

# No Selfies Here: FDOT Picks I-395 Reconstruction Plan But Local Leaders Say They Wanted More Input

By [KATE STEIN](#) · 23 HOURS AGO



*A rendering of a possible design for the "signature" I-395 bridge to be constructed over Biscayne Boulevard.*

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

It's intended to connect the MacArthur Causeway with I-95 and the Dolphin Expressway, but a project to improve I-395 has divided Miami-Dade leaders and the Florida Department of Transportation. And with FDOT's selection of a project contractor on Friday, local leaders say the state transportation agency has work to do to bridge an ideological gap.

Throughout the years-long process of developing a reconstruction [plan](#), local officials have insisted an I-395 bridge over Biscayne Boulevard be iconic -- Miami's equivalent of San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge.

In 2013, Miami Mayor Tomás Regalado and then-Commissioner Marc Sarnoff sued FDOT when it tried to back away from the "signature bridge" concept. In a settlement, FDOT agreed to create a committee of local leaders to review competing bridge designs, focusing on aesthetics.

Flash forward to Friday. FDOT also had its own committee review designs, focusing on other factors. It ultimately awarded the contract to a design that didn't score as highly with the aesthetics committee, to the frustration of local leaders.

"I envisioned a bridge where people would flock to take selfies. One that every broadcast in Miami would feature," Alice Robertson, executive director of the Miami Downtown Development Authority, wrote in a letter a spokeswoman read during a public comment period before a formal vote on the design. "I ask that FDOT exercises its discretion and build the iconic bridge that won the votes of the aesthetic review committee. The bridge that will be the icon for Miami for generations to come."

A spokesman for Miami-Dade County Mayor Carlos Gimenez said the mayor wanted aesthetics to be "the deciding factor" in the bridge design.

Michael Hernandez also said Gimenez would like FDOT to include the county and City of Miami commissions in the construction and design process.

Other local leaders said they're concerned FDOT hasn't asked Overtown residents for more input on a project that passes through their community -- and which has [already divided the neighborhood](#).

"In 1964, 65, 70, no one came to those residents, either. And they built the bridge and destroyed the community," said Ola Aluko, president and CEO of the St. John's Community Development Corporation. "We want to make certain that the same thing that happened back then does not occur again."

Aluko says that once it's reconstructed, I-395 will be within 15 to 20 feet of an affordable housing complex.

He adds that the contractors that won, Archer Western and The de Moya Group, reached out to some Overtown stakeholders over the years.

But Aluko and other speakers during a public comment period on Friday said they'd like to see much more outreach from both the contractors and from FDOT.

The \$800 million dollar I-395 reconstruction project is supposed to start by the end of the year and take five years to complete. Other components of the project include a rebuild of the 836/I-95 interchange and reconstruction of 836 between I-95 and Northwest 17th Avenue.