

# Business Monday JUNE 28, 2015

## CEOs: Better transit system needed, but higher tolls hurt

### HIGHLIGHTS

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ADES

**The question:** Do you think higher tolls on the 112 and 836 will hurt workers and the economy? Or are they needed to maintain and improve Miami-Dade’s transit system?

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I don’t believe it will hurt the economy and we need to improve our public transit system, not necessarily our roads.

**Daniel Ades, managing partner, Kawa Capital Management**

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Placing more toll readers on the roads means all users are contributing to the road upkeep, not just those who pass by certain segments – that seems fair. The additional expense has a silver lining if it motivates people to demand improvements to public transit.

**Christine Barney, CEO, RBB Communications**

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Though tolls are needed to help modernize and repair these expressways, the charges are excessive and a financial burden for people making low wages who have to drive long distances, especially on 836. I totally disagree with the whole toll structure we are seeing in Miami-Dade and Broward Counties, especially on I-95 Sunpass lanes. When traffic is heavy, it can be common to see \$10 toll charges.

**Richard Behar, founder and CEO, Capitol Clothing Corp.**

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It's always a delicate balance between providing services and increasing cost. However, if Miami's going to thrive we have to maintain our roadways and improve our public transportation in order to maintain our quality-of-life. Ultimately, by improving our highways we will save people time and money because they will not be stuck wasting hours in traffic and congestion.

**Alice Cervera Lamadrid, managing partner, Cervera Real Estate**

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Tolls are needed to maintain roads. Tolls will also help to grow mass transit and get more cars off the roads which will have a greater long-term impact on the success of Miami as a growing city at large. I think the more important questions is will the tolls raised be used to pour more concrete or to build mass transit systems so more people can move more efficiently throughout the city?

**Pandwe Gibson, executive director, EcoTech Visions**

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If higher tolls are the main source of revenue to fund improvements in our transit system, then we should increase them.

**Julie Grimes, managing partner, Hilton Bentley Hotel**

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There are some days when you feel nickel and dimed everywhere you turn, I understand the need for funding for road maintenance and improvements, but my bigger concern is a focus on better public transportation.

**Felecia Hatcher, co-founder of Feverish Gourmet Pops**

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I do think that higher tolls are needed to maintain and improve Miami-Dade transit system. However, I do NOT believe that MDX made their case so that the paying public could understand it. I believe that the Miami Herald did a much better job; however, too many people get their news in sound bites rather than in in-depth news reports. The Herald Toll Calculator was genius, but how many people used it? The perception is that transportation costs continue to rise while traffic congestion is NOT improving, therefore we are being “shafted by government again.”

**Ann Machado, founder and president, Creative Staffing**

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The costs hurt workers and the economy, but they are needed to maintain and improve our transit system, so, overall, the costs are worth the benefits.

**Victor Mendelson, co-president, HEICO**

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Tolls are just one piece of the larger transportation puzzle. We have to maintain a balance, providing useful services for commuters while working to improve the overall transportation network.

**Nitin Motwani, managing principal, Miami Worldcenter Associates**

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We need to finance our infrastructure and this seems to be the most equitable solution. Variable tolls can help ease traffic. Hourly workers are certainly impacted financially by rising tolls, but paying for road improvements and infrastructure modernization has to come from somewhere.

**Abe Ng, founder and CEO of Sushi Maki**

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There is a threshold where it is both overly burdensome and hurtful.

**Todd Oretsky, co-founder, Pipeline Brickell**

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To put it diplomatically, I think what MDX is doing is ineffective. This group of good people, whom I highly respect, has inherited years of neglect and a lack of forward-thinking and planning. However, the current “catch-up” strategy is ill-advised. Traffic is getting worse by the day, while tolls continue to rise. I fail to see the logic in this flawed model for improving traffic flow and find it undemocratic. This is a very difficult development and message for people to swallow, especially workers who are on the lower end of the pay scale, and students who work multiple jobs and must arrive on time at work and school. With few reliable public transit options, highway officials must become more strategic, innovative and empathetic.

**Edouardo Padrón, president, Miami Dade College**

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This is a tough one for me because it presumes that the money from the tolls would actually be allocated to the best use for improving our transit system. I’m pretty skeptical about that. Solving our transit issues will take creativity and out-of-the-box solutions that will certainly come from the private sector, like Uber and CitiBike.

**Joanna Schwartz, CEO and co-founder, EarlyShares**

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I think any increase is going to impact the people who can least afford it. Better solution would be higher taxes on tourism.

**Dave Seleski, president and CEO, Stonegate Bank**

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As the former chairman of the Miami-Dade Expressway Authority, I know it will not hurt our economy. Industry experts know that 10 percent of the users were paying 90 percent of the tolls for many years. Experts will also tell you that infrastructure spending has a better return on investment than almost any other government expenditure! To become and sustain our status as a world-class city, this infrastructure investment is an absolute must.

**Darryl K. Sharpton, president and CEO, The Sharpton Group**

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There is a lot of evidence to show that an effective public transport system is essential for a successful city so for South Florida it has to be a priority. The challenge is that we don't currently have that in place and it needs to move up on everyone's agenda.

**Gillian Thomas, president and CEO, Patricia and Phillip Frost Museum of Science**

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Progress comes at a cost, and sometimes the cost is seen as too high or unaffordable. We need to have trust in the officials we elect to do what is best for our community as a whole – and yes, updating our transit system is a good thing and definitely needed.

**Alina Villasante, founder, Peace Love World clothing**

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They are needed to improve the transit system, but they need to be used for that purpose. However, the cost of living in Miami is so high and working families find it hard to make ends meet (i.e. rent, food, utilities, transit), so a delicate balance is needed regarding increased tolls – maybe through a program that discounts tolls for working families making below a certain wage.

**Paco Velez, CEO, Feeding South Florida**

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I think that we should continue to challenge our elected officials to justify these significant toll increases. Are they really necessary? Why are they rising so much at once?

Unfortunately toll hikes, just like rises in the price of gas, disproportionately impact retirees

and the working poor, who like everyone else in the labor force will have no choice but to absorb the cost.

**John Wood, president, Amicon Construction**

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