

KENDALL GAZETTE

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Protests expected at meeting to discuss new turnpike ramps

BY RICHARD YAGER

A \$26.6 million project to access planned speed lanes on Florida's Turnpike at SW 104th Street is expected to draw protests during a community outreach meeting scheduled for Oct. 3, 6 p.m., at Killian Palms Country Club, 9950 SW 104 St.

Turnpike officials scheduled the session after a scarce turnout of Kendall residents attended an Aug. 6 public hearing at Reception Palace Ballrooms, 14375 SW 42 St. (Bird Road).

Lack of community knowledge about the project has angered some residents and led State Rep. Frank Artiles to question the need for the joint FDOT-Turnpike project, scheduled for construction in 2014.

"Residents of my district, myself included, have raised serious concerns with the proposed express lane access ramps," Rep. Artiles wrote on Sept. 19 to Diane Gutierrez-Scaccetti, turnpike executive director, after criticisms were raised by Devon Aire residents and RollBackTolls activists at his office on Sept. 10.

A member of the House Transportation Committee, Artiles noted the project "is adjacent to Devon Aire K-8 Center and Devon Aire Park which both have heavy pedestrian and vehicle traffic with school and after school activities.

"The community has received little to no evidence to support [the] intended benefits," he continued in his letter, urging that a meeting be called to provide more details about the project to a greater number of Kendall residents.

Artiles also wants turnpike authorities to provide specifics on costs versus benefits including projected toll revenue and copies of all traffic and logistics studies performed to date on the Killian Parkway interchange.

"We will be there to express our concerns for the safety of schoolchildren, as well as the many people using the adjacent public park," said Didi Gimeno, president of the Devon Aire Parent-Teacher-Student Association.

"We are hoping that members of Arvida PTSA, Kendall Federation of Homeowner Associations and other nearby homeowner associations also will attend to learn how this project will affect them," she added.

"There are very real concerns about the waste of funding simply to benefit drivers who use express lanes for commuting routes," said co-chair Carlos Garcia of the RollBackTolls movement that has



Map shows proposed turnpike express lane connections with SW 104th Street.

objected to tolls on public expressways.

A newspaper advertisement and abutting ownership notices of the Aug. 6 turnpike informational meeting had been the only notifications that the overpass was due for reconstruction, said Garcia, adding that mailed notices were sent only to residents living within 300 feet of the overpass.

The new project slated to begin in 2014 would allow east and westbound SW 104th Street traffic to exit northbound onto two lanes that would merge into a single northbound turnpike express lane. The revised interchange plan also allows four southbound speed lanes to exit east and westbound onto SW 104th Street.

A stoplight on the SW 104th Street overpass would halt traffic to allow turnpike express motorists access and egress.

According to Garcia, "that would mean a third traffic signal on Killian Parkway between existing stoplights at SW 117th Avenue and SW 122th Avenue, adding to traffic congestion already a problem in this Kendall area."

Turnpike officials say the rebuilt interchange would "ensure a balance between the important mobility function of the turnpike system and needs of the region and users served," noting congestion

increases a potential for accidents. New travel lanes are being added to provide congestion relief and accommodate future growth, operating in a similar manner to I-95 express lanes, its statement continues.

The lanes "will be generally priced \$0.25 more than the general toll lanes (increasing dependent on traffic conditions) to provide a reduced/reliable travel time for longer distance travel through typically congested portions of the turnpike."

The turnpike express lane system is planned north of SW 137th Avenue in Homestead to SR 836 (Dolphin Expressway) including a 1.5-mile break between SR 874 and SW 104th Street allowing for traffic to enter or exit the SW 120th Street Interchange and Snapper Creek Service Plaza from the inside lanes.

While access is limited, Kendall area travelers using the SW 120th Street or SW 88th Street (Kendall Drive) interchanges will be able to enter the express lanes to travel north to SR 836. The planning statement concludes that the interchange would "meet future traffic needs" for the Kendall area.

Project details currently are available online at <www.floridasturnpike.com> linked to future construction projects.