

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item H-6
June 12, 2018
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Raul Valdes-Fauli
Vice Mayor Frank Quesada
Commissioner Pat Keon
Commissioner Vince Lago
Commissioner Michael Mena

City Staff

City Manager, Cathy Swanson-Rivenbark
City Attorney, Miriam Ramos
City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman
Deputy City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Zach Cosner, Conservative Concepts

Agenda Item H-6 [12:15:08 p.m.]

A Resolution of the City Commission of Coral Gables urging the Miami-Dade County Board of Commissioners to deny the proposal to extend SR-836, known as “Kendall Parkway” Project. (Sponsored by Commissioner Lago)

City Attorney Ramos: We go to H-6, Commissioner Lago; I think we can hear that item.

Commissioner Lago: Yes. I think we have a representative from one of the organizations that wanted to speak here.

City Attorney Ramos: H-6 is a Resolution of the City Commission of Coral Gables urging the County Commission to deny the proposal to extend SR-836, known as “Kendall Parkway” Project.

Commissioner Lago: I’m looking for the gentleman who is supposed to speak. Here he is. Come on up. Did you already give the presentation to staff?

Mr. Cosner: I did but it might not have gotten in on time.

Commissioner Lago: Let me get a confirmation from staff to see if they have already uploaded. Ready to go? OK. Here it is. Alright sir, so give your name, what organization are you with and let's commence.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: You have to get closer to the mic.

Commissioner Lago: After you give your presentation I'll give little closing comments in regards to the 836 extension.

Mr. Cosner: So my name is Zach Cosner.

Commissioner Lago: How much time do you need?

Mr. Cosner: Just five minutes.

Commissioner Lago: Five minutes – perfect. Thank you.

Mr. Cosner: My name is Zach Cosner, I live in 2180 S.W. 114th Terrace.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: You have to do better. You have to get closer to the mic.

Mr. Cosner: My name is Zach Cosner, I live at 2180 S.W. 114th Terrace. I work for the firm Conservation Concepts, which is a firm which does activist work for various non-profit groups that operate within Miami-Dade County. I'm here to talk about the major issue that is affecting the "Hold-the-Line" campaign and promises to have major impacts on the City of Coral Gables, as well as all residents of Miami-Dade County. That is the proposal to allow for the extension of the SR-836 Expressway, pass the urban development boundary and the thousands of acres of farms and wetlands on the County's western perimeter. So, since about 2013 and more actively since 2017, MDX has been pushing for this extension, the SR-836, well past the urban development boundary. As you can see into areas of the Bird Drive Basin, into areas that are currently viewed as urban expansion areas, as well as areas that are used for agricultural land and within the western Wellfield. We believe that this would have major impacts on all Miami-Dade County residents and residents of the City of Coral Gables for several key reasons. The first of which is its impacts on transit and traffic. So it's important to note, because MDX has said otherwise, they said it won't interfere with implementation of rapid transit. This is simply not true. The...Project is estimated about \$800 million dollars and it's important to consider that by

Statute under Florida Statute 348.0004, MDX is obligated to spend between 20 and 50 percent of its excess toll revenue on the implementation of mass transit and improvement of transit within the area that it serves, Miami-Dade County. Therefore, because of the fact that it would take up what would otherwise be constituted excess toll revenue, this would be directly taking money out of the pocket of or out of the coffers for transit implementation, implementation of the SMART Plan, which is a hugely important plan for the integration and interconnection of Miami-Dade County's economy and turning Miami-Dade County into a thriving interconnected and economically vibrant community. The other important thing to consider in terms of transit is that it will extend urban sprawl well out past the County's western puffery and divert and dilute potential ridership on the transit expansion programs. Another major impact to traffic is that it will create induced demand. So, induced demand refers to the process for which new roads encourage more frequent and longer vehicle trips. This plan will serve as basically -- operation induced demand is pictured above right there, basically showing that as you improve capacity, it basically serves as a subsidy to vehicle trips and vehicle transportation, as opposed to other forms of transportation, thus putting more cars on the road. It will also serve as a feeder highway unto the SR-836, which is not going to be associated with any concurrent widening of the SR-836, meaning that it will essentially take congestion and put it onto the existing roads in the urban core without basically accommodating for any improvements to roads within the urban core. Another major impact and one of the reasons that many environmentalists are up in arms about this project is that it will have major impacts on County resources. As you can see here...is the Western Wellfield, which is where many residents draw their drinking water; these are the areas where surface water and ground water are intermixed the most; and having a highway and having a great deal of development in this area is very dangerous and very impactful to our water supply, as there is a lot of PCB's, Polychlorinated Biphenyls, various chemicals that spill from roadways into the ground and can provide a public health risk. Also the fact that the pavement itself will disrupt, recharge and keep water from flowing from the surface water in the ground waters. There is also, I've demonstrated here where the agricultural areas are. Agriculture is under major threat in Miami-Dade County and needs to be preserved. There is baseline estimate that the County planners have drafted out that if we fall below approximately 57,000 acres of actively used agricultural land, the entire economy of scale, which farmers rely upon could begin to break down and lead into the full destabilization of our agricultural economy. Obviously something we want to avoid. We are about 61,000 acres right now, according to various estimates. So, it's very important that we maintain as much as our agricultural land as possible. And finally, as I've said before, health and safety have major impacts on water supply, as well as inducing development in these low-lying flood-prone areas to the western portion of the County, which would put residents at risk. Finally, there is a bit of a strange issue in procedure that this proposal has followed thus far. This project would be implemented by MDX; MDX is the entity which would be collecting toll revenue from the project. And in previous iterations of the proposal, MDX was the applicant, however, twice in 2017 when MDX was the applicant it came

before the Government Operations Committee and failed to garner enough votes to pass on both occasions. Then in January 2018, Mayor Gimenez orders the County Zone Regulatory and Economic Resources Department to resuscitate the proposal to take on the role as applicant. We feel this is fairly appropriate as the County and MDX do not necessarily have the same objectives and it puts the County planners and beaurocracy in a strange position of being forced to basically find a way to implement this project. We feel it's inappropriate for the County to be representing the third party....And finally...

Commissioner Lago: Thank you Zach, I appreciate it. Just to be brief, because I had a long prepared statement that I wanted to make sure it touched all the points, but you've hit a lot of the points. You've done a really good job. This is simple. I want to send a resolution with the support of this Commission sending a very clear statement. We don't want any more urban sprawl. What we want is urban infill. Let's concentrate and implement the SMART Plan. Let's not take the monies, supposedly from what I've heard this could be a billion dollar project. Let's not take 10 or 20 percent of that which was going to be directed to the implementation of actual transportation initiatives in Miami-Dade County away from the SMART Plan, for example. This is not the answer. The extension of the 836 is a short term fix that puts Miami-Dade's economy and families incredibly at risk. The extension of the SR-836 will generate economically killing sprawl during a time of much climate change. The answer here is very simple. There is a buffer between the Everglades and what we know as urban sprawl and that is the farm land. Let's leave something for...

Vice Mayor Quesada: Have you discussed this on the board that you sit on?

Commissioner Lago: It did not go to the TPO.

Vice Mayor Quesada: It didn't? It sounds like a perfect...

Commissioner Lago: And, that's one of the problems that we are having here.

Vice Mayor Quesada: Presentation – I'm fully supportive.

Commissioner Lago: And again, I want to make sure that people understand, this is not Coral Gables, even though this doesn't touch Coral Gables, it will affect Miami-Dade County as-a-whole. So why don't we for once, for once as a County, as a community effectively follow what Chairman Bovo, Vice Chairman Suarez from the City of Miami and the entire TPO has stated that the answer here is the implementation of the SMART Plan...

Vice Mayor Quesada: You think all...

Commissioner Lago: And I'm going to leave you with this last comment, I'm going to leave you with this last comment and that is, every single time one of these multi-billion dollar, hundred million dollar highway project gets built, they cut the ribbon, what happens the next day?- gridlock. The more highways you build, the more people buy cars. You don't need a rocket scientist to tell you that.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: I have a comment. And, this passed the County Commission unanimously with the exception of Commissioner Suarez, unanimously.

Commissioner Lago: It's going before the Commission June 20th.

Mr. Cosner: Yes. It's not yet come....

Commissioner Lago: Yes, it's going before the 20th.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: I understand it passed the County Commission.

City Attorney Ramos: What I see here is that the Government Operation Committee Meeting is tomorrow.

Commissioner Lago: Yes.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: OK. To me this is not a Coral Gables issue. Maybe it would relieve Coral Gables traffic. I am here to represent the citizens of Coral Gables, the residents of Coral Gables and I understand the environmental issues, but maybe this would relieve traffic coming through our City and frankly, we have no business, except for the environmental part voting on this and that's all I have to say.

Commissioner Lago: Mayor like always, you bring a good, a different paradigm to the conversation, but I think that we need to stop looking at things as just cities. I think we need to start looking at a more global perspective and the SMART Plan has been rolled out and endorsed by the TPO and the County and now we need to find a funding strategy to actually deliver on this. We need to find opportunities that are easily and comprehensively delineated in the SMART Plan and not just build more highways. Building more highways is not the answer. The moment that this highway gets built, what's going to happen?- they are going to rezone all the properties around the area and they are going to push development right to Krome. Is that what we want?- is that what we want? Do we want zero buffer then basically the homes are going to be overlooking the Everglades? I grew up in the farmlands, I grew up in the Everglades, my

parents own property there. I think that's something special that we need to maintain, which is part of our history, part of who we are, and I understand and I respect your comments. But this is an opportunity for us, this has been passed by the City of Miami, South Miami, excuse me, it's been passed by the City of North Miami and from my understanding the DDA of the City of Miami.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Alright. Will you make a motion?

Vice Mayor Quesada: So moved.

Commissioner Keon: I'll vote no because I don't want to vote on it, because I don't know enough about it. I mean I've heard what you said outside of just what you said, I don't know enough about it to make that decision. I don't know. I mean I don't know how it's structured that it allows water to flow underneath; it allows animals to flow underneath. I don't know. I really – I've seen articles in the paper about it, but I don't know enough about it to be able to be an informed voter.

Commissioner Lago: This has gone before the County.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: It's been moved and seconded.

Commissioner Keon: But I don't really know it.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Will you call the roll please.

Commissioner Lago: This has gone before the County how many times and failed.

Mr. Cosner: It's gone before the Government Operation Commission twice in 2017 and failed on both occasions and it was scheduled to go before the County in April after it was deferred, we believe, because it did not have enough votes to pass.

Commissioner Lago: So, my understanding it will be heard on June 20th.

City Attorney Ramos: June 20th is what I'm finding.

Commissioner Lago: June 20th at the County Commission and if you have an interest like South Miami, like North Miami, like the DDA from City of Miami of having some input in regards to a billion dollar project, instead of kicking the can down the curb, let's make the SMART Plan the

real priority here, not just building more highways, because you've seen every time we build these highways, again, it's just more congestion.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: OK. It's been moved and seconded, will you call the roll please.

Commissioner Mena: I didn't hear the item.

Commissioner Keon: He's excused.

Vice Mayor Quesada: Yes

Commissioner Keon: No

Commissioner Lago: Yes

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yes

(Vote: 3-1)

City Attorney Ramos: For the record, Commissioner Mena walked into the room after the item had already been discussed and that's why he's not voting.

[End: 12:28:00 p.m.]