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Drivers upset over toll increases in Miami-Dade County

Some trip prices up as much as 300 percent

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MIAMI-DADE COUNTY, Fla. - It's been months since open road tolling went into effect along the Dolphin Expressway (State Road 836), but the outrage over the adjustment in toll prices does not seem to be going away.

"It's bad. It's not good. It's not fair," said Karl Stark, a commuter, who had just exited the 836 on 37th Avenue.

"I can't afford to drive the 836. It's a luxury to drive the 836 anymore," said Carlos Garcia, a community activist who runs RollBackTolls.com.

The organization fights against what they say is a

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From left, Jose Hevia, Robert Holland, Felix Lasarte and Louis Martinez, not in the photograph, had the worst record on attendance, while serving on the MDX board.

- Time MDX board members were present at meetings
- Miami-Dade Expressway Authority: Maurice Ferre
- Miami-Dade Expressway Authority: Shelly Smith Fano
- Miami-Dade Expressway Authority: Norman Wartman
- Miami-Dade Expressway Authority: Gonzalo Sanabria
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- Miami-Dade Expressway Authority: Louis Martinez

financial burden on drivers who use all five expressways operated and maintained by the Miami-Dade Expressway Authority.

"Students have been priced off the highways -- people with fixed incomes," Garcia said. "Now you have to pay actually two toll points at 17th Avenue in the westbound, which didn't exist before, at 57th Avenue westbound, which didn't exist before, and right there you're talking a \$1.40 in tolls."

Garcia points out that a round trip from Interstate 95 to Florida's Turnpike was \$2.50 prior to changes in tolls pricing.

After the changes, the same trip is \$4.20, almost double in price.

Officials at MDX point out about 8 percent of drivers do the round trip.

Garcia said he is outraged the changes in tolls punish those living in specific communities. A driver who enters the ramp on 87th Avenue near Fontainebleau and Doral will pay significantly more.

Before the changes, a round trip from 87th Avenue to downtown Miami was a \$1. Now it's more than \$3 -- a 300 percent increase, Garcia said.

"A lot of people are crying foul, 'Why am I paying 300 percent more for the same exact trip?' The traffic isn't any better; the construction is going to last for (the) next five, six, seven years," said Garcia, adding that MDX should have kept the same rates and divided those among all the new tolling points.

"We feel that the board's decision was out of touch with the reality of the everyday commuter of Miami-Dade County," Garcia said.

It was a close vote back in [March 2013](#), when the MDX board passed the changed in tolling prices with a 7-6 vote. One of the yes votes came from longtime board member [Robert Holland](#), who was on the phone during the crucial vote.

That was not unusual for [Holland](#), who is [one of the worst](#) when it comes to calling into meetings, [according to attendance records](#) provided by MDX. Records also show in his 10-year tenure, [Holland](#) was not physically at meetings almost half the time.



RELATED: [Attendance record of MDX board members](#)

"There are some meetings that I can't attend physically, but we're allowed to appear by phone," [Holland](#), an attorney by profession, said. "And most of the meetings if I'm not there physically I do appear by phone."

[Holland](#) also pointed out the MDX board has a strong committee system and is closely in touch with staff on projects.

On attendance, [Holland](#) is not alone. [According to records](#), the majority of board members with bad attendance records voted to increase toll prices.

"It's easy to say, 'No I don't want tolls. No, no, no.' Everybody can say no. I can say no. But how do we solve the problems?" [Holland](#) asked. "In a major metro area with huge transportation issues, you need solutions."

He said in his mind, increasing toll prices was the answer.

"All I want to do is come up with a solution," [Holland](#) said.

Board Chairwoman [Maritza Gutierrez](#) rejected the idea that the board is out of touch with reality.

"I think we're all living in tough times," [Gutierrez](#) said. "We have to look at what MDX did before and what it did now and what's it's doing in the future."

[Gutierrez](#) voted against the toll increase, but has since seen the benefits of the increase.

"The concern is, we either do it all now -- we construct all now -- or we wait and it takes five or 10 more years to construct it all," said [Gutierrez](#), who was quick to remind the public that MDX had not increased tolls in nine years.

The changes are part of what MDX calls equitable tolling. Before the changed, MDX officials said only 55 percent of users paid a toll.

They argue the new system allows for fair tolling and ensures drivers pay for the segment of the road they use. The longer you're on it, the more you pay.

"This agency had to increase the toll, had to close the system, because we don't get any other source of funding from anywhere else," [Gutierrez](#) said.

Joe Diaz, a commuter, said he doesn't mind paying extra.

"It's not too bad. People like to complain about everything," Diaz said.

Ninety percent of tolls collected are used to build and maintain the five county highways.

Close to \$60 million collected on the new system will repay new projects worth close to \$900 million.

Miami-Dade County Mayor Carlos Gimenez said he wants to figure out ways to reduce the cost of MDX and return the money saved to the toll payer.

Gimenez does not control the board, but under a proposed state Senate bill, he may soon be in charge of it.

"In the eyes of many, this is a tax. It's a road tax," said Garcia, adding that commuters are avoiding

tolls and instead using side streets and clogging roads. "We're not asking for them to get rid of the tolls. We're saying, 'Adjust the tolls, be fair with us. The impact to many people is unrealistic.'"

The MDX board recently voted for a toll freeze.

"That means there is no future increase in any of the tolls on MDX roads," Gutierrez said.

MDX board members are appointed by Miami-Dade County commissioners and Florida's governor. Members are not paid for the time they serve.

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slum_dog · 17 days ago

I would like to know where all the money saved by eliminating the toll collectors went. Why not use all that money to lower the tolls. Yes it is a Road Tax. I guess MDX wants the entire system to be lexus lanes. Tolls should have waited until the projects were finished. MDX board members need to have at least a 90 percent attendance rate before they can vote on increasing any tolls. No phone in voting.

13 · Reply · Share ›



TonyTheToe · 17 days ago

Pick a day...any weekday and everyone take the surface road to work as protest. That will show how pizzed we are.

12 · Reply · Share ›



NGFH > TonyTheToe · 16 days ago

Agreed it would be messy and people would have to leave earlier for work but it would certainly get the point across.

7   • Reply • Share ›

 TonyTheToe > NGFH • 16 days ago

Yes, that goes without saying. It would be a minor sacrifice for a major point made to the powers that be. This isn't a "toll", it's another "tax" placed on hard-working Americans.

7   • Reply • Share ›

 TonyTheToe • 16 days ago
Greed

5   • Reply • Share ›

 County > TonyTheToe • 16 days ago

Exactly. That money is suppose to fix the roads and yet some areas are getting worse. When I used to drive on I-95 south bound to 125th it was the worse section of road that you can drive on. Yet the express lanes had been in place for a while and expanding. I guess the money they are making is paying to add more into Broward rather than the roads it is intended to fix.

3   • Reply • Share ›

 grandma954 > County • 16 days ago

Its bad up this way too, and can someone please tell me why anyone thought the express lane was a good idea . If you get in that lane and someone breaks down or has an ooops then your sitting in that line of traffic FOREVER....no way off ,no way to turn around. Bad idea all the way around...

4   • Reply • Share ›

 County > grandma954 • 16 days ago

The bean counters or some person with an MBA who has no common sense as that is not part of the program. As for break downs or accidents. They have a specific time frame where those vehicles have to be removed in just like the turnpike. It doesn't matter if it is a breakdown or accident and that is why FHP has troopers that only work on the Turnpike. I would not be surprised if FHP had to deal with those accidents first before the rest of I-95.

1   • Reply • Share ›

 grandma954 > County • 16 days ago

Thanks , I still think the whole thing is stupid....

2   • Reply • Share ›

 [Sonny](#) · 16 days ago

Tolls are how Holland "solves" the traffic problems? Since when have they been solved after the increases, because I don't see it.

4   · [Reply](#) · [Share](#) ›

 [John Barnard](#) · 16 days ago

I toll ya it wasn't going to work..

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 [TheExecutioner](#) · 16 days ago

Try commuting from Kendall to north miami like i do and paying Turpike AND Dolphin tolls the whole way. It used to be you could take a shorcut using the 112 but they jacked that up too now. Skrew you people, You charge outrageous fees for the "luxury" of using your over-crowded expressways. There's nothing express about them. I pay as much on tolls as I do fuel, and for what? We are being held hostage by a lack of roads.

3   · [Reply](#) · [Share](#) ›

 [sofladude](#) > [TheExecutioner](#) · 16 days ago

You could always use mass transit to get there if you have 3 hours to spare.

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 [Rijomi2](#) > [sofladude](#) · 16 days ago

On a good day.

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 [LA0826](#) > [TheExecutioner](#) · 16 days ago

I have a small child therefore my time is limited due to school hours. I commute from Hollywood to downtown Miami and half the time am forced to take the express lanes because I will either not make it to work on time or not make it back to her school on time. It is abuse.

2   · [Reply](#) · [Share](#) ›

 [Tim](#) · 16 days ago

I AM REALLY LAUGHING OUT LOUD!! I warned everyone about these drive through express sun pass tolls years ago. In the past when the state needed extra money they had to go through a big drawn out process of red tape to just raise your tag renewal fee. Upping the no seat belt ticket was a huge process. The state of Florida would take from this fund to pay that fund..take from the schools to boost this. Now, anytime they need money they reach into your pocket by flashing a new toll rate that constantly changes in accordance to "heavy traffic demand". The state and local government now have a magic wand that they wave as needed at our expense. Anytime they need a bail out they adjust the tolls. Think about the 100's of thousands of cars that go

through these booths hourly. Even each car "donating" an extra 25 cents is a cash boost the state and/or local government makes INSTANTLY! Badly needed money to coverup there mess-ups and keep their personal expense accounts healthy. In the past, they couldn't just send a road crew out to change toll fee rates for a couple days - that would look too obvious and be way too time consuming. Now they just throw these digital bandit up on even interstate (free-ways) by creating "express lanes". Eventually they leave one "freeway" lane open to the poor sports and "slackers" who cant or don't want to go with the program. Slow but surely the general population can and is indoctrinated into all kinds of ideology's that not only compromise your financial being but your morals as well. I think there is something about a slippery slope...

3   · Reply · Share ›

 County > Tim · 16 days ago

When they started the express lanes on I-95 I said they would extend it into Broward and it is happening.

3   · Reply · Share ›

 grandma954 > County · 16 days ago

NOW... its a mess too..

2   · Reply · Share ›

 Cagüentó Losizquierdistas > County · 16 days ago

And there are also plans to put them on I-75.

1   · Reply · Share ›

 County > Cagüentó Losizquierdistas · 16 days ago

That would not surprise me.

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 Burgess Krell · 16 days ago

It is always amusing to watch pro-tax liberals complain about taxes when they have to actually pay them. A toll is simply a euphemism for a tax to use a specific road.

2   · Reply · Share ›

 Mr.Realist · 16 days ago

A good public transportation system would solve these and many other problems in South Florida, unfortunately our politicians are too stupid and too greedy to make that happen.

2   · Reply · Share ›

 [sofladude](#) · 16 days ago

Time to form the Toll Party, take all our transponders and throw them into Biscayne Bay to protest these toll taxes that we weren't given the chance to vote on...lol.

2   · Reply · Share ›

 [Truthsayer](#) · 16 days ago

Nobody is forcing any driver to take a toll road! There are alternative roadways parallel to toll roads that will get the driver where he wants to go. Toll roads are a convenience that helps save time and aggravation, for a fee!! Toll roads have been around since the horse and carriage days. If you don't want to pay the toll take the public roadways. If you want to take the express roads then you have to pay for the privilege; roads aren't free and cost millions to build and maintain!

I usually take I-95 to work (free!!!) but will occasionally, for convenience sake, take the turnpike; it's my choice...

2   · Reply · Share ›

 [lionsuar77](#) > [Truthsayer](#) · 16 days ago

Good luck taking surface streets in the city of Miami! Traffic is brutal! The county has basically screwed the people once again! If your traveling West East you're not even given a rail option. Just ask anyone who lives in Doral....so please spare us all on your little history lesson on what a toll road is supposed to do! Simple fact is that traffic is horrible, and sitting in traffic just got a whole lot more expensive!

3   · Reply · Share ›

 [sofladude](#) > [lionsuar77](#) · 16 days ago

getting around Doral 10 years ago was a headache...it must be 10 times worse now. I avoid it.

2   · Reply · Share ›

 [sofladude](#) > [Truthsayer](#) · 16 days ago

at least i-95 has free lanes, whereas 836,112, 874 are all toll lanes. they added new toll points and moved others to increase toll revenue. the people that use the 104th street exit on 874 on their daily commute now have to pay a toll there, whereas before the toll wasn't charged north of 104th street. when you have to pay that new toll tax 500+ times per year, it's a lot of money.

1   · Reply · Share ›

 [TheExecutioner](#) > [Truthsayer](#) · 16 days ago

Yeah right, like it's so easy just to take the understreets. First of all, try finding an alternative East-west route to replace using the Dolphin. Flagler? Tamiami Trail? Have you seen what those roads look like at rush hour? Must be nice to have so many options, because many of us don't!

1   · Reply · Share ›

 [Truthsayer](#) > [TheExecutioner](#) · 16 days ago

The only other way to pay for the express roads is to use tax money; that way people who never use those roads, or have no need for them, will have to pay to subsidize those who do! The roads have to be paid for and the fair way is to have the people who use them pay for them!

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 [Jose Ortega](#) · 16 days ago

The tolls have been increased to pay down the debt on the municipal bonds that were floated to pay for the previous highway upgrades. Stop your whining and pay what you owe. Be grateful the County didn't jack-up your ad velorem taxes.

1   · [Reply](#) · [Share](#) ›

 [Toondrawer*35](#) · 16 days ago

I was watching a late 50's documentary on the need for highways here in South Florida. They were then called "freeways". .

1   · [Reply](#) · [Share](#) ›

 [Richard Flynn](#) · 16 days ago

Why don't they use these tolls to finance more and better Metrorail destinations. There are enough roadways that continue to have money allocated for expansion but are obsolete before the construction is finished. Having Metrorail expanded to Florida City and West to the far reaches of Kendall would provide an alternate source for commuting to work or school instead of using an automobile. The MDX authority is not accountable to anyone and is not an elected body. It should be dissolved as another bureaucratic boondogle.

1   · [Reply](#) · [Share](#) ›

 [tardisbabe](#) > [Richard Flynn](#) · 15 days ago

Agree with the expansion to the west, but it becomes a NIMBY thing because people don't want to deal with the noise and construction of new stations in the suburbs.

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This comment was deleted.

 [TheExecutioner](#) > [Guest](#) · 16 days ago

Let us know what we can do to help.

1   · [Reply](#) · [Share](#) ›

Nitronaught · 16 days ago

Just shows that if you can afford it, you even get special lanes on the highway...

Weren't they supposed to help increase car pooling originally?

1 | □ | □ · Reply · Share ›

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