

## Higher-priced express lanes could come to toll roads

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Mayrice Ferre, Chairman of MDX explains the toll increases on MDX Expressways to Miami Herald Editorial Board on Wednesday July 31, 2013

Miami-Dade Expressway Authority officials are planning extra-toll express lanes on State Roads 836, 112, and 874 as well as the Snapper Creek Expressway and the Gratigny Parkway even though those roads already have tolls.

The officials said they see the express lanes as a tool to manage congestion and to provide a premium transit option.

The disclosure came during a presentation Wednesday before the Miami Herald editorial board by Maurice Ferre, the agency chairman, and Javier Rodriguez, the organization's executive director.

Though MDX and state transportation officials had previously talked about the possibility of adding express lanes to MDX roads, it was only Wednesday that agency leaders provided more information about the concept.

They showed a map that featured the future South Florida managed-lanes network that the Florida Department of Transportation plans to build on I-75 and the Palmetto Expressway.

The MDX express lanes would be akin to express lanes that Florida's Turnpike is about to start building on its Homestead Extension within a few weeks.

Ferre and Rodriguez said that though the footprint for express lanes will be built on MDX roads as part of planned improvements, the lanes would not be operational for perhaps five to eight years. Ferre said the MDX board of directors would first have to approve an express-lane plan.

"At the end of the construction period you will have the infrastructure, the pavement area, complete so that we can have managed lanes," said Rodriguez.

He and Ferre said that express lanes on MDX roads would not become operational until the board votes on the plan and the FDOT South Florida express-lanes network is active.

“I commit to you publicly that I will bring it to the board for a policy decision on that issue,” said Ferre. “Eventually, if we go into managed lanes it will be a toll within a toll.”

The MDX goal, said Rodriguez, is that within eight years the agency expressways will be ready to incorporate express lanes.

“Our goal is that by the year 2020, all of our infrastructure will be in place and the policy decisions are made,” said Rodriguez. “Then it becomes an operational issue.”

Under the concept of adding express lanes to toll roads, the toll on the express lanes would be higher than on the regular lanes. Also, the express lanes would be used by express buses similar to those already operating on the managed lanes of I-95 in Miami-Dade County.

Rodriguez and Ferre said it’s too soon to determine what the tolls would be on MDX express lanes.

“You are going to pay a premium,” said Rodriguez. “You can either pay the existing toll to be on the general-purpose lanes, or you can pay a higher toll to be on the express lanes.”

Another option to ensure a certain speed, he added, would be for MDX managers to determine the level of tolls on entire highways during peak hours.

On June 18, the MDX board approved a new toll rate for 836 that will take effect next summer.

The new rate, which will be 70 cents, is actually lower than the current rate. But in effect it represents a toll increase because starting in 2014 all drivers on 836 will have to pay a toll on segments of the road that are currently not tolled.

Right now, 60 percent of drivers who use 836 do not pay a toll because they exit before reaching toll plazas. But next year, when the new rate takes effect, the option of avoiding toll plazas will no longer be available since tolls will be collected electronically no matter where drivers enter the highway.