

Tunnel new weapon in Brickell Avenue Bridge jams

Written by [Catherine Lackner](#) on April 19, 2016



Directors of Miami's Downtown Development Authority have come up with a new weapon in their ongoing quest to solve traffic problems associated with the Brickell Avenue Bridge.

For years, the authority has battled the Florida Department of Transportation and the US Coast Guard over what it says are improper bridge openings that snarl traffic into and out of downtown. Most of the openings that occur during restricted times (morning, lunch and afternoon rush hours) are for pleasure craft, authority members have said.

Their attempts to have the Coast Guard enforce its own rules and to have the hours increased so that they fully take rush hours into consideration "are in limbo now," said authority board member Richard Lydecker, who is senior partner of the Lydecker-Diaz law firm, at the authority board's meeting on Friday. His firm spent many hours on a *pro bono* project that analyzed bridge-keepers' logs and concluded the rules were not being followed.

But, said Jorge Luis Lopez, the authority's local lobbyist, US Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen got involved, saying marine interests along the Miami River would be harmed if the hours during which the bridge is supposed to be locked down (except for emergencies) were enforced as they are written.

There should be a balance of the needs of the marine industry, pleasure boaters and drivers, said

authority board member Alan Ojeda, who is president of Rilea Development Group.

But, Mr. Lydecker said, there are only six hours per day when restrictions are in effect. “You can have the other 18 hours,” he said.

Then in March, the authority’s board learned that the countywide Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) has fully funded a traffic study to put a tunnel under the Miami River, a controversial idea that has been discussed for years or decades. The study would be crucial for the project to meet approvals.

“We’re hoping the MPO research can be used for the Brickell tunnel, so we don’t have to duplicate efforts,” said Alyce Robertson, authority executive director.

But, pointed out Eric Riel Jr., authority team leader for planning, design and transportation, that study will probably take one year to 18 months.

“There are studies that may very well be done and paid for,” said board member Alicia Cervera, who is managing partner of Cervera Real Estate. The Related Group, she pointed out, has a mega-project, One Brickell, that is announced to rise on the south side of the bridge. And Swire Properties, she said, must have had traffic studies done before proceeding with its massive Brickell City Centre project. “Related isn’t even out of the ground yet,” she said, meaning that the data should be fresh.

“Send it to me,” Mr. Lydecker quipped. The authority should make every effort to get those studies and use the findings to either back the tunnel option or insist on better rule enforcement, board members said.

“Related should be on our side,” said authority Vice Chair Neisen Kasdin, who is office-managing shareholder of Akerman LLP, “unless they have a boat-shipping business we don’t know about.”