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Gridlock = Trouble for business community, so help fix it

HIGHLIGHTS

Latin Builders Association president says business suffers from traffic congestion

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That's why businesses must be part of the solution

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BY ALEX LASTRA

lbaorg.com

There is no question that Miami-Dade County's traffic woes negatively affect business. For too long, we have left the burden of broken promises to our elected officials and public agencies, but it has become clear that the public sector alone can neither drive the innovative solutions nor solicit the necessary funding for implementation without our help. The responsibility to solve Miami's transportation and mobility crises lies within our business community.

The Latin Builders Association (LBA), the country's largest Hispanic association of its kind, is committed to forming a consensus on establishing and implementing transportation, transit and mobility priorities and solutions throughout the county. As builders, planners, attorneys and community leaders across Miami-Dade County's top industry, we understand that we can and will build ourselves out of this gridlock by working smarter and together.

The LBA recently hosted the leaders of Miami's top transportation agencies as part of our Signature Legislative Breakfast Series. Aileen Boucle, executive director of Miami-Dade's Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO); Alice Bravo, director of the Miami-Dade's Department of Transportation and Public Works; Gus Pego, district secretary for the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT); and Javier Rodriguez, director of the Miami-Dade Expressway Authority (MDX), spoke with candor and courage.

Only with the consensus and support of the business community will Miami-Dade County embrace the necessary multi-modal implementation strategy necessary to secure funding and bring projects home to Miami.

We must develop new mixed-use transit hubs throughout Miami-Dade County. Residents in communities like downtown, Midtown and Coral Gables enjoy the opportunity to commute to work, go grocery shopping and pick up their kids from school without getting into a car. This quality of life should not be reserved for the county's most affluent. More communities, particularly in the southern and western parts of the county, would benefit tremendously from investments in the form of private development and public infrastructure to create sustainable neighborhoods.

The multiplicity of municipalities and public agencies has contributed to a complex transportation network loaded with inefficiencies. Despite the many dedicated public servants behind the projects that brought us our roads and the 15th-largest transit system in the country, we are void of a countywide transportation and mobility plan. With our support, transportation agencies would be able to present a united front in soliciting federal and state support for projects with the greatest impact.

Miamians need to understand that we are a donor community within a donor state. We send more money, including gas taxes, to both Tallahassee and Washington, D.C., than we get back. Yet our roads continue to slow and our transit needs only increase. Trends may change and economies may shift, but Miami will surpass 3 million residents within the next 15 years.

The answer is not the draconian measure of a building moratorium that will only serve to send us spiraling back into a recession. All great cities experience congestion, but they also have robust and effective transportation options. We must support investments in our transit system.

The initial investment may seem expensive, but they are no more costly than our highways and provide for users of all demographics, including the 15 million tourists who visit each year.

It is incumbent upon all leaders of Greater Miami, business and the public to engage each other and develop a transportation and mobility plan that works for all of us. Mobility solutions will not only make Miami-Dade County a better place to live and to work, they will boost our county's ability to attract new businesses and industries, and to create new jobs.

ALEX LASTRA IS PRESIDENT OF THE LATIN BUILDERS ASSOCIATION.



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