

'Injecting Green Space' To Make Way For Pedestrians On Biscayne Boulevard

By KATE STEIN



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Ken Russell, District 2 commissioner for the city of Miami, and Oksana Klimovich of Synergy Workspaces, chat at the Biscayne Green pop-up park in downtown Miami on Wednesday, Jan. 11, 2017.

KATE STEIN / WLRN

The southernmost blocks of Biscayne Boulevard go past American Airlines Arena, the Bayside Marketplace mall and Bayfront Park. All places where people -- often crowds of people -- like to walk. But because of all the cars speeding by, walking in the area can be dangerous. Sidewalks are narrow, and crossing the street -- well, either you can wait a long while or take your chances in the traffic.

Enter Biscayne Green.



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1:23

It's a project created by Miami's Downtown Development Authority (DDA) to promote walkability and public transit along Biscayne Boulevard, one of the city's major thoroughfares.

With about \$250,000 from the Knight Foundation, the Miami Foundation and its own funding, the DDA took over three blocks of parking on Biscayne Boulevard under the MetroMover tracks.

Through Jan. 26, those blocks have been converted into green spaces with picnic tables, a dog park,

murals, yoga, food trucks and evening concerts.

"It's sort of a symbol of a changing mindset," said District 2 Commissioner Ken Russell, DDA chair. "Injecting this green space in the middle of eight lanes of traffic... creates less priority for cars and more for pedestrians."

Russell said the project aims to give Miami residents a sense of what the city could be like with fewer parking spaces and more green space. That vision includes expanded use of public transit, which Biscayne Green promotes with its proximity to the MetroMover, bike racks and buses. (Some of the traffic lanes along the Green have been converted to bus lanes.)

"That's our bait to get people on to public transit and to use it," Russell said. "We don't want people using their car to get to Biscayne Green or any of the other parks in the area. Our hope is that they use public transit, maybe for the first time... and then they start creating the habit."

The question is whether people will embrace that mindset. Some of the people present at Biscayne Green for a networking event on Wednesday morning had taken the MetroMover to get there. Others said they drove, biked or walked.

And some used a combination of methods. Mike Sarasti said he drove his car to a lot a few blocks down from Biscayne Green, then walked over. He said there's an overall shortage of parking along Biscayne Boulevard, so providing transportation alternatives -- and incentives to use them -- is a good move by city officials.



Ken Russell, Miami's District 2 commissioner, shows off tires repurposed for a children's playspace in the pop-up park along Biscayne Boulevard.

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"Not being able to park in this area has made me walk downtown more," he said. "I walk from my building now when I'm coming to lunch in the area."

"Not being able to park in this area has made me walk downtown more." - Mike Sarasti

Ines Mato biked to Biscayne Green from her nearby office building. She said she had considered driving to work earlier in the day, but opted to take her bike in the car-free spirit of Biscayne Green.

"I like this idea of creating a more pedestrian-friendly environment," she said. "That's definitely an idea I want to support."

Mato said the park spaces also "bring the community together."

"You get to interact more," she said. "This is a great idea to meet other people from the community and share ideas."

That was the goal behind Wednesday morning's event at Biscayne Green, a 9-to-11 a.m. outdoor co-working session. Mato, Sarasti and others enjoyed free coffee and the chance to take advantage of Miami's warm weather while also working on their laptops using the Green's free wifi.

"This is an amazing initiative," said Oksana Klimovich of Synergy Workspaces, which partnered with DDA to organize the event. Synergy's building is just across the street from Biscayne Green, and Klimovich said she was excited both to host the company's first outdoor coworking event and to be working outside.

"This is pure joy," she said.

Other [scheduled events](#) at Biscayne Green include a Taste of Downtown food festival, dance classes and happy hours.



Russell, the District 2 commissioner and DDA chair, says he wants to make Biscayne Green permanent before the end of his tenure in 2019. The DDA has received a \$422,000 Florida Department of Transportation grant to study the potential impacts of permanently eliminating some traffic lanes.

"We've been able to achieve getting the temporary version of it for people to try it out," Russell said. "The chicken is here; the egg will come."