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They sell it as American Dream Miami. But it'll make your bad commute hell on earth. | Miami Herald



Rendering of an artificial beach at the American Dream Miami retail theme park, a project planned for Northwest Miami-Dade. A final vote before the County Commission is scheduled for May 17. **Triple Five**

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You want to know how bad — how really, really bad — traffic is in the Northwest Miami-Dade and South Broward communities surrounding what will be the largest mall in America?

So bad, for example, that commuting parents are dropping off kids on the Northwest 103rd Street exit ramp off the Palmetto Expressway because they can't drive into the parking lot of a Hialeah Gardens charter school, battle traffic again to get back on the highway and get to work at a decent time.

Amid rush-hour drivers, kids open doors, get out and walk around cars waiting for the light to change. As if a major expressway ramp were an official drop-off point. When WSVN Channel 7 came to film "[Dangerous Drop Off](#)" a few days ago, FHP showed up, started pulling people over, and issued warnings to no avail. The troopers couldn't keep up with the number of parents arriving and kids getting out and darting across lanes, putting their lives at risk.

To this scenario, the unconscionable leaders of Miami-Dade County government — so many of them responsible for the kind of rampant overdevelopment that has brought us to this point — are adding more unimaginable gridlock.

They sell it as "American Dream Miami," a \$4 billion theme park and mega mall. But it will make your already bad commute hell on earth.

And the administration of Carlos Gimenez — who secretly helped pull together the land deal that made this happen and rammed it down residents' throats in cahoots with Commission Chairman Esteban Bovo, who represents the [areas most affected](#) — have done absolutely nothing to mitigate the impact.

Their bright idea of a traffic solution: Have Canadian developer and mall builder Triple Five build a bus depot and buy a handful of new county buses to shuttle visitors and tourists.

The mall/theme park is estimated to generate 100,000 vehicle trips per day. And that's all they got from the developer? Buses?

How this ill-conceived project — and another oversized development by the Graham Companies right next door — have sailed through the county approval process explains how we got to be in the traffic pickle that we're in these days.

An ambitious developer — this one a Canadian-Iraqi who built Minnesota's Mall of America out in the boonies — buys himself the perfect politically connected lobbyist, Miguel Diaz de la Portilla, a Republican from Coral Gables who served in the Florida Senate from 2010-16, leaving not a chance for residents and commuters to stop the project or reshape it into something more manageable.

All the county departments fall in line with the go-edict from above, and despite the environmental impact on sensitive lands so close to the Everglades and the conservative traffic studies that nevertheless generate high numbers, what you get are green-light votes from advisory boards appointed by the commissioners.

To add to the disgrace, Assistant County Attorney Dennis Kerbel says it's not even legal to impose an agreement on Triple Five that they will not use government subsidies. Yes, our tax dollars are making others rich, that's what that means. It's so disgraceful that the man who represents Miami Lakes and Palm Springs North, Commissioner Bovo, wants to open up two local town streets to all the traffic the mega mall will generate.

He, of course, lives safely ensconced in Hialeah, and only pays lip service to traffic woes from his leadership post on the dais.

And when the few brave souls who remain community activists in this town show up at meetings and raise all these issues and get too eloquent, the lobbyist and the developers bring in people to opine that this bad deal is just what our children need. It's like Disney World come home to Momma so she doesn't have to drive or train it to "expensive" Orlando.

A final vote by the county commission is scheduled for May 17.

It's not over till it's over, environmentalist Jonathan Ullman tells me, evoking Everglades defender Marjory Stoneman Douglas, who famously said: "Be a nuisance when it counts. Do your part to inform and stimulate the public to join your action. Be depressed, discouraged, and disappointed at failure and the disheartening effects of ignorance, greed, corruption and bad politics — but never give up."

And when all else fails, I say, remember the names of those who brought you this mega mess so that you don't keep making the same mistake of voting for all of these county commissioners again, and certainly not for Bovo when he runs for mayor in 2020.

Unless, of course, you're up for riding American Dream's charity buses to drop off your kids at school.

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