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Miami Commissioner Gimenez: Road impact fees should be allowed for transit improvements in urban infill areas

By Risa Polansky

Increased road impact fees paid by developers would mean more money for Miami-Dade roadway improvements.

The county expects to collect an additional \$95 million to \$120 million over the next five years should commissioners give final approval to a proposed fee hike.

But in some areas — even those experiencing the most development — roads are already built out, Commissioner Carlos Gimenez says.

He's proposing the county allow road impact fee revenue to be used for transit capital improvement projects inside urban infill areas.

The fee revenue typically finances roadway improvements that would "enhance the vehicular movement or increase the vehicular volume in any corridor," said Esther Calas, county public works director.

Mr. Gimenez's plan, which received initial approval from the commission, would "add additional capacity to transit in certain areas of town where streets are already built out," he said.

The idea would be to expand transit services, not to replace existing, he said, offering examples such as completing a Metromover loop around Brickell or beefing up Brickell circulator services.

"If you can't add capacity to the streets, then you need to add capacity to transit," he said.

The county's transit department is embroiled in an ongoing struggle to come up with funds to maintain existing services and build new projects.

A 30-year projection released last month predicts a more than \$9 billion shortfall should the county move forward with planned expansions.

Mr. Gimenez said his intent is not to bail out the transit budget but to ensure the road impact fees urban developers pay truly contribute to improving transportation infrastructure in the area.

The Builders Association of South Florida has yet to take a position on the proposal, President Rey Melendi said.

"The industry isn't for or against it yet, because we don't know enough about it. We do have a lot of questions."

Those dollars could be used to, for example, replace old traffic signals even in built-out areas, he said, though transit improvements could also prove worthwhile.

"We've just got to make sure that were not taking dollars out of a program that can ultimately affect roads that can be improved on," he said. "It's an interesting concept. We just need to make sure that it doesn't hurt the roadway funding"

Both the fee increase and Mr. Gimenez's proposal must first be reviewed by the county's Governmental Operations and

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Environment Committee before returning to the commission for final approval. The meeting is scheduled for Sept. 9.



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