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MDX is overstepping its boundaries

Miami-Dade County commissioners created the Miami-Dade Expressway Authority (MDX) in 1994 to ease traffic congestion and establish local control of toll revenues. Two years later MDX took over the five busiest roadways in the county — the Airport, Dolphin, Don Shula, Gratigny and Snapper Creek expressways. While its foundation and the original intentions of MDX were necessary at the time, in recent months, MDX has overstepped its boundaries and taken advantage of its de facto monopoly over Miami-Dade's major roadways.

MDX originally approved a fixed toll rate of 70 cents for the Dolphin Expressway in March, and after a 60-cent alternative was introduced, it called for a public hearing where community members and elected officials could voice their opinions on the matter. On June 19, voice them they did.

In fact, I and several colleagues from the Miami-Dade legislative delegation attended and condemned the toll increase at an MDX board meeting. We asked the board to pass the less costly alternative, a 60-cent toll per gantry. Nonetheless, the motion for the lower toll failed on a 7-5 vote, even in the face of widespread public opposition.

Therefore, the MDX board went about its business — not the people's business — and passed the resolution increasing tolls to 70 cents per mainline gantry and 30 cents per ramp gantry. Before this change, the roundtrip tolls from my district in southwest Miami to downtown were \$2.50. If the new tolls are implemented, the cost would rise to \$4.20. Commuters who use the expressway will see an increase in what they spend on tolls when the new charges begin next summer.

MDX has vastly overreached its boundaries as a quasi-governmental body and I hope to remedy the situation for my constituents legislatively before the charges come into effect in June 2014. To borrow the term coined by Roll Back Tolls, MDX is practicing "tollation" — tolling without representation.

Even though MDX is a state-sanctioned agency, there are systemic inadequacies within its structure. I'm worried that MDX is not held properly accountable for its decisions because there are no elected officials sitting on the board and it has not prudently explored other options to finance future projects. I'm also worried about MDX's apparent monopoly over tolls in Miami-Dade County and its inability to engage in active listening with the public.

This decision to raise tolls portrays MDX as having little concern for the economic well-being of the resident, and I will remain adamant in supporting my constituency on this controversial issue.

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