

Vote set on expanding the 836 expressway. Not set: the final route | Miami Herald

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Rush hour on State Road 836, which is also known as the Dolphin Expressway. The Miami-Dade Expressway Authority wants to extend the toll road 14 miles south and west into Kendall. **C.M. Guerrero** - El Nuevo Herald File

As Miami-Dade commissioners prepare for next week's vote on whether to extend the 836 expressway 14 miles south and west into Kendall, architects of the controversial roadway haven't settled on where exactly they want to put it.

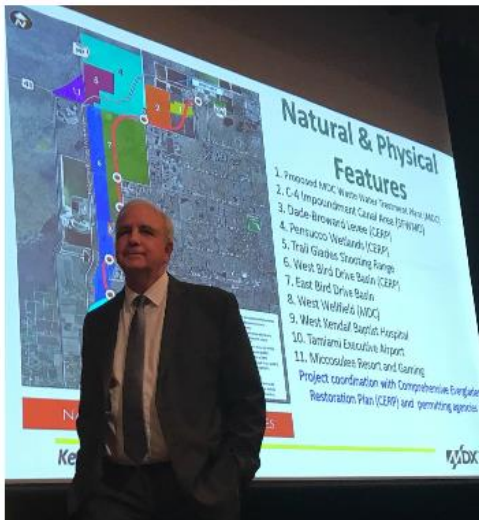
The current plan from the Miami-Dade Expressway Authority has two options for the final leg. One route hugs the county's western boundary for urban development as environmentalists and smart-growth advocates attack the \$650 million MDX project for encouraging sprawl even closer to the Everglades. The other moves the expressway even farther to the west, risking more flak but appealing to residents who want the expressway farther from residential areas.

At public meetings on the project, Kendall residents have embraced the concept of the proposed expressway as desperately needed relief for clogged suburban roads. But they also asked that the "Kendall Parkway" be moved away from their homes. Earlier this year, MDX added the second option that sends the highway about a mile further west.

County commissioners won't be asked to resolve the alternative ending when the project comes up for preliminary approval on June 20. A spokeswoman for the Miami-Dade Expressway Authority said the actual alignment would be created by the time the project comes back for final approval, after state regulators weigh in on the details.

"Obviously, we're not going to build two," said MDX spokeswoman Tere Garcia on the fork that's on the current blueprint for the toll board's "Kendall Parkway" project. She said MDX drew up the alternative southern leg after members of community zoning panels asked for a more western option.

"During the course of these things, changes and refinements occur," she said. "The important thing is they get evaluated on whether they are feasible or not."



Miami-Dade Mayor Carlos Gimenez while presiding over a town hall in West Kendall about a transportation plan he endorses: extending the Dolphin Expressway southwest into West Kendall.
BY DOUGLAS HANKS - MIAMI HERALD

Critics see the late alterations as evidence of a rush to get the project approved, without a more extended discussion on harm caused to wetlands and potential risks to farmland and nearby well field areas, the source of Miami-Dade drinking water.

"Shifting it further west just makes the impact greater," said Laura Reynolds, a consultant for Friends of the Everglades. "The interchanges have to go farther, and the development sprawl is larger."

Marta Vicedo, director of the Miami Transit Alliance, said the move to bring the 836 extension before the full commission without a precise plan on where the expressway will go lets the county sidestep a debate on using transit to alleviate Kendall's traffic.

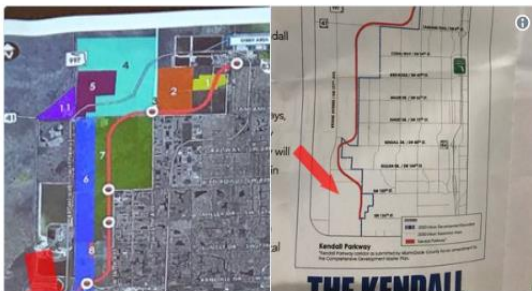
"This is completely rushed," she said. "Not only is there not a thoughtful conclusion as to where this route will go, but also whether other alternatives could possibly prevent the construction of this extension."

The question mark over the ultimate route hints at the political lift Mayor Carlos Gimenez took on when he made approving the 836 extension a top priority for his final two years in office. After lobbying for a seat on the MDX board, Gimenez has become the 836 extension's top public advocate. In private, he's working votes on

the 13-member commission, a board that has already blocked the proposal three times in committee.

"There are folks who don't live in this community that are citing things that really aren't real" in opposing the project, Gimenez said at a June 7 town hall in Kendall. "There are people who don't want to see this happen."

Commissioner Joe Martinez, who represents most of Kendall, backs the more western alternative. He also said he was ready to block the upcoming 836 vote if MDX didn't agree to a route change announced late last week: a 600-yard move even further west for the segment between Bird Road and Kendall Drive.

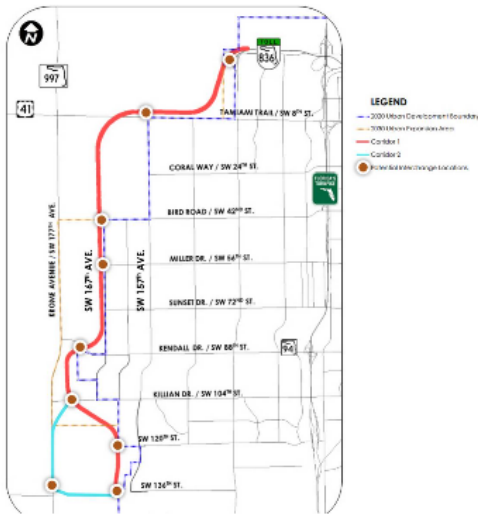


"It's in my district," Martinez said this week. "It wasn't going to be on the agenda" without the change.

The MDX, an independent board that runs six expressways generating about \$240 million a year in tolls, held its kickoff meeting on the 836 extension in 2014. A string of public meetings followed as the agency heard feedback on potential routes, some bringing the expressway within the Urban Development Boundary but most staying outside.

Extending the expressway past the boundary requires a majority vote by the County Commission to change its master development plan. But to actually extend development out to the new highway is tougher, since it takes a two-thirds vote to actually expand the Urban Development Boundary and its far more permissive zoning rules.





The Miami-Dade Expressway Authority wants to build a 14-mile extension of State Road 836 into West Kendall. The southwest extension would be called the Kendall Parkway. This map shows the two potential southern legs, with one option in light blue and the other in red.

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The Miami-Dade Expressway Authority wants to build a 14-mile extension of State Road 836 into West Kendall. The southwest extension would be called the Kendall Parkway. This map shows the two potential southern legs, with one option in light blue and the other in red.

For advocates, the extension represents the quickest way to alleviate traffic in Kendall, which is not served by Metrorail or Metromover, the county-funded rail systems that run through Miami and its closest suburbs. Since it would be built with toll money, the expressway wouldn't drain county transportation funds and MDX said it could start construction as early as 2019.

The prospect of being able to hop on the 836 in Kendall has residents like Frank Portuondo welcoming the notion of highway construction crews rolling into their community.

"It took me an hour and twenty minutes to travel 19 miles today," he said during the June 7 meeting at the Kendale Lakes library, where MDX unveiled the more western route for the 836 extension. "I can't wait for this project to be finished."

Miami Herald staff writer Jenny Staletovich contributed to this report.

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