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## Gratigny might link I-95 and Turnpike

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Gratigny Parkway, one of South Florida's shortest expressways, could one day become one of the longest -- if a study under way determines such an expansion is feasible.

At a meeting Wednesday night, Miami-Dade Expressway Authority officials provided additional details about extending the 5.4-mile long toll road west to the Homestead Extension of Florida's Turnpike and also east to Interstate 95.

Discussion of the extension -- two totally separate projects that are being treated by MDX as if planning two separate highways -- comes at a time when major toll expressways in South Florida are being converted into cashless electronic toll roads.

The Gratigny was the first to be converted in June, followed by Don Shula and Snapper Creek in July.

"I think the idea [of extending the Gratigny] is awesome," said Lillian Santiago, a resident of a neighborhood near the confluence of I-95 and Northwest 119th St., the area where a possibly bigger Gratigny extension would link up with I-95. "It would save me time taking my children to school."

If MDX carries out its plan to lengthen the Gratigny in north Miami-Dade, it would become the second full-fledged east-west expressway in the county, in much the same fashion as the Dolphin (State Road 836).

The Gratigny currently runs from Interstate 75 on the west to Northwest 32nd Avenue on the east, two miles short of I-95.

For years, MDX has considered extending the Gratigny -- one of the most heavily used expressways bringing commuters who live in the heavily-populated suburbs of southwestern Broward County to jobs in northern and central Miami-Dade.

But it was only last year that MDX took serious steps to carry out the project.

On Sept. 15, MDX held a kick-off presentation meeting to outline details of the east extension to I-95.

A preliminary plan presented at that meeting shows an elevated expressway above Northwest 119th Street as one possible alternative.

The document also says that it could take about 10 years to finish the extension, from planning to construction to operation.

What took place Wednesday night in Hialeah Gardens was a public alternatives workshop to provide details on the west extension to the turnpike and get feedback from the surrounding community. The

meeting was at the Westland Gardens Park Community Center, 13501 NW 107th Ave.

The expansion being considered shows the road shooting directly west along Northwest 138th Street and then linking up with Okeechobee Road and the turnpike.

The two possible extensions are now in the initial phase called project development and environment study.

Whether the extensions are actually built, how much they might cost and how long construction would take will be determined by the PD&E study.

“The importance of the PD&E is to evaluate the possibility of such a project and to ensure the public's input,” said Cindy Polo-Serantes, an MDX spokeswoman.

The project would be financed by toll revenue.

“The toll revenue is from the exact same user who would benefit from the extension,” said Polo-Serantes.

“MDX is solely financed by toll revenue. No federal or state funding is received by MDX.”

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