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Miami-Dade transportation board under siege for being too large



@doug_hanks

A county transportation board is the subject of a Tallahassee fight over how many people should get to run it.

Miami-Dade's 23-member Metropolitan Planning Organization can be controlled by the County Commission, since the 13 elected commissioners make up a majority of MPO's membership.

A state [bill](#) backed by Miami Beach Mayor [Philip Levine](#), Miami City Commissioner [Francis Suarez](#) and [others](#) would cut membership down to 12, mainly by reducing county-commission seats to four.

The mayor of Miami-Dade would get a vote for the first time, and Miami-Dade's six largest cities would retain their seats. One seat would still belong to the county's toll authority.

But seats reserved for the school board, an at-large elected municipal official, and a civilian from the suburbs would each go away.

The proposed changes haven't sat well with county commissioners. Chairman Jean Monestime, who also serves as chair of the MPO, wrote the sponsor of the proposal, Rep. Jeanette Nuñez of Miami, a letter this week urging her to rewrite her plan.

"By dramatically reducing the number of officials serving on the MPO, you would significantly erode the

breadth of representation and the very legitimacy of this federally certified planning body," Monestime wrote. The "theory that fewer members will result in better outcomes does not apply in this instance."

Nuñez wrote back: "Clearly, the status quo has not worked and I do not believe that the MPO will reorganize itself, absent my proposal."

Under the current bill, MPO membership would consist of: the county mayor, the chairman of the County Commission and the commission's transportation committee, and two other commissioners appointed by the governor based on the make-ups of their districts; representatives from Miami-Dade's six largest cities (Miami, Hialeah, Miami Gardens, Miami Beach, Homestead and North Miami); and a representative from the county's toll authority, known as MDX (for the Miami-Dade Expressway Authority).

The transportation [bill](#) (HB 7039) that includes Nuñez's MPO plan passed the House this week, but some changes to her amendment are already in the works. Nuñez said she hopes in the Senate version to add back the school-system seat and create another seat for a county commissioner who represents at least three municipalities with smaller populations.

"I'm sensitive to the needs of small cities," said the Republican, who represents a suburban district that includes the West Kendall area.

As amended, the proposal would shrink the 23-member board to 14 members. The County Commission would lose eight seats, instead of nine. The board would still lose an at-large municipal seat appointed by the governor and currently held by Miami Commissioner Marc Sarnoff, as well as the governor-appointed seat reserved for a resident of unincorporated Miami-Dade (who may not hold elected office). That position is [listed](#) as vacant, which is why the photo of the MPO's board at the top of this post only includes 22 people.

Federal law requires each community have an MPO, which prioritizes transportation projects receiving state and federal funding. The MPO updates its [Transportation Improvement Plan](#) each year.

Critics complain that the large membership makes decisions difficult, and even obtaining quorums can be a challenge. Monestime's office notes the board is in the process of a national search for a new executive director, and sees the prospect of a board shake-up as throwing a wrench into the process.

Levine, Miami Beach's mayor, said the reorganization is more important than the quick hire of a executive director, given Miami-Dade's worsening gridlock and stalled efforts to ease it.

"My advice would be: clean up your mess first, then hire your new director," he said.

Posted by Doug Hanks on Friday, Apr. 17, 2015 at 2:57 PM in [Miami-Dade Politics](#) | [Permalink](#)

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