

Giménez's 'other side' on 836 softens city board

BY CATHERINE LACKNER

If some directors of Miami's Downtown Development Authority have softened their opposition to a plan to extend State Road 836 to the west and south, chalk it up to a visit by County Mayor Carlos Giménez.

"I'm somewhat disappointed that you voted against it without listening to the other side," the mayor told the downtown group at its meeting Friday.

Last month, directors voiced opposition to the planned Kendall Parkway, which would take the toll road from Northwest 12th Street near Dolphin Mall to Southwest 136th Street on the south and to Southwest 177th Avenue (Krome Avenue) on the west. The road would be built beyond the urban development boundary (UDB), which was a key issue for the downtown authority.

Authority board member Marta Viciedo, founding partner of the Urban Impact Lab, first brought the proposed extension up several months ago. Extending the expressway, she said, would add to suburban sprawl, dilute county resources and prioritize cars over public transit. The route the extended highway would take "isn't even in the SMART plan,"

the county's ambitious mass-transit scenario, she said.

At that time, Ken Russell, authority chair and Miami commissioner; and Neisen Kasdin, authority vice chair and office-managing shareholder of Akerman LLP, said the group should hear what the other side has to say.

If built, the Kendall Parkway would offer some traffic relief to 600,000 West Kendall residents without taking money away from the SMART plan or other mass transit programs, Mr. Giménez told the group Friday. In fact, it would be built with dedicated lanes for bus rapid transit or some mass transit mode yet to be determined, he said. "Bus rapid transit is something we can do right away, and do it the right way."

"We're trying to divert traffic by getting some people to go west in the morning," when many area residents are driving east to pick up the Florida Turnpike, the mayor said. "It would simplify mobility for everybody."

"We're not trying to move the UDB," Mr. Gimenez insisted. "You can't use the road to justify building more. You can't use it for currency, or to upzone."

Neither should the extension of the toll road signal that the county is abandoning mass transit, he said. "This takes no money away from the

SMART plan. I want to see other transit options."

"This is more of a philosophical thing for us," said board member Alan Ojeda, president of the Rilea Development Group and chair of the downtown authority's Transit, Connectivity and Mobility Committee. "We see that for every \$2 spent, \$1 is going to cars and \$1 is going to the SMART plan."

"The bottom line is, it's not touching the SMART plan, so let's move to support it," said board member Richard Lydecker, senior partner of the Lydecker-Diaz law firm. Coming back to Miami from the Florida Keys, he said, he has observed the West Kendall area to be a "parking lot" in the mornings.

Board member Nitin Motwani, managing director Miami Worldcenter Group LLC, said his company recently "lost a team member" because of a 90-minute commute.

"Please don't forget these folks," Mr. Giménez implored the authority's board. "In the five years it would take to build this, we could really help them."

"It's about a philosophical position for us," said board member Alicia Cervera, managing partner of Cervera Real Estate. "If we don't really commit to mass transit, this is really just a temporary solution."