

# Keeping ‘Miami-Dade’ in MDX is the root of our success

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It’s been said that if you don’t know history then you don’t know anything.

There is an effort afoot in the Florida State Legislature, in the form of a bill that could have a lasting impact on the future of MDX.

Such a bold challenge to the very core of MDX begs the question, why was MDX created? What would it mean to our community if such a legislation were to proceed?

Lets then travel back to the 1980s.

This was a time when tolls were collected on the five Miami-Dade County would go to the state fund with no assurance that they would be returned to Miami-Dade. There was not enough money to even maintain the five expressways and, simply stated, the local transportation needs were not being met.

Miami-Dade was experiencing unprecedented population growth and economic prosperity, fueled by booming international trade and waves of international visitors. But the county was being held back by traffic gridlock on a rapidly aging expressway infrastructure.

Built in the 1960s, the most important east-west expressways connecting the County’s critical centers of commerce and tourism, SR 836 and SR 112, were designed to accommodate a total population at that time of less than a million residents – one third of what we have today.

As public pressure for a solution grew, civic leaders working with local- and state-elected officials were looking for an answer to reverse the flow of “donor county” dollars collected from tolls in Miami-Dade County from going north to the coffers of the Florida State Capital.

In addition, the state's investment in the transportation infrastructure in our community was declining year after year, as also gas-tax dollars were continually being diverted to serve transportation projects elsewhere across the state.

### **Taking Action**

In 1993, the Florida Legislature, with the strong leadership of the Miami-Dade Legislative Delegation, the Miami-Dade County Commission, the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce, and many corporate and civic leaders in this community, legislation was approved enabling Miami-Dade County to create a local independent expressway authority that would retain 100 percent of its toll revenues for use right here in our county.

In 1994, the Miami-Dade County Commission created the Miami-Dade Expressway Authority, today's MDX, and named its first governing board of directors. Since then, MDX exclusively funded by the tolls on its five expressways (SR 836, SR 112, SR 874, SR 878, and SR 924) was tasked with reinvesting all of its funds locally in the operation, maintenance, modernization, and expansion of these five aging expressways.

In 1996, MDX issued \$80 million in Toll System Revenue Bonds to provide sufficient funds to pay the balance of the \$91.3 million that it cost this county to obtain operational and financial control of its five expressways from the FDOT.

MDX acquired the exclusive right to determine, fix, impose, and collect tolls for the use of the system to pay for the modernization of these aging roads, as well as the growing transportation infrastructure needs of our community. With the Revenue Bonds being paid by the residents and users of the MDX expressways, as such, these assets belong to Miami-Dade County today, not the state.

### **A Better Way**

Over time, this community has continued to grow and flourish. Our transportation infrastructure today must serve the needs of:

- 3 million residents;
- 1.9 million licensed drivers;

- 181,436 daily commuters from Broward and Palm Beach counties;
- 15.4 million visitors annually;
- MIA, one of the busiest international airports in the world;
- PortMiami, one of the busiest cargo and cruise ship ports in the Southeast U.S. with a new billion-dollar tunnel carrying cargo containers from SR 836 directly to the port.

With SR 836 now in its 50th year of operation, MDX is nearing completion of the final modernization of its most vital corridor, with over \$550 million in capacity and operational improvements as well as a transit component to serve this community.

These have been the fruits of local investment secured by MDX as a local agency. The new 836 Dolphin is the backbone of our community that now will serve the future commuting, commerce, and general transportation needs of Miami-Dade County – and well into the future.

### Smart Moves

Commitments to the county's SMART Plan are driving the planned Bus Express Service that will start later this year as a pilot program on special lanes on 836. This service will start at the now-completed Dolphin Station Park and Ride to downtown Miami. Eventually it will also connect to the future Kendall Parkway where construction is also targeted to soon begin.

It is important to note that MDX has also contributed to the advancement of \$3.3 billion in key improvements to the local transportation infrastructure network by partnering with other agencies. In addition, MDX has committed 30 percent of its expenditures on average to local small business. It has reinvested 100 percent of its net revenues locally – and has done so without receiving any money from federal, state, or local sources.

### **A Tip of the Hat**

If not for the work that MDX delivers to this community, with little fanfare, Miami-Dade would not have been able to flourish into the major metropolitan region it is

today. Hopefully, the public realizes this.

Hopefully, the public can be aware that MDX only collects 40 percent of the tolls in the area, because MDX is a separate entity from both the Turnpike and I-95 Express.

We also hope that there is an awareness that every dollar collected by MDX has been invested locally – by looking at the myriad projects now coming to fruition. And how MDX is contributing to the quality of life of commuters who can now see their travel times cut in half with when the 836 was extended to 137th Avenue.

We also look forward this year to the prospect of commuters riding the Bus Express Service, and for the first time realizing the benefits of being able to leave their cars behind. Or when they see the budding fruits of the Kendall Parkway project in easing the gridlock in West Kendall.

MDX has a long history of enhancing the transportation infrastructure and commuting options for the people and businesses of Miami-Dade County. With a little hindsight, it is our hope that the community has the foresight to entrust us to continue with our good work in our local community.