

Miami-Dade Senate candidates want to tackle ‘excessive’ traffic tolls



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BY KRISTEN M. CLARK
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A Miami Republican state representative seeking to be promoted to the Florida Senate this fall says he’s “taking a stand against tolls” — tapping into a popular consumer issue that puts him at odds with some in his own party.

Frank Artiles, who’s running against incumbent Democratic Sen. Dwight Bullard in Miami-Dade’s District 40, says he wants to fight back against “excessive and abusive tolls” that South Florida commuters face on a daily basis.

But Bullard, of Cutler Bay, has his own plans to reduce Miami-Dade commuters’ toll bills, and he argues his plan is more feasible than the one by moderate-sounding Republicans like Artiles, whose solution Bullard said is “to just get rid of the tolls.”

While other Florida Republicans — including Gov. Rick Scott — have proposed expanding the state’s network of toll roads, Artiles offers a three-step plan to halt that progress and, instead, provide “toll relief.” He started making his pitch on this topic to voters a couple weeks ago in a web and TV ad that’s been airing in Miami-Dade County.

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MIAMI-DADE COUNTY CANNOT CONTINUE TO CARRY THE BRUNT OF FUNDING ROADS FOR THE REST OF THE STATE.

State Rep. Frank Artiles, R-Miami

Artiles wants a moratorium on any new toll roads or toll increases, and he wants to stop work for new toll lanes on Florida’s Turnpike and the Palmetto Expressway. He told the Herald/Times, if elected, he’d also specifically propose “a 25 percent to 30 percent reduction in fee rates, followed by a comprehensive review of toll placement criteria across Miami-Dade County, which should result in a more equitable distribution of the burden required to maintain our roadways and expressways.”

“Miami-Dade County cannot continue to carry the brunt of funding roads for the rest of the state. There has to be a balance and overall fairness and equity in the process of funding our roads and expressways throughout Florida,” Artiles said in a statement.

Meanwhile, Bullard favors a more narrowly tailored solution that he said would more directly help Miami-Dade commuters by making a “clear distinction” between Miami-Dade Expressway Authority (MDX) roads and state-run roads.



BEING NICKEL-AND-DIMED GOING FROM DORAL TO DOWNTOWN (MIAMI) IS HURTING OUR RESIDENTS.

Incumbent state Sen. Dwight Bullard, D-Cutler Bay

He said his plan “is more geared toward creating a local option for tolling — meaning if you’re a frequent user who lives in the county, we’d consider a reduction of toll rates for you since you’re constantly being tagged with tolls.”

“I think people are OK with tolls from here to Orlando on the Turnpike, but being nickel-and-dimed going from Doral to downtown is hurting our residents. ... They’re feeling the greater impact,” Bullard said.

Artiles said the Florida Legislature needs to “develop long-term transportation funding solutions that go beyond the ‘easy fix’ of just placing tolls and passing the buck on to commuters,” and he said lawmakers need to crack down on waste by and improve oversight of local transportation authorities, like MDX, that often decide toll increases.

The newly redrawn Senate District 40 in central Miami-Dade County leans Democratic, which helps Bullard, but it also is heavily Hispanic, which could play in Artiles’ favor.

Artiles has spent about \$73,000 on TV ads so far, campaign finance records show. Bullard hasn’t released any ads yet, but he said he expects to go on air within the week.

Independent Mario Jimenez is also on the ballot for the seat.

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