



MIAMI-DADE COUNTY

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Fight over extending Dolphin Expressway into Kendall gets one-month delay

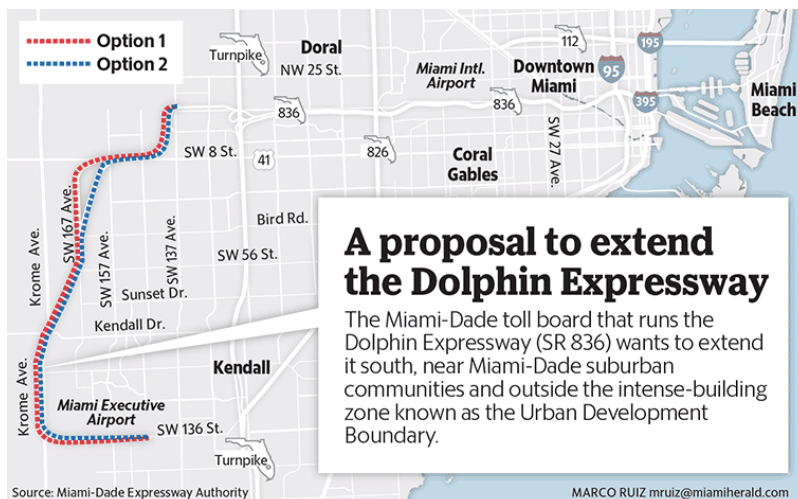
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It will take at least another month before Miami-Dade considers extending the Dolphin Expressway into Kendall, after county commissioners postponed a key committee vote on the controversial plan.

Jose “Pepe” Diaz, the commissioner sponsoring legislation to allow the expansion, did not attend a Tuesday committee meeting slated to hear the proposal. He sent a letter requesting the item be deferred to the June meeting of the Government Operations committee, and the panel agreed. “The commissioner wanted to be present for his item, but he was unavailable,” Diaz spokeswoman Olga Vega said.

One prominent supporter of the plan — Commissioner Joe Martinez, whose district includes much of the proposed southwest extension —was recovering from a heart attack he suffered last week and also missed the meeting.

“I have been pushing it for a long time,” Martinez said during a telephone interview after the meeting. “It’s a really good alignment.”



The long-debated plan to extend the toll road 15 miles into Kendall and rural parts of Southwest Miami-Dade still hasn’t been finalized by the Miami-Dade Expressway Authority, the toll board that operates the expressway.

But Miami-Dade commissioners would endorse the concept under Diaz’s proposal to rework the county’s growth plan to allow extending the Dolphin (officially called State Road 836) past the area that’s supposed to mark the divide between rural Miami and the suburbs. Called the Urban Development Boundary, the western marker is a top battle line between environmentalists and builders.

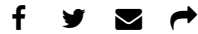
Claudia Tenzer, a consultant representing the Friends of the Everglades, told commissioners that extending the Dolphin past the development boundary will inevitably extend commercial activity further west toward environmentally sensitive lands.

“This project will shrink the buffer between agriculture land and Everglades National Park,” she said during the public comment period of the committee meeting.

But representatives of residents along the proposed route said the area deserves an alternative to the current network of clogged streets and highways serving the growing area.

“We are very overdue for substantial relief from traffic,” said Ory Dawes, a board member of the Country Walk Homeowners Association.

The next meeting of the Government Operations committee is June 13 at 1:30 p.m.



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