



The Brickell Avenue Bridge in downtown Miami has always been bottle neck for commuters exiting and entering the city core. Carl Juste; edited by Justin Azpiazu - Miami Herald

## DOWNTOWN MIAMI

# Will the Coast Guard do something about Brickell drawbridge gridlock?

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In an effort to reduce rush-hour congestion in downtown Miami, the Florida Department of Transportation is requesting a shift in Brickell Avenue drawbridge closure times by the U.S. Coast Guard, which regulates boat traffic on the Miami River.

The [much-despised bridge](#) causes gridlock each time it opens during peak travel periods. Downtown business owners, commuters and residents have sought to keep the bridge locked down when traffic is heaviest, but the Coast Guard and the marine industry have been [opposed](#) to further disruption of commerce and navigation on the river.

Now, it's up to the Coast Guard to decide whether to [alter the schedule](#) on behalf of fuming drivers.

The FDOT proposal asks the Coast Guard not to raise the bridge from 8:05 to 8:59 a.m., from 12:05 to 12:59 p.m. and from 5:05 to 6:59 p.m., citing the greatest volume of vehicles from 8:15 a.m. to nearly 9 a.m. and from 5:15 p.m. to nearly 7 p.m. on weekdays. At all other times, the bridge would continue to open on the hour and half hour from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. on weekdays.

“The traffic data shows that the afternoon traffic peak volume is higher than the morning traffic peak volume for a longer period,” FDOT District Six Secretary James Wolfe wrote in his request for a schedule modification to Capt. L.A. Allen of the Coast Guard District Seven Bridge Branch.

Landside and waterborne stakeholders have been stuck in their own version of gridlock over what to do about the bridge, which has become a major chokepoint as [downtown](#) has grown 40 percent since 2010 to 92,000 full-time residents, and where the daytime population has swelled to 250,000, according to a report by the Downtown Development Authority.

City leaders say the schedule alteration — which does not increase the total amount of time that the bridge is closed — is a practical compromise to a contentious [conflict](#).

“It’s been a fight for the past several years, with a Coast Guard study disproving an FDOT study, and folks speaking past each other,” Miami Commissioner and DDA Chairman Ken Russell said. “But I’m a big believer in consensus, and once we got to the table with a mediator the Coast Guard tried to give us hints of what they would accept. While there is no guarantee they will accept it, there was an openness to receiving this letter.

“Now the ball is in the Coast Guard’s court.”

Miami Mayor Francis Suarez endorsed FDOT’s request as a “pragmatic solution.”

“The Brickell bridge has developed a dismal reputation among locals for creating extreme congestion in what is an already dense and highly active area,” Suarez wrote in a letter to Wolfe. “By expanding evening peak time closures and starting them a half hour later, we have an opportunity to alleviate not only traffic but also the frustration experienced by countless commuters over these unnecessary and burdensome delays.”

Suarez hailed the spirit of cooperation between the DDA, Coast Guard, FDOT and Miami River Commission, but River Commission Chairman Horacio Stuart Aguirre said the organization, created as a clearinghouse for all public policy and projects regarding the 5.5-mile working waterway, was not informed about the letters sent this week.

“We were not copied on those submissions and furthermore nobody has asked the Miami River Commission to put this on the agenda,” Aguirre said. “I don’t know if it’s helpful to do business on the side and not have all parties involved. We are open-minded and eager to explore all possible solutions, including those the DDA doesn’t seem interested in pursuing. I don’t think it’s one but a bucketful.”

The commission — which supports the long-term solution of [building a tunnel under the river](#) — advocates implementation of a dozen action items to relieve traffic problems around the bridge, including reopening all three lanes across the bridge (currently down to one lane), restricting valet parking at surrounding buildings that contributes to bottlenecks, and smart signage alerting drivers to bridge openings and alternate routes. Aguirre said recent adjustments to traffic signal synchronization, overseen by the Miami Police Department, are starting to show positive results.

“We also need to do something about the [reckless pedestrians](#) who completely ignore the lights and horns when the bridge is rising and continue to walk, run, race, ride or push baby strollers across the bridge and cause 10-minute delays,” said Aguirre, who has asked for a police officer or aide to be posted on the bridge to prevent pedestrians from sneaking across.