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Looking for solutions to worsening traffic in South Dade

By Ernie Sochin

For



Conceptual rendering of overpass for street intersecting with MDX's planned use of the South Dade Busway for automobiles.

several years I have been attending various meetings the purpose of which is to solve the worsening traffic situation for us living in South Dade.

After iust about every meeting someone announces

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this point.

Firstly, we were thought to be fortunate to receive the bus lanes on US1. We all know the problems that has created. Not only does it mess up the north and south traffic on US1 but creates tremendous traffic jams on the east-west highways waiting for a chance to cross through the light. Of course not being allowed to make left and right turns when there is no oncoming traffic has also caused huge backups on US1.

MDX had a plan to devote one lane of the bus road as a toll lane to help people get to work in the morning and reversing that lane at night to allow people to return. There seems to have been a great deal of resistance to this idea and I don't know whether it is still in the planning stage or not.

Many people want a thing called light rail which does provide fast transportation but not if it has to stop at every intersection on US1. It would just defeat the purpose of having one. The answer: We must build overpasses at all of the key intersections or make a dedicated two-level highway to keep people moving.

What is actually happening? Firstly, thousands of people are moving in our direction and being forced into a narrow strip of land bordered by the ocean on one side and the Everglades on the other yet it seems everyone wants to live there. My little town of Cutler Bay has quadrupled in size since I first moved here.

I remember on my first visit to South Miami, before I actually moved here, calling my wife and telling her what a paradise this was because there was virtually no traffic. When we first moved here and would drive along Old Cutler Road, if a car passed in the opposite lane we would try to see who it was because most assuredly they were a neighbor or someone that we knew.

Lifestyles have changed. The trend is to the new urbanism which provides for people to live in multistoried buildings and be able to walk to or take a trolley to their place of business or entertainment. I am told that the new millennials are hardly buying any automobiles because they no longer need them.

When I lived in Boston some years back there were central locations where virtually all of the trolley cars, buses, trackless trolleys, and subway cars would rendezvous and you could go off in any direction from this point and get fairly close to your destination.

Dade County is not set up that way and would

require walking at least several blocks to your eventual destination, which is fine on a perfectly nice day but we all know better. Most days in South Florida are bloody hot and humid, and I sincerely doubt anyone in a three-piece suit or normal dress would want to walk several blocks and then arrive at work needing a shower. Other problems are simply crossing the highway once you arrive at your destination on the Metrorail.

At the end of every meeting that I attend the final result is to order a new study. I have no idea how many studies have been done on this topic and I have yet to see the results of any of them.

Lifestyles also have changed over the last few years because children no longer walk or ride their bikes to school but must be driven and most times picked up at the end of the day. As parents most of you know you must be prepared for that eventual phone call that little Johnny has a cold or fever and must be taken home. Try doing this using public transportation.

I grew up in an era where few women worked outside the home. We never had an automobile in our family and were able to travel wherever we wanted to using public transportation. We now have for the most part at least two people in each household leaving at about the same time and returning about the same time each day and you wonder why we have traffic.

Those favoring Metrorail have this illusion that everyone else will be riding public transportation which will leave the roads free and clear for them. Don't count on it.

Population growth is driving all of this and frankly I know of no way to stop people from moving to a part of the world that they choose to live in. There are many groups who demand that no more housing be built, no more shopping centers, no more anything. The problem is that people are coming here and they will find a place to live and there are developers who are fully aware of this and will be building homes, possibly multiple levels to accommodate this in rush of new residents.

As more and more people move into the area, more and more facilities are needed to service them for food, medical care, drycleaning, and just about everything that needs to be done outside the home. The best we can hope for is to have as many of these facilities as close to the heart of the city as possible thereby avoiding the main arteries for performing day-to-day activities.

There are those who think that we can prevent people from moving here by simply telling the people that own all the various tracts of land that they can't build anything that will attract new people. I don't think that this is legally or morally sound.

Truthfully I think we must make it easier for the motoring public to get places and this involves more and larger roads. I know that it is sacrilege to talk about the holy Old Cutler Road which has been designated a historic highway. I happen to love Old Cutler Road, ride my bike there frequently and am very proud of what my town has done to its section of Old Cutler Road despite a lot of opposition from some of the nearby residents.

Old Cutler Road is a nice road but that is all it is — a road for carrying people to and from wherever they happen to be going. The road is certainly wide enough to add at least one lane, possibly a reversible lane that would speed people on their way to and from work. The historic designation could be removed by the people in Tallahassee if they were clearly made aware of what is happening in our towns.

I find myself using all of the back streets through Palmetto Bay and Pinecrest in order to avoid sitting on US1 or Old Cutler Road. Whenever I suggest any type of accommodation for automobiles I am viewed as some kind of traitor not to be listened to. Perhaps they are right. It might be nice to go back to 1960 where I was surrounded by woods, strawberry fields, and huge lots of land with nothing on them. I don't think this is something even worth wishing for.

The truth is we have got to change our way of thinking, be prepared for more traffic no matter what we do and just understand this is the new way of life for South Florida. There are a bunch of empty states in the middle of this country with very low density and little traffic that probably would love to have some of these people move there, but I doubt that that is about to happen. Note: Wrong Hat! My apologies to those who took offense at my last article on becoming a dictator. I selected a hat that seemed to fit what I wanted to do and inadvertently chose a Nazi officers cap which seemed to offend some people.

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