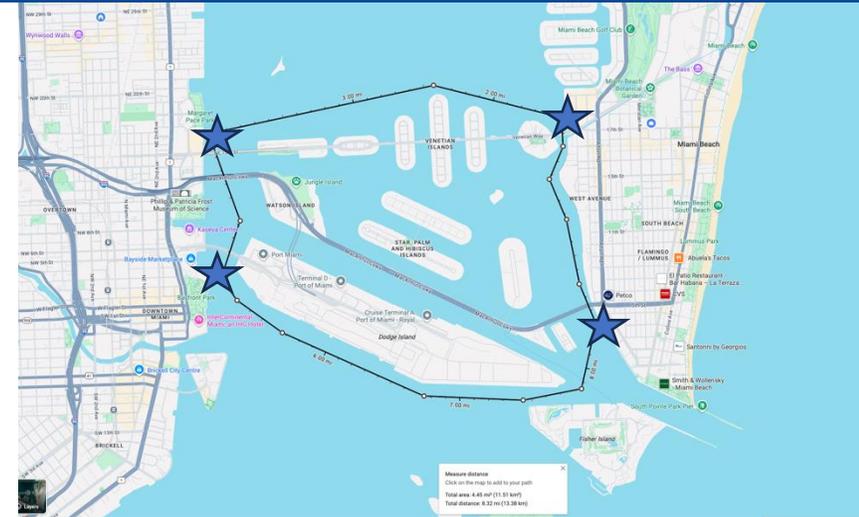
Background & Prior Service

First Pilot – Water Taxi Miami (2014)

- In 2014, the City supported a pilot service operated by Water Taxi Miami.
- The service operated without any City subsidy; the vendor relied solely on fare revenue.
- This resulted in high fares, particularly unattractive for daily commuters.
- Ridership was modest and primarily tourist-oriented, not sustainable for commuter needs.
- Lesson learned: A fare-driven model without subsidy is not viable for long-term commuter service.

Second Pilot – Poseidon Ferry (2024)

- The City partnered with Poseidon Ferry for a one-year pilot.
- Supported by an annual subsidy of \$600,000.
- Fares were more competitive than in 2014, which initially helped attract interest.
- However, the main challenge was reliability:
 - The vessel experienced frequent mechanical problems,
 - Resulting in service interruptions and cancellations,
 - Ultimately, causing the pilot to be terminated after just three months.
- Lesson learned: Reliability of vessels and operations is critical; even with subsidies and demand, mechanical failures undermine rider confidence and long-term viability.



Special Event Service

Art Week 2024

- During Art Week 2024, the City issued an ITQ for temporary water taxi service.
- Service was provided between Miami Beach and Downtown Miami, helping alleviate bridge traffic during one of the busiest weeks of the year.
- In 5 days, ridership was approximately 15,000.
- This short-term activation demonstrated:
 - Strong interest in waterborne connections for major cultural events.
 - The value of partnering with local operators to provide flexible, scalable service.
 - The need for reliable vessels and better integration with land-based transit connections.



Route Total Distance: 2.45 miles (3.94 km)

Ongoing Water Taxi Procurement

RFQ Process (2025)

- March 2025 – RFQ released.
- June 2025 – Proposals evaluated.
- July 2025 – Water Taxi of Fort Lauderdale selected as operator.
- August 2025 – Contract negotiations and service planning.
- Winter 2026 – Initial service (Phase 1) launch.

Phase 1 (Cross-Bay)

Phase 2 (North-South along City of Miami Beach)

Phase 3 (Indian Creek Waterways)



Operator

Water Taxi of Fort Lauderdale chosen as the service operator.

- Experienced provider with existing fleet and operations in the region.
- Ability to leverage existing vessels, staffing, and ticketing infrastructure.
- Proven track record in tourist and commuter ferry services.



Planning & Consultant Support

Consultant Support

To ensure a sustainable and well-integrated service, the City engaged KPFF Consulting Engineers.

KPFF will provide technical expertise and help the City with:

- Demand analysis and route evaluation.
- Stop location feasibility (e.g., Indian Creek, Maurice Gibb Park).
- Drafting proposed service schedules and fleet requirements.

Miami-Dade TPO Waterborne Feasibility Study

The Miami-Dade Transportation Planning Organization (TPO) recently completed a Waterborne Feasibility Study.

- The study analyzed cross-bay and intracoastal routes, ridership demand, and infrastructure constraints.
- Findings confirmed that waterborne transit is feasible with:
 - Consistent funding support.
 - Integration with land-based transit (trolley, Metrobus, Metrorail).
 - Investment in docking infrastructure and ADA accessibility.

The City's collaboration with KPFF will build upon and align with the TPO's regional study, ensuring Miami Beach's service fits into the larger countywide mobility strategy.

Grant Opportunities & Partnerships

The City will actively pursue all available grant opportunities to support water taxi service operations and infrastructure.

Ongoing efforts include:

- FDOT Service Development Program Grants – the City secured \$600,000 in 2024 to subsidize the upcoming water taxi service and has applied again this year for continued funding.
- Regional collaboration – the City is coordinating with Miami-Dade County and the City of Miami to explore cost-sharing and joint grant applications.
- Federal and State opportunities – potential future funding through FTA ferry programs and resiliency grants tied to coastal transportation.
- Partnerships will ensure the service is both financially sustainable and regionally integrated.

Conclusion

- The upcoming Water Taxi Service represents a major step forward in multimodal mobility for Miami Beach.
- Builds on lessons from the Poseidon pilot.
- Backed by KPFF's technical expertise and delivered by an experienced operator.
- Aims to provide residents, workers, and visitors with a safe, reliable, and scenic alternative to roadway congestion.

Next Steps:

- Finalize route alignments and docking infrastructure with the operator.
- Negotiate and execute a contract with Water Taxi of Fort Lauderdale.
- Secure funding partnerships with City of Miami, DDA, and Miami-Dade County.
- Anticipated launch Phase 1 Service in late 2025/early 2026.
- Monitor ridership, customer satisfaction, and adjust schedules as needed.
- Expand more routes (north-south, Indian Creek waterways)



Thank you

