

# While Miami drivers stew in traffic, their lawmakers are making them pay for rural roads in North Florida | Opinion

By [Carlos A. Gimenez](#)

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Miami-Dade commuters' tolls will fund three North Florida roads they won't use. *Miami Herald*

As we wait for Gov. Ron DeSantis to decide whether to sign into law legislation that would dismantle the Miami-Dade Expressway Authority — a misguided effort that has already harmed the once-stellar credit rating of MDX and will likely cost South Florida drivers more — let's see what else happened on the transportation front in Tallahassee.

In essence, the state plans to use tolls Miami-Dade County drivers pay on Florida's Turnpike, and even a portion of their motor vehicle registration taxes, to help build three new toll roads in rural counties north of us. Once again, Miami-Dade County is the cash cow for the rest of the state, and our legislative delegation (with some rare exceptions) are aiders and abettors in this scam.

So while we face congestion because of empty promises by the two legislators who sought to create a new state-run transportation authority in a supposed effort to cut tolls and eventually

end them decades from now, the reality is Sen. Manny Diaz Jr. and Rep. Bryan Avila delivered a bait and switch. The final bill that passed the Legislature (HB385 and SB898) contains no guarantee that tolls will be cut at all, or that all the toll money collected would remain in our county, and important proposed roads like the Kendall Parkway are in jeopardy.

Our legislators seem to have had no qualms in having Miami-Dade County drivers end up paying for roads that won't serve our community. Senate Bill 7068 would fund the Southwest-Central Florida Connector from Collier to Polk counties; extend the Suncoast Connector 130 miles north from Citrus to Jefferson counties; and build the Northern Turnpike Connector from the Ocala area heading to the proposed Suncoast Parkway up in North Florida.

Those three rural roads will become a legal extension of the turnpike system, which means that toll revenues from the entire state system will be used to cover those building and operation costs, as well as \$77.5 million in motor-vehicle registration fees collected statewide that will be used for those three roads. Motor-vehicle registrations in Miami-Dade account for almost 10 percent of the state's registrations. And the turnpike portion that runs through our county accounts for 16.7 percent of the turnpike's revenues, even though that span makes up only 11 percent of the turnpike's lane miles.

I don't blame legislators from other parts of Florida for voting for SB7068 because they were working for their region's interests. However, I do blame those Miami-Dade legislators who voted against the best interests of our residents, their constituents. This is precisely why I proposed merging the Miami-Dade portion of the turnpike with MDX, so that we could immediately cut 20 percent in tolls for our drivers and end the state's insistence on automatic toll hikes based on cost of living — a total savings of \$8.5 billion — while also producing a \$1.85 billion work plan that would include roads and transit for the next three decades.

Instead, our drivers will be bankrolling three rural roads to the tune of billions of dollars in Northwest and Southwest-Central Florida while we're stuck in traffic here with no clear plan and facing greater costs.

Let's hope Gov. DeSantis vetoes the Diaz-Avila legislation that tramples on Miami-Dade County's home-rule charter. We can do better for our citizens.

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