



A rendering of what a new interactive kiosk may look like at Miami-Dade bus stops. Taken from an online presentation by Civiq, the company that makes them, this shows a user looking at an interactive screen featuring a message from Mayor Carlos Gimenez. The kiosks show digital advertising as well as information a government wants to share with residents, including transit schedules. Civiq

MIAMI-DADE COUNTY

Digital ads on tap for Miami-Dade bus stops in swap for ‘smart’ kiosks that offer free Wi-Fi

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Digital ads could spread across Miami-Dade bus stops under a deal to install high-tech kiosks with Wi-Fi hot spots throughout the county’s transit system.

The company behind New York’s celebrated transformation of old pay phones into high-tech digital way stations has negotiated a 15-year deal with Miami-Dade officials to install up to 300 of the kiosks at bus stops and Metrorail stations across the county.

Civiq also would take over the transit system’s current Wi-Fi network on all of its trains, expanding the service to all buses at no charge.

The Massachusetts company pays for the equipment and operating expenses through digital advertising on the kiosks, and sees enough profit potential in Miami-Dade that it has pledged to spend \$20 million in the county to get started.



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Brad Gleeson, Civiq's chief commercial officer

Executives tout the kiosks as a no-cost way for local governments to bring interactive information stations to their streets and transit centers — as well as an opportunity to use the equipment's sensors to track everything from litter to gunshots to traffic.

“We call it the civic mobility experience. This is the concept of creating this seamless canopy of connectivity in a city,” Brad Gleeson, Civiq's chief commercial officer, said in a presentation posted on the company's website this month. The kiosks “make a city more aware and more efficient.”

The kiosks themselves provide free Wi-Fi service within 200 feet, offering people waiting for a bus the chance to use the internet without tapping into their phone's data plan.

Critics see the Civiq arrangement as a way to circumvent county restrictions on digital ads, which are strictly regulated and the bane of public-space activists. “It's pure visual pollution,” said Peter Ehrlich, a founder of Scenic Miami, a group that fights digital billboards.

Dusty Melton, a Miami-Dade lobbyist who has urged strict enforcement of the county's sign ordinance, said Civiq's digital kiosks could be considered roadside ads if installed at bus stops.

“This contract appears, quite clearly, to be in blatant violation of the county's very own sign code,” Melton said. Along with a requirement that digital signs be limited to properties larger

than 10 acres, Melton noted the current law requires the electronic ads only advertise things available on the property with the sign itself. Bus-stop screens, he said, would seem to violate the rules “in hundreds of locations.”

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Civiq executives were not available for interviews. A mock-up of a kiosk included in the draft contract shows it would stand about 9 feet tall, with a 55-inch screen — on the larger end of the scale for most big-screen televisions. A mock-up of the device in Gleeson’s presentation features an image of Miami-Dade Mayor Carlos Gimenez on the main touch screen, with readouts on county weather and transit information below.

Alice Bravo, Miami-Dade’s transportation director, said at a recent committee meeting that county staff did not feel the county’s signage rules applied because the kiosks’ screens are designed for pedestrians.

“These are small, isolated screens,” she said. “They’re not designed for viewing by vehicular traffic.”

Bravo and other administrators negotiated the no-bid Civiq deal under a provision in county law that allows marketing arrangements to be signed without soliciting other proposals. No Civiq executives registered to lobby county officials during the talks, avoiding a step that can draw public attention to a potential deal.

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Gimenez recommended the Civiq contract in a Dec. 14 memo, and it won unanimous approval from the County Commission’s Transit

committee on Wednesday. The deal, which includes revenue-sharing for the county from ad sales, is now awaiting a final vote before the 13-member Commission.

Bravo said the talks spun out of Miami's annual eMerge Americas technology conference, which Civiq executives attended.

The company is in the midst of replacing New York's 7,500 pay phones with the smart kiosks. They offer gigabit Wi-Fi, significantly faster than most networks, along with charging stations for cellphones, a button that automatically connects with a 911 operator, free phone calls from Vonage, and an interactive screen showing public announcements and information on city services.

Civiq is pitching its services to local governments across the country, but a company publicist said the closest example to Miami at the moment is New York.

Miami-Dade has the 14th largest transit system in the country, and the proposed deal gives Civiq the ability to install at least 150 stations in the county's more than 40 rail stations and in a tiny portion of its more than 8,000 bus stops. Civiq would need local permission to install them at stops within city limits, a key barrier given the appeal of high-traffic areas in Miami and Miami Beach to advertisers.

In its online presentation, an executive with Civiq's kiosk partner, Intel, described the use of cameras on advertising displays that can track a viewer's gaze for interest and customize displays to match a passerby's niche.

"If a woman is looking at a screen," Intel's Karthik Murugan said, "you don't want to show men's clothing."

Murugan also said three-dimensional cameras in the devices can help decipher whether an advertiser's message is connecting. Along with "gaze tracking," new technology allows emotion detection.

“Are they happy? Are they frustrated with the content that’s being shown?” Murugan said. “The 3-D camera will help with that analysis.”

THE MASSACHUSETTS COMPANY PAYS FOR THE EQUIPMENT AND OPERATING EXPENSES THROUGH DIGITAL ADVERTISING ON THE KIOSKS, AND SEES ENOUGH PROFIT POTENTIAL IN MIAMI-DADE THAT IT HAS PLEDGED TO SPEND \$20 MILLION IN THE COUNTY TO GET STARTED.

The presentation also said Civiq raises revenue from cellular companies that can utilize the kiosks for help in boosting phone reception. Taking over Miami-Dade’s existing free Wi-Fi network in all trains and some buses could prove lucrative, too. Bravo said Civiq would have the ability to inject advertising into a Wi-Fi system that’s currently ad-free.

But while ads may come to transit’s Wi-Fi offerings, Civiq would also expand the service beyond the roughly 200 buses that have it now to the entire 850-vehicle fleet. And Miami-Dade could stop paying Wi-Fi providers for the current service, since Civiq would pick up the tab.

Gimenez’s Dec. 14 memo said the 15-year deal would save Miami-Dade about \$2 million in existing costs, with the county collecting between 3 and 4 percent of Civiq’s ad revenue (and up to 5 percent if the deal is renewed).

Bravo said a central advantage comes from the convenience a high-tech kiosk can provide transit users — especially new passengers who aren’t familiar with how the system works.

“We’re looking for things that help improve access to transit, that help improve the reliability of transit,” she said. “I think that’s how we get more and more people to take public transit.”

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