

Mayor Gimenez: Here are the real facts about the Kendall Parkway proposal

By CARLOS A. GIMENEZ



Miami-Dade County Mayor Carlos Gimenez says the Kendall Parkway would alleviate traffic headed south and west. @MDTraffic

The Kendall Parkway has emerged as the best solution to help more than 600,000 residents in the West Kendall and far southwest areas of Miami-Dade County get to their jobs and back home to their families. It is the perfect fit for drivers and transit riders looking to shorten their commute times to downtown Miami and areas east and north — and the parkway accomplishes these goals without enabling any new development so that traffic would greatly improve for residents and businesses located there.

As a member of the Miami-Dade Expressway Authority (MDX) I've worked diligently with the staff and with residents of West Kendall, along with Commissioner Joe Martinez and others in the South Dade area, to find an

environmentally friendly way to break the cycle of rush-hour stagnation that residents face every day. That stagnation is hurting businesses in the area, and also affecting public safety and health. This is not the first time I've heard from officials at Baptist Hospital in West Kendall that ambulances can get stuck in backed-up traffic while taking emergency patients to the hospital.

Time is money, as the saying goes — but time also can be a life-saver, and the Kendall Parkway would save time, money and — yes — potentially, lives.

Unfortunately, I've heard some myths and misinformation from people who are not dealing with facts but instead instilling unsubstantiated fear about our county's future. I want to ensure that everyone understands exactly what the new parkway can accomplish — and what it will not do.

Myth 1: The Kendall Parkway will generate new housing and business developments because it seeks to go outside the county's Urban Development Boundary (UDB).

Fact: The county's comprehensive development plan limits new development west of the UDB. Moving the UDB can only be accomplished by a two-thirds vote of the County Commission. This project does not move the UDB, and I supported that two-thirds-vote proposal when it went before county voters to ensure that future generations can enjoy the Everglades and also to protect our water supplies and stop draining county services that are costly to provide in the far western reaches of the county.

The county has included specific legal language in all proposals pertaining to the Kendall Parkway, which the state will review, that would prohibit a developer from using the capacity of this new road to try to justify the size of any development near it — whether it's to the east or west of the UDB. Any new development seeking approval must count only on already existing roads there, not the parkway.

Myth 2: The Kendall Parkway will strain the county's budget at a time when transit needs are greatest.

Fact: The parkway would not use one penny from the county's transportation budget. The parkway would be a project paid for solely with toll money collected by MDX from this new road. It is a user-paid expressway, period.

Myth 3: Trains would be a much better solution to what ails West Kendall.

Fact: The county's SMART Plan seeks a combination of roads, trains, buses and new technology to relieve congestion in all parts of Miami-Dade. In fact, the parkway would offer an Express Public Transit Service built and operated by MDX on special lanes to move people to their destination much faster than they can get there today.

Myth 4: The parkway will destroy Miami-Dade's precious environment near the Everglades.

Fact: Not so. I have instructed the county's Regulatory & Economic Resources Department to require on-site mitigation to ensure that environmentally sensitive and agricultural land is protected in the area. This will give us an opportunity to buy 1,000 acres of sensitive lands and put them in the public trust in perpetuity. The plan also has miles of bike and walk trails near the route.

Dealing with the facts, we can help the nearly one in four Miami-Dade residents who would benefit from the Kendall Parkway — not to mention residents living east of the area who will see less intrusion into their roads from the west. Let's do it right.

Carlos A. Gimenez is mayor of Miami-Dade County.