

Push to extend Dolphin Expressway into Kendall blocked again over development fears

MIAMI-DADE COUNTY

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State Road 836, also known as the Dolphin Expressway, is one of the busiest highways in Miami-Dade County. The toll board managing it wants to extend into Kendall, but county commissioners are blocking the effort. **C.M. GUERRERO** EL NUEVO HERALD

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commissioners [again blocked extending the Dolphin Expressway southwest into Kendall](#) because the expansion plan required the busy road to cross the boundary designed to protect low-lying areas around the Everglades from urban development.

A resolution endorsing rules for the extension died during a committee meeting Tuesday after Commissioner Dennis Moss, the sponsor, withdrew the proposal instead of seeing it go down on what was shaping up a 3-2 vote against. Environmental groups spoke against the Moss proposal, urging commissioners to “hold the line” against anything that would invite moving the county’s Urban Development Boundary farther west.

“Building more highways will contribute to more sprawl,” Valerie Robbin, a Sierra Club member, told commissioners. “I think it would make more sense to invest in transit systems inside the UDB and get away from adding more roads and traffic.”

The Miami-Dade Expressway Authority, the state-chartered toll board that runs the Dolphin, wants to extend the east-west highway [about 15 miles into the Kendall suburbs](#).

Advocates see the extension as a desperately needed route for Kendall residents to avoid clogged neighborhood streets, and note the plan would leave the development boundary intact. Joe Martinez, the commissioner representing Kendall, argued against punishing his residents for the sake of an arbitrary land-use boundary that is already so erratic it looks like the person drawing it “had four drinks before picking up a pen.”

“When I go to downtown and back, it’s the equivalent of driving to Disney World,” Martinez said after the proposal died. “It’s three hours.”

Critics warned that building pressure would naturally increase once the multi-lane highway expanded, and that an extended Dolphin would eventually serve as the new western boundary of urban development in Miami-Dade.

Moss cited that worry when he was the swing vote against an earlier effort to endorse extending the Dolphin, which is formally known as State Road 836. [In June, Moss joined the majority on his Government Operations committee in rejecting a proposal for Miami-Dade itself to sponsor a Dolphin extension in the county’s planning process.](#)

Mayor Carlos Gimenez backs the Dolphin extension, and he called for a revote after the June defeat. That effort fizzled, and supporters of the extension received a boost from Moss coming up with a potential compromise: a resolution instructing Gimenez to craft a policy that would discourage “inappropriate development” outside the UDB after an 836 extension.

“The idea is to put some parameters on it,” Moss said Tuesday. “To make it more difficult to use this [836 extension] as a way to extend the UDB.”

While Martinez brought Moss over to his side in this 836 vote, he lost a previous supporter to the opposition. Commissioner Jean Monestime, who voted with Martinez in June in favor of the 836 proposal, said he was against the Moss plan on Tuesday.

“I cannot see this being in line with everything we’ve discussed here,” Monestime said. “Which is making sure we develop mass transit to better Miami-Dade County.”

The MDX board, which includes Gimenez, [rejected demands from commissioners that the authority use toll revenue to build Miami-Dade an east-west rail line along the Dolphin.](#) MDX did agree to fund an express-bus line, and the Moss proposal did not require MDX to pay for rail.

While no vote was taken, Monestime and fellow commissioners Rebeca Sosa and Xavier Suarez were lined up against the Moss proposal on the five-person committee. That left Moss and Martinez outnumbered on the Yes side.

“We have a process in place. Let’s follow that process,” said Laura Reynolds, a consultant for Friends of the Everglades. “The commission has recognized that this was kind of unprecedented, to have an opinion on something before you even have that something in front of you. I was very happy they stuck with their original decision.”

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