

MORE

CAPTAIN

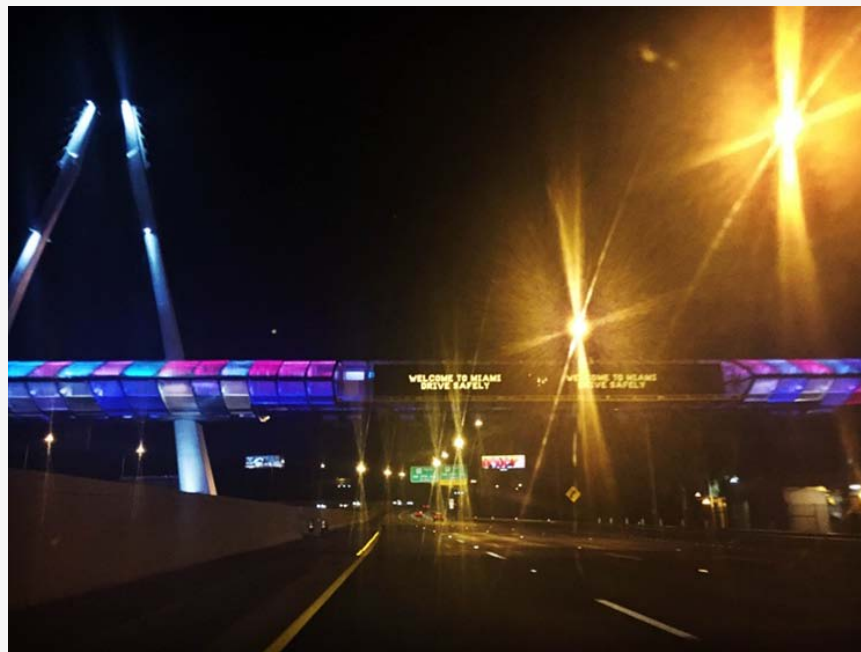
DRINK RESPONSIBLY. CAPTAIN'S ORDERS.

AS MDX APPROVES \$3 MILLION IN DRIVER REBATES, ANTI-TOLL ACTIVISTS CREDIT PUBLIC OUTRAGE

AA

BY JESS SWANSON WEDNESDAY, JULY 1, 2015 | 1 DAY AGO

f 1.3k t 19 + 1 3



MDX approves new plan to refund any motorist who spends more than \$100 a year.

Photo by Jess Swanson

For the past five years, justifiable-toll advocate Carlos Garcia felt like a lone crazy man screaming in the woods. "No one cared; no one was listening," he says.

But since the Miami-Dade Expressway Authority (MDX) approved a new toll rebate program Tuesday, Garcia believes the right people are finally listening — and doing something. Almost \$3 million is expected to be returned to commuters in the move.

"It sounds like a very original, different idea," Garcia says after the

advertisement

MDX board meeting. He has worked with **RollBackTolls**, a grassroots toll watchdog group for South Florida. "I'm optimistic. It's a rebate program rather than a frequent-user program."

According to Garcia, Miamians began to care about tolls around November 2014, when MDX hiked fees by \$52 million on its five expressways (Dolphin, Airport, Don Shula, Snapper Creek, and Gratigny). For many commuters, the increase doubled their toll bills each month, forcing many cash-strapped drivers off the highways and onto already-crowded side streets.



RELATED STORIES

Petition to End Tolls in Miami, Reform MDX Draws Thousands of Signatures

After an onslaught of complaints and criticisms, a **petition** to end all tolls in Miami attracted more than 16,000 signatures in eight months.

"A lot of people are calling foul," Garcia says. "Because of all the outrage in the community, MDX is scrambling to do something. This has been a PR nightmare."

After MDX's credit rating improved (and it became cheaper to borrow money), there is cash left over from last year's toll hike. This past Monday, MDX announced plans to approve a new toll "rebate program" to return some of that money (an expected \$3 million).

At first, Garcia was wary because MDX has introduced discount programs in the past. When it was unveiled, Garcia points out, the original MDX advantage program was mired in red tape, with its strict registration and eligibility windows. (It applied to only the most frequent drivers who were tolled 66 days per 90-day quarter, spending a minimum of \$50. Registration closed in April.)

On Tuesday evening, though, the MDX board approved the new rebate program in a 13-0 vote that significantly eased the advantage program's qualification requirements. Now, anyone who spends more than \$100 a year in tolls will receive a rebate. On July 13, MDX will open registration for the program. Anyone with a SunPass can **sign up** for free. The amount members can qualify for in refunds varies from year to year.

However, the size of the refunds depends upon how much a person spends and the size of the surplus, which MDX will calculate in October. Rebates are expected to be doled out in December.

Six months ago, MDX chair Maritza Gutierrez told commuters at the monthly board meeting that there were "**bellyachers out there.**" And justifiable-toll advocates such as Garcia didn't stop their bellyaching.

On Tuesday's board meeting, it was clear the tide had turned when Gutierrez softened her tone and **announced** that "any money that is not used as intended goes back to the customer."

advertisement



Get the This Week's Top Stories Newsletter

Every week we collect the latest news, music and arts stories — along with film and food reviews and the best things to do this week — so that you'll never miss Miami New Times' biggest stories.

GO ▶

SHARE THIS



READ MORE

NEWS ▶

TRAFFIC ▶

Sponsor Content

3 COMMENTS

YOU MIGHT ALSO LIKE



Paid Distribution

The Ultimate Truck Test: Up the Side of a Volcano [Video]



House Music Miami Wants to Unify Miami's Dance Music Scene



Coachella 2015's 50 Most Beautiful People



Miami's Ten Best Fourth of July Parties

Toyota on YouTube

MORE NEWS

Recommended by Outbrain



ENVIRONMENTAL

\$25 Million To Create More Nature Trails Goes Into Effect Today

UPCOMING EVENTS

TICKETS

Jupiter Hammerheads vs. Bradenton Marauders
Sun., Jul. 5, 1:00pm

TICKETS

Jupiter Hammerheads vs. Bradenton Marauders
Mon., Jul. 6, 6:35pm

TICKETS

Jupiter Hammerheads vs. FT Myers Miracle
Tue., Jul. 7, 6:35pm



POLITICS

As 24-Hour Abortion Waiting Period Starts, Pro-Choice Groups Promise To Keep Fighting



WTF FLORIDA

Keys Deputies Arrest Man Dressed as Pirate for Firing Muskets at Cars

MORE NEWS

CAPTAIN

DRINK RESPONSIBLY. CAPTAIN'S ORDERS.
CAPTAIN MORGAN WHITE RUM. 40% Alc/Vol.
©2015 CAPTAIN MORGAN RUM CO., NORWALK, CT.

©2015 Miami New Times, LLC. All rights reserved.