



Fabiola Santiago DECEMBER 12, 2014

Fabiola Santiago: As tolls rise, Florida shorts Miami

HIGHLIGHTS

While Miami-Dade residents were hit recently with new, unprecedented toll hikes on major east-west arteries, Gov. Rick Scott was rewarding his rural conservative supporters with \$9 million to build and improve their toll-free roads.

BY FABIOLA SANTIAGO
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While Miami-Dade residents were hit recently with new, unprecedented toll hikes on major east-west arteries, Gov. Rick Scott was rewarding his rural conservative supporters with \$9 million to build and improve their toll-free roads.

So while down south we pay our way, the folks up north who contribute less to state revenues get a free ride.

Poor timing? Irony? A laugh to go with the slap to the pockets of Miami-Dade's toll-payers?

The governor's announcement from Tallahassee was all those things — and came by way of press releases packaged with words of praise from a long roster of who's who in the state's powerful Republican legislative leadership.

Twenty rural areas — mostly in Northwest Florida and also in agricultural Belle Glade, Pahokee, and South Bay — will receive transportation improvement funds from the state, part of Scott's "Rural Areas of Opportunity Program," a euphemism for developing what's left of the Old Florida landscape in the name of creating jobs. Never mind that it's the weather and our natural resources — not the asphalt — that lure and keep us here.

And those \$9 million — that's just peanuts.

There are billions more where those came from, promised the governor, who turned down many more billions in federal funds for high-speed rail service in Florida.

"This year we made an historic investment of over \$10 billion for transportation needs and DOT's five-year plan will invest nearly \$41 billion into our state's transportation system," Scott said. "Investing in our roads is a top priority because it will help our state continue to be a global tourist and business destination."

How caring of the governor, just reelected by a mere 64,145 votes, to be so generously selective with those global tourists visiting Gadsden and Jackson counties. And where's our cut?

After all, the governor appoints five of the 12 volunteer board members to the Miami-Dade Expressway Authority, the agency that hit drivers with the new tolls. Six members are appointed by Miami-Dade commissioners; a 13th board member is a state employee, the Department of Transportation's District Six secretary.

As much as these Scott appointees say they're there to serve this community, those members are politically beholden to the governor who appointed them. During Scott's reelection campaign, former Miami mayor Maurice Ferre, an appointee to the MDX by the Miami-Dade Board of Commissioners — and a Democrat — endorsed Republican Scott in an ad that ran quite often in Spanish-language television.

Maybe instead of levying bigger tolls, Ferre could help roll back taxes for the poor and working people of this community and use his clout to get us some of that state money for road maintenance and improvements.

We certainly need the subsidy.

When the high cost of transportation is combined with the high cost of housing and our comparably low salaries, this region is [at the top of the most expensive places](#) to live in the United States, newly elected Miami-Dade Commissioner Daniella Levine Cava told me Friday.

"We are driving up prices because we're catering to foreign investors and that makes it harder for local

people,” Levine Cava said.

On Tuesday the MDX addressed the public anger over the latest toll hikes on 836 and 112 by [discounting the tolls](#) on five-axle trucks so that they don’t spill onto city streets to avoid the tolls. That may be a first step in the right direction, but while the move helps keep trucks out of neighborhoods, it only benefits the big trucking industry, which campaigned for that rollback.

What about other commuters, like students and low-wage earners?

“Past land use decisions separated the places we live from the places we work,” Levine Cava said. “The consequence of this is that the cost of commuting puts enormous strain on people of limited means — especially those who need to regularly use our toll roads. The county and MDX need to do much more to provide a robust public transit service for our community along those same roadways.”

Something to think about as you drive along our traffic-clogged highways, hear the “p-e-e-e-p” every few miles, and know that your SunPass, like a hungry teenager, is again demanding to be fed.

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Ambrose Sims · ★ Top Commenter

A Florida voter who is a COLLEGE GRADUATE recently told me that he ONLY votes in Presidential elections. With this kind of thinking, and mostly the working class poor buying lottery tickets, yet don't see the importance of voting in ALL elections, those non-voters paying the tolls deserve all the tolls they get. I've said it before, and I'll keep saying it--the majority of this state's voters are Democrats, if they had wanted a better chance of influencing the appointments to the MDX board, they would have voted to put a Democrat in the Governor's mansion.

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Bandika Beek · ★ Top Commenter

Big Deception from M Ferre,viewing & listening that's" If people Don't want to pay tolls, them drive by the cities street. Easy for A millioner to say, and laugh of the voters and community that more than once put him in Government.

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Marcos Soria · Miami, Florida

I guess the politicians don't drive to work?...I don't see them on the metrorail...? The joke is on us!

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Alex Perez · ★ Top Commenter

Finally something I can agree with you. One, exception though, you must have one of the older sunpasses, the new ones don't "p-e-e-e-p" anymore, because if they did people would be reminded all too often just how much more money they are paying to use the same clogged up roads.

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Pepe Pena · ★ Top Commenter · Florida International University

I find it so insulting that every time we need funds for schools, public health care or roads in Miami Dade, we need to pay more taxes for those projects. I don't know what are the legislators from this community doing because they are not representing us in Tallahassee. We are the ones supporting all those other rural counties and we don't get any benefits. Miami Dade needs to wake up and kick all of those representatives out of their positions for not doing their job.

Reply · Like · 1 · December 13, 2014 at 6:30am





Roll Back Tolls

Tollation! We want our representation back! Sign the petition asking MDX to roll back toll rates, here.
<https://www.change.org/p/carlos-gimenez-we-want-mdx-to-roll-back-the-recently-increased-toll-rates-on-the-sr-836-112-expressways-in-miami-to-pre-nov-15-rates-many-daily-commuters-cannot-afford-the-54-increase-and-don-t-want-to-pay-more-to-be-stuck-in-worse-traffic>

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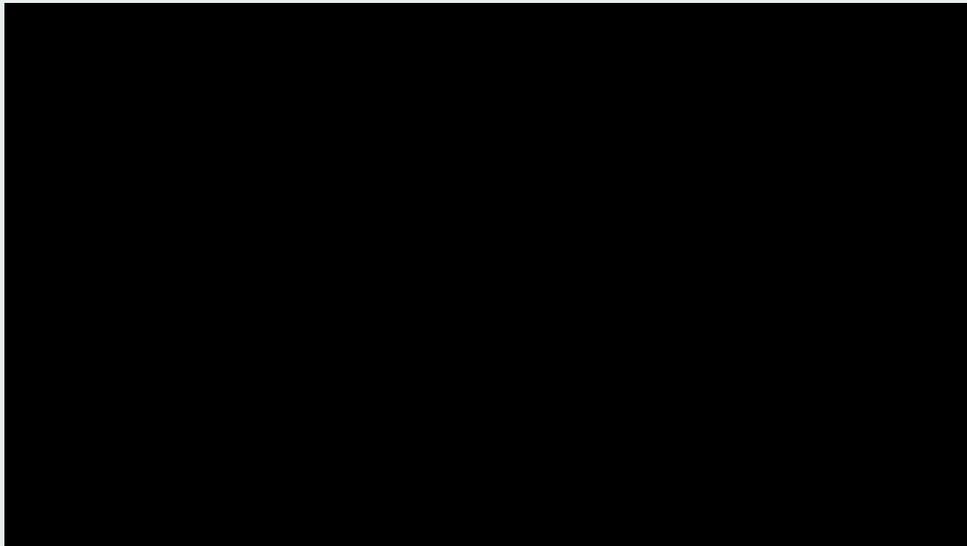
Rok Alwar · ★ Top Commenter · Hermanos Maristas. Cuba

Fabiola, you must be a really liberal democrat....complaining about everything. South Florida is congested with millions of people....so, they have to pay more, they use more natural resources. You came from Cuba in 1969, in 1969 I was serving in the US Army.....and I never complained about the USA.

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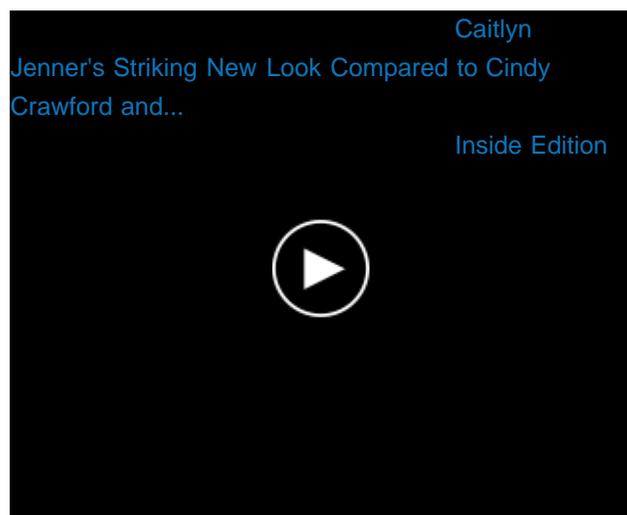
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