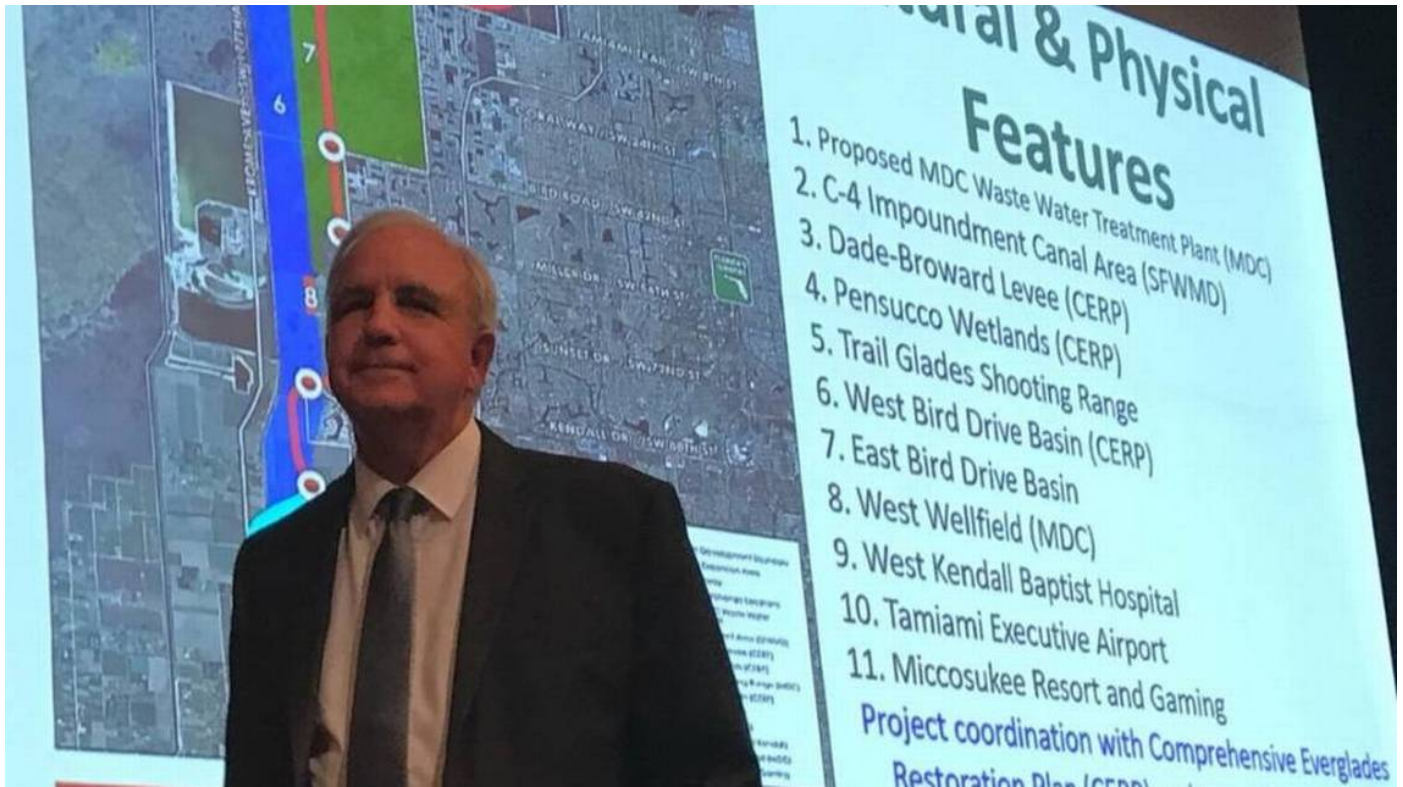


# Do it! Build the Kendall Parkway/836 Extension

By JUAN C. ZAPATA [Former Miami-Dade Commissioner](#)

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Miami-Dade Mayor Carlos Gimenez presides over a town hall in West Kendall about a transportation plan he endorses: extending the Dolphin Expressway southwest into West Kendall. Douglas Hanks MIAMI HERALD

Hardly a day goes by in our community without a comment being made over our unbearable traffic situation. This fact is telling of the dire situation we find ourselves today.

How did we get here?

I would say it was the result of poor planning, nearsighted (or self-serving) county bureaucrats, unrealistic political promises and multiple missed opportunities. We can

start to change that conversation with the Kendall Parkway/836 Extension proposal, which offers a realistic and viable solution to provide significant relief.

The project is surrounded by misinformation and driven both by altruistic and self-serving interests. It is critical in making a sound decision to be clear on the facts. The proposed roadway is not being built on the Everglades. Yes, there are wetlands, but that impact can be mitigated. The funding of this project will not take away money from Miami-Dade transit projects. This project is funded by MDX, exclusively from its toll collections. State law made it that way — separate and independent. So this expressway would be paid for by the very people who would benefit the most without impacting any other transit options being discussed.

When I was elected to the County Commission in 2012, representing areas west of the turnpike (an area I affectionately call the West End), I knew there was no more pressing issue than finding solutions to the punishing traffic situation.

The impact on the quality of life for hundreds of thousands of residents is real and brutal. It was obvious after looking at all options that an extension of the 836 Expressway, in spite of it being outside the UDB, was the only financially viable option in bringing relief to the long-suffering commute of my neighbors. In early 2013, we convened a charrette that introduced the idea and it received overwhelming support among residents.

We commissioned a study conducted by Florida International University to look at holistic solutions and provide a strategic plan on how to address the area's issues, especially transportation. Not only did they provide valuable information, they validated the thesis that an extension would bring desperately needed relief and open the door to attracting job centers. I advocated for this extension during my tenure and before leaving sponsored a resolution directing the administration to make changes to the [Comprehensive Development Master Plan](#) to allow for this extension.

The plan being presented has its strong points and would definitely alleviate chronic congestion along major east/west arteries. The bike paths and mass transit components are applauded and desperately needed as are the mitigation efforts and

sensitivity to resident's concerns. But there is no doubt that in its current form it would open the area for future development if the proper safeguards are not in place. There are no perfect solutions and this project is no different. A good idea taken to its extreme can become a bad one.

The underlining problem and major flaw are in the number of exits in the proposed plan. There are just too many. This extension should be a straight shot with the only goals being to alleviate eight street and Kendall Drive and bring economic activity to the Miami Executive airport area. The other unnecessary exits will only invite further development by improving levels of service along major east to west roads. This may sound good at first, but that is code for developers and county staff to scream, "Build, baby, build!"

It is hard to trust the county to do what's right and impose some self-discipline. I have lived west of Southwest 127 Avenue since arriving to this beautiful community in 1977. Besides serving as a county commissioner for the area, I had the privilege of chairing a community council, being a member of the Planning Advisory Board, served as a state legislator and been active in numerous groups.

This has exposed me to all of the promises, countless beautiful presentations, and numerous reassuring guarantees of how wonderful things were going to be. I have seen how those assurances have played out. Let's just say my disappointment is as long as the traffic backup during rush hour.

Creating tamper-proof guarantees that this project will not lead to further development has to be part of the decision. I wouldn't believe any future promises to do the right thing. This area is a community built on broken promises. The special interests are just too powerful and the lack of municipalities out west makes us too weak to fight the political battles.

If you need proof, look at what has happened to the hundreds of acres of industrial land that have been rezoned to residential. And let's be clear, this is in no way MDX's fault. The blame and responsibility lie squarely in the county, its staff, and the commission. Safeguards should include building the extension to hug the existing

UDB, creating a process and rules that commissioners cannot override and limiting the number of exits.

The Parkway makes sense for those of us living in the western part of the county but creating a tamper-proof process that prevents the mistakes of the past must be in place. Let's not miss another opportunity in taking a bold step forward in improving mobility. Let's allow the West End to help itself and everybody east of us.

That means all of you.

*Juan C. Zapata served as a Miami-Dade Commioner from 2012 to 2016.*