



OP-ED

## Mayor Gimenez: Expanding 836 parkway will not harm the Everglades

BY CARLOS A. GIMENEZ  
*miamidade.gov/mayor*

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The 600,000 residents of Kendall and West Miami-Dade have long been in need of a solution to their traffic woes. Every day they navigate a traffic-clogged area that forces them to spend more time in their vehicles than with their families.

Alleviating the gridlock while safeguarding our environment and the Urban Development Boundary is possible. That's why I have proposed, with community input and the support of Commissioner Joe Martinez, the Kendall Parkway extension of State Road 836.

It's a unique plan that's not the traditional model of development: building more roads, adding more capacity for development, and then getting more gridlock.

On June 20, Miami-Dade commissioners have the opportunity to provide almost one-fourth of our residents in an area larger than the city of Miami with the traffic relief they need to vastly improve their quality of life. And to do this in a way that protects drinking water and agricultural lands and does not allow for additional development beyond what is currently allowed.

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For the first time, future development applications in the entire 80 square mile traffic impact analysis area —which lies overwhelmingly within the UDB — would not be able to benefit from the parkway's added capacity. In other words, future development applications would be considered as if the parkway were not there, compelling developers to compensate for their traffic impact, either monetarily or by building roadway improvements.

Waiving this rule would require a 2/3 vote by county commissioners — the same requirement that under the county charter applies to expanding the UDB. Additionally, the Kendall Parkway provides for transit service along its full length, providing seamless connection to service that will be implemented within the existing 836. It also includes right-of-way for possible rail expansion. Plus, MDX would buy 1,000 acres of wetlands in the Bird Drive and North Trail Basins for

protection in perpetuity, adding a buffer between the parkway and the UDB. And there would be a 14-mile multiuse nature trail along the parkway for residents to enjoy.

MDX has never incorporated all of these features into a roadway.

All of this would be paid by users of the Parkway extension — not by county funds. It would augment the county-funded SMART plan by adding transportation alternatives that I have consistently pushed.

These are the facts. Yet there continues to be a misinformation campaign that seeks to make this parkway a ruinous highway that would destroy nature and our water supply, lead to bigger developments and put more cars on the road. Indeed, the recent Herald story had a sensationalized headline: “County wants Dolphin Expressway to burrow through the Everglades.”

First, the parkway is not in the Everglades. That area may have once been, but so was most of Miami-Dade, including where the Herald building sits in Doral. In fact, of the approximately 3,200 acres within the Bird Drive and portions of the North Trail Basin within the project area, less than 680 acres are publicly owned. MDX’s parkway mitigation would more than double this number. And contrary to the “burrow” headline, portions of the parkway will be elevated to protect environmentally sensitive land, water flow and wildlife. It’s *not* a tunnel.

This is the first time in our county’s history that a roadway of this magnitude would carry so many protections. It reflects a planning process that has evolved — one that addresses and mitigates legitimate concerns yet solves a real issue for our residents, who would shave off about 20 percent of their daily commute time each way.

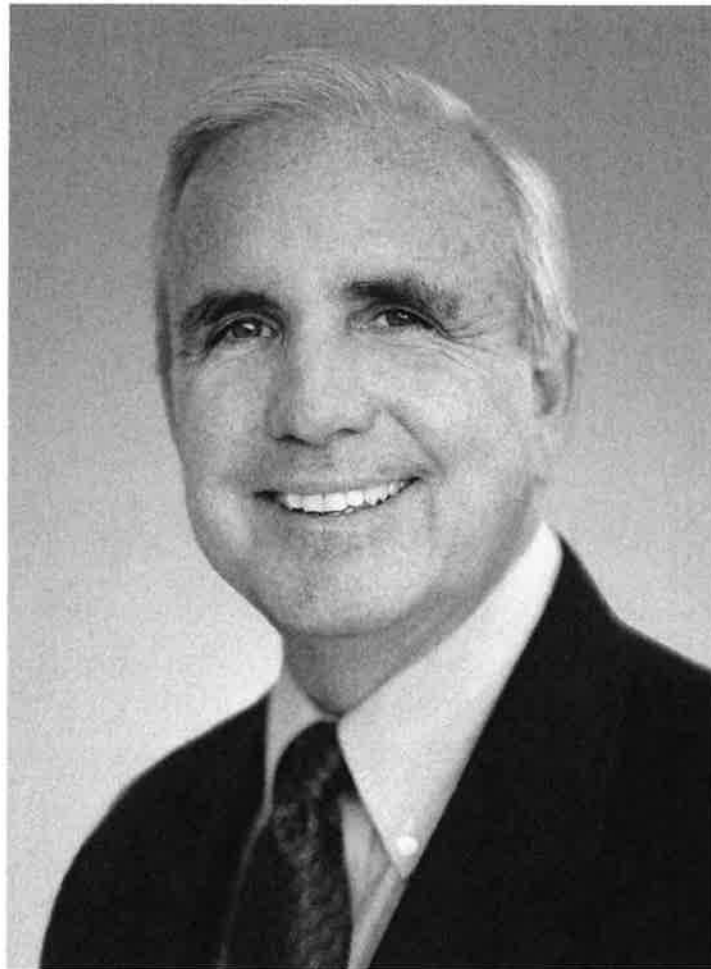
There will always be pressure to move the UDB. But, as evidenced by my voting record as a commissioner, that is not my goal. In fact, Miami-Dade County has been very thoughtful in decisions about the UDB. The protections incorporated into the parkway have been designed to be as effective as the policies that have helped this community hold the UDB.

This is a responsibly designed project with new and forward-thinking policies.

Throwing up our hands is not leadership. To believe that a transit system alone can fix this problem is not realistic or financially feasible. This project is a bold mix of transportation solutions and serves as a reminder for what is possible when agencies work together to solve problems.

This project moves us forward. Doing nothing is not an option. Our hardworking residents deserve a better quality of life.

*CARLOS A. GIMENEZ IS MAYOR OF MIAMI-DADE COUNTY AND BECAME A MEMBER OF THE MDX BOARD IN 2017.*



Gimenez

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