

Date: September 1, 2021

To: The Miami-Dade County Mayor and Commissioners

From: The Venetian Causeway Residents

This document explains the positions taken by the Venetian Way Neighborhood Alliance (VWNA), the Venetian Islands Homeowners Association (VIHA), the Belle Island Residents Association (BIRA), Venetian Isle Condominium Association, and 1000 Venetian Way Condominium Association regarding the planned renovation of the Venetian Causeway (VC) by the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) and Miami Dade County (MDC) including the proposed privatization of the VC.

1. **We support much - but not all - of the FDOT VC renovation plan.** It calls for replacing 8 stationary bridges and slightly raising them, while preserving the historical profile of the VC.

However, we support **rehabilitation** of the east bascule drawbridge rather than the **replacement** option recommended by the FDOT.

Rehabilitation of the east bascule is the better option because it:

- a. addresses safety by replacing the current shallow pilings with stronger drilled shafts;
- b. offers a 25+ year life span at a savings to MDC and its residents;
- c. ensures the VC will maintain its prestigious designation on the National Register of Historic Places (NHRP);
- d. maintains current marine traffic patterns;
- e. preserves the unique spoil islands as the “crown jewels” along the VC; and
- f. is a win-win for all parties that truly care about the VC

2. **We strongly oppose privatization of the VC** for several important reasons. MDC Commissioner Sally A. Heyman (District 4) and Representative Michael Grieco, Florida House of Representatives (District 113) both agree with our position on privatization of the VC, as expressed in the enclosures to this letter.

Privatization is a bad idea because:

- a. it puts nearly \$2 million in annual net toll revenues and over \$13 million in cash reserves in the pockets of private investors instead of in MDC’s coffers. See MDC figures enclosed in this letter;
- b. the current RFP for bids calls for contracts of between 40 and 80 years, which means a total loss of revenue and cash reserves of MDC of over \$200 million dollars;

- c. it does not offer MDC or its residents a faster or better solution to fixing the bridges as private companies will not prioritize residents but rather seek to monetize profits for their partners/investors;
- d. MDC is about to begin the final design of a FDOT safety and resiliency VC roadway improvement plan;
- e. the VC should be removed from the current privatization RFP as it has nothing in common with the Rickenbacker Causeway and there is no benefit to either MDC or its residents to combine the two; and
- f. There will be no gain and much pain by privatization of the VC.

Respectfully submitted,

Diana Martinez
President, Venetian Way Neighborhood Alliance
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Melissa Beattie
President, Venetian Islands Homeowners Association
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Scott Diffenderfer
President, Belle Island Residents Association
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Enclosures

DETAIL AND BACKGROUND

Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) Project Development and Environment (PD&E)

The historic scenic VC is a 2.5-mile two lane roadway winding through a residential neighborhood with 10 low stationary bridges and two bascules (drawbridges) which join Miami to the west and Miami Beach to the east. The VC has been designated as a Historic Place by the prestigious NRHP since 1989 and is also designated as historic by adjacent cities and MDC.

Many of the bridges on the VC are functionally obsolete and in need of repair. Weight limits have been imposed to minimize further decay and damage. The FDOT is preparing a PD&E study of how to proceed with upgrades to the VC which will be submitted to MDC to implement the final design stage of the renovation. MDC already has funding for the final design phase as well as limited funds for the construction phase of the plan (the latter may serve as matching funds for other funders including the federal government) (See enclosure to this letter).

The PD&E study considered three options for the East Bascule: "do nothing," "rehabilitate," and "replace." Rehabilitation is a much better option, as it addresses all important issues while maintaining the VC's historic designation and current beauty, including the unique parklike spoil islands where walkers, bicyclists and motorists can relax, take pictures, and enjoy the views. Replacement of the East Bascule does not accomplish these goals.

We strongly urge the Mayor and Commissioners to vote for the rehabilitation option for the VC's east bascule drawbridge.

Proposed Privatization of the Venetian Causeway

An unsolicited proposal by a private company, and a subsequent RFP issued by the County, call for the privatization of the Rickenbacker Causeway and the VC.

We are strongly opposed to the privatization of the VC. As shown in MDC figures, annual toll revenue ranges from \$6.2 million to \$5 million between 2018 and 2021 (reflecting the COVID-19 pandemic). Annual operation and maintenance expenses are about \$3 million. This means an approximate \$2 million to \$3 million annual profit for MDC and its general fund. In addition, MDC figures show there is over \$13 million in VC cash reserves prior to capital expenditures projected in 2021-2022.

Therefore, we see no reason for MDC to turn over a continuing source of revenue to a private firm. In addition to the financial loss to MDC, such a move is not in the public's best interest. The goal of our MDC government is to serve our residents. Furthermore, MDC currently maintains eight bascule bridges, which yields some economies of scale. The goal of a private company is to make a profit for their shareholders. The VC should be managed by a government chartered to help the people.

We strongly urge the Mayor and Commissioners to remove the VC from this RFP. Commissioner Sally Heyman and state Representative Michael Grieco agree with our positions.

Respectfully,

VWNA Diana Martinez, Pres. VIHA Melissa Beattie, Pres. BIRA Scott Diffenderfer, Pres.



MEMORANDUM
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
COMMISSIONER SALLY A. HEYMAN
DISTRICT 4

TO: Honorable Daniella Levine Cava
Mayor
Miami-Dade County

DATE: August 10, 2021

FROM: Sally A. Heyman
Commissioner
District 4

SUBJECT: RFP for Rickenbacker Causeway and
Venetian Causeway

As County Commissioner of District 4 which includes the Miami Beach portion of the Venetian Causeway (Venetian), I have represented that community area on numerous Venetian projects since 2002. Specific to the current RFP initiative involving the Rickenbacker and Venetian; I have heard from Venetian residents, businesses, interested parties and the City of Miami Beach. The aforementioned DO NOT want the Venetian Bridges included with the Rickenbacker Bridge RFP.

The common element that brings these two bridges together is they are both County toll bridges. Otherwise, the priority of safe traffic commuting and resiliency is shared by many bridges. However, the Venetian Isle Bridges are unique in that it is a National Historic Registry Bridge since 1989 and must include Historic Preservation in all plans.

I am concerned with the timing as it relates to the FDOT Bridge Study, a multi-year study scheduled to be presented August – September of 2021. Their work product and conclusion should be considered when putting forth an RFP that includes the target area and funding sources. For all the public engagement, dialogue of problems and solutions and joint work efforts, very little was about the Venetian toll road, and lacked that community's engagement. I find including the Venetian Causeway in the Toll Road RFP to be disingenuous, an afterthought for furthering P3 taking over both County tolls.

Now is the time to remove the Venetian Causeway from the pending RFP-P3 solicitation and pause for the FDOT Study, get City of Miami Beach and Miami input, and engage the two County Commissioners and their respective Resident HOA's in a meaningful conversation of how an RFP will impact them.

Thank you for your timely consideration.

cc: The Honorable Jose "Pepe" Diaz, Chair and
Members of the Board of County Commissioners
The Honorable Dan Gelber, Mayor, City of Miami Beach
The Honorable Francis Suarez, Mayor, City of Miami
Barbara Bisno, Chair, Venetian Isles Neighborhood Committee
Debbie Liebowitz, Condo President, Belle Isle



The Florida House of Representatives

Representative Michael Grieco

District 113

August 17, 2021

Office of the Mayor
Daniella Levine Cava
111 NW 1st Street,
29th floor
Miami, FL 33128

RE: RFP for Rickenbacker Causeway and Venetian Causeway

Dear Mayor Levine Cava and County Commission Board Members,

On behalf of myself and my constituency in Florida House District 113, I am writing in strong opposition to the proposal of privatizing the Venetian Causeway and/or its operations. As the State Representative and a resident of the City of Miami Beach, we have seen several projects affecting the Causeway (Venetian) over the years, all presented with full public input and transparency. However, the current RFP initially focused on the Rickenbacker lacks any compelling argument for the Venetian's inclusion and comes across as either an afterthought or simply a money-grab. Moreover, I do not believe the residents most directly impacted by this effort have had the full opportunity to understand the pros and cons.

For the sake of the residents of Miami Beach, the current privatization RFP needs to exclude the Venetian Causeway and be subject to input from City and State Officials and residents if there is an appetite to revive the idea in the future. Meaningful conversations need to be had on how this will affect our community and we are not there yet.

I/we appreciate your consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Grieco".

Representative Michael Grieco, Esq. District 113

District Address

Suite 300
1666 79th Street Causeway
North Bay Village, Florida 33141-4189
(305) 993-1905

Tallahassee Address

406 House Office Building
402 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1300
(850) 717-5113

	FY 2018-19	FY 2019-20	FY 2020-21	FY 2021-22
Entering Fund Balance (cash reserves)	\$9,354,001	\$12,884,786	\$14,287,932	\$13,258,000
Revenues				
Operating	\$6,286,495	\$4,912,108	\$5,368,562	\$5,077,000
Interest	\$225,408	\$157,598	\$25,465	\$145,000
Total Revenues	\$6,511,903	\$5,069,705	\$5,394,027	\$5,222,000
Expenditures				
Operating	\$2,244,372	\$2,418,824	\$2,664,900	\$2,575,000
Debt Service	\$814,492	\$743,291	\$689,900	\$711,000
Total Expenditures	\$3,058,864	\$3,162,115	\$3,354,800	\$3,286,000
Net Operating Revenues (R-E)	\$3,453,039	\$1,907,590	\$2,039,227	\$1,936,000
Capital Expenditures	\$240,698	\$739,203	\$3,069,159	\$8,106,000
Adjustments	(\$318,443)	(\$234,760)	\$0	
Net of Capital and Adjustments	(\$77,745)	\$504,443	\$3,069,159	\$8,106,000
Entering Fund Balance (cash reserves)	\$12,884,786	\$14,287,932	\$13,258,000	\$7,088,000

Miami-Dade County figures for Venetian Causeway Revenues and Expenditures 2018-2022