

From: *Miami Today*, Thursday, June 03, 2010  
 Subject: **FDOT alumna Alice N. Bravo has changed her gears to steer Miami's Department of Capital Improvements**  
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PROFILE

WEEK OF THURSDAY, JUNE 3, 2010

## FDOT alumna Alice N. Bravo has changed her gears...

After nearly seven years with the Florida Department of Transportation, Alice Bravo is switching gears. Ms. Bravo, a licensed professional engineer, began last month as head of the City of Miami's Department of Capital Improvements — an office that has seen its share of turmoil over the years.

In 2007, 11 design employees were charged with running a private business on city time. This year, it came to light that fund transfers left some capital projects ongoing without financial backing, creating budget holes.

But with new lawmakers and administrators in office, the issues are being addressed. Now, Ms. Bravo says, it's time to leave problems in the rearview mirror and focus on steering projects toward completion on time and on budget.

Major initiatives like Marlins stadium garages, Museum Park and new trolleys fall under Ms. Bravo's purview, and she says she's ready for the challenge.

She sat down with *Miami Today* reporter Susa Polansky during her first week on the job to talk priorities and strategy.

**Q: Tell us about your professional background and what led you here.**

**A:** I started by studying civil engineering at the University of Miami and after that I went to work at a large local engineering firm designing bridges, and then moved on to roadway projects.

I also during the course of that time got an MBA, and I've been fortunate to work in a lot of engineering areas, for transportation primarily, and that led to my role at the Florida Department of Transportation.

There I was very fortunate to work on some of the biggest transportation projects in this region — the 95 Express lane, Port of Miami tunnel, reconstruction of the 18-mile stretch into the Keys.

When I was approached with this opportunity, I thought it was very interesting to see things from a different perspective.

The City of Miami, the namesake of our community, and here you deal with completely different types of issues, from development to parks, police stations, fire stations — everything that really touches the people of the city day to day.

**Q: What experience can you take from the state side and translate here, and what do you expect to be new for you?**

**A:** The state has a very structured approach to the delivery of projects as far as the methodology that follows the planning of the projects, assessing needs, prioritizing them, so that's something I hope I can bring here.

These are times where everyone has limited resources, and we have to make sure we maximize the benefit that those resources provide.

I expect what's going to be different is that there are so many priorities; it's not just transportation. How those transportation priorities are worked into everything else is what's going to be different.

**Q: What's your strategy to get acclimated?**

**A:** My approach is to find out everything I can of the projects that are going on, the projects that are planned, talking to the staff, finding out what the issues have been.

If we don't need to reinvent the wheel,



Ms. Bravo plans a proactive approach to projects. "You avoid issues by identifying them while they are on paper rather than when they're in the ground set in concrete."

**The Newsmaker**

**Alice N. Bravo**

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 Personal philosophy: "Where there's a will, there's a way. There's no obstacle that cannot be overcome if you're determined enough and follow the right course."

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we won't. But where we need a process or new procedures to ensure that we get an efficiently designed, quality product and that we can deliver it on schedule and on budget, we'll implement whatever we have to do to accomplish that.

**Q: This department is tied to budgetary troubles, given fund transfers and projects that went on without the money behind them. Do you have ideas in terms of oversight and ensuring something like that doesn't happen again?**

**A:** The financial transactions side has been addressed so that there's improved coordination and communication. The rest of it has to do with procedures that are followed in the design process and the procedures that are followed once we're in construction, and documentation and having checks and balances.

That's how you ensure your program goes forward without those types of issues.

**Q: Is there anything you bring from the state as far as how to make sure that the right hand always knows what the left hand is doing?**

**A:** Yes. A lot has to do with communication and coordination. Whenever a project is in design, you bring in the folks that are going to be involved in the construction side. You make sure what you're producing is going to be constructible.

You avoid issues by identifying them while they are on paper rather than when they're in the ground set in concrete. That's the key to everything, and so you need independent reviewers of the plans, you need to be auditing your operating procedures to make sure the documentation is in place.

It's nothing new, but whatever's missing we can implement.

**Q: How have you spent your first week in office?**

**A:** The most interesting part is that I got into on some conversations on what gets assessed by rating agencies when you're moving forward with bonding. That's something that at the state level occurs in Tallahassee and you don't become familiar with the mechanics of it.

I also got to attend my first city commission meeting, so I heard about a lot of issues — planning and zoning, Miami 21, all kinds of issues that take place on a daily basis as a city.

**Q: Is a bond issue coming up?**

**A:** The bond issuance associated with the parking garage for the new Marlin's stadium.

**Q: What have you identified as your biggest challenge?**

**A:** Probably identifying the structure that you would want to have in place and implementing that without stopping everything. So projects that are already in construction you want to apply whatever structure or procedures or documentation you need to make sure that from this point they go forward without any problems.

It's like doing construction on a roadway — you can't eliminate traffic while you build a job. You've got to identify, implement while things keep moving forward.

**Q: What are some projects underway that fall under your purview?**

**A:** A number of parks facilities, rec-

reational centers, a number of roadway projects underway, neighborhood drainage improvements.

There are projects that will be going to construction soon that are funded with stimulus dollars for sidewalk improvements and roadway improvements and bridge repairs as well.

**Q: Are you familiar with some of them coming from the state?**

**A:** The bridge repair project is the Brickell Key bridge. The roadway improvements, a major one is Northeast Second Avenue. Primarily the rest are neighborhood streets.

**Q: How about some of the bigger-ticket projects? The stadium garages — have you tackled any of that yet in terms of plans and the timetable?**

**A:** I've gotten some feedback on measures being taken to move the project and yield additional savings for the city from the original bid price. There have been negotiations to bring the price the down, and now we're identifying additional incentives to produce even more savings as part that project moving forward.

**Q: What's the next step there?**

**A:** The construction management firm has been selected, so they're in the initial phases.

**Q: Then the port tunnel — what's the city's role? Will you be involved, given your background?**

**A:** I'll still be involved. Fifty percent of the capital contributions was in partnership between the county and city. The city's contribution on [is] \$50 million, so we're a very strong funding partner.

A great portion of the work takes place on Watson Island, so the future projects and different lease areas on Watson Island, we have to make sure that the tunnel design and work is coordinated with those facilities.

At the same time there's going to be inspections and permitting issues to coordinate with the county to make sure that process is seamless and we don't have a duplication of efforts.

**Q: How does it feel to be on the other side after so many years working on that project?**

**A:** The interesting part is that everybody wants the project to be successful, so the goals are aligned.

And now it's something that really benefits the city because of the downtown truck traffic. So it's great to be here where you're going to realize a lot of the benefits of the project.

**Q: Can you give an overview of the tunnel project's timetable?**

**A:** The schedule was 55 months and that clock started ticking on Oct. 15, 2009, when the concession agreement was final and the notice to proceed was issued. They're about seven months into that, and they plan to break ground at the end of this month or the first week of June, so that puts you around May 2014 when the project would be completely finished.

The first phase is on Watson Island, and basically they're constructing a new side road access for the Miami Children's Museum and Jungle Island, and then they'll construct new eastbound lanes for MacArthur Causeway.

Once those new lanes are available, traffic will be shifted and then the real

## ...to steer Miami's Department of Capital Improvements

work commences in the median of MacArthur Causeway, where they're going to prepare the pits where the tunnel boring machine will be introduced.

**Q: There's been some concern from Beach leaders about traffic, or residents trying to access the city's amenities like the Children's Museum and Jungle Island. What can you tell them?**

A: The concessionaire and the project manager, they've developed a plan that is sensitive to the levels of traffic, and they're proactive in finding out how they can use the flexibility that they have to minimize whatever impact, if any, on MacArthur Causeway.

They have flexibility as to when they bring materials in. They plan to bring their excavated materials out through a conveyor belt to a barge to not have new truck traffic introduced, so a lot of the issues that the Beach is bringing up the contractor has actually built into his plan.

**Q: The Museum Park project – have you had a chance to be briefed on the city's role and what's up next?**

A: I got a very preliminary briefing. The city's portion of the project is the park and the whole area south of the museum buildings itself.

The design I think is fairly well developed for the park. So I guess the next phase is identifying when the museum buildings would go forward and how the park improvements would be funded and move forward on a timeframe to match.

**Q: How might budget cuts affect your department?**

A: Most of the projects are moving forward with the proceeds of bonds from various funding sources, so someone working on the project is actually being funded by that project, not from general revenue.

We're a small portion of the city general revenue budget.

**Q: What's it like working with a whole new group of leaders? What's the atmosphere at the city now?**

A: I see there's a lot of energy. There's new administration, new mayor, four of the five commissioners

are new, so it's great when you have a fresh approach and everybody looking to see how you can provide the maximum benefit for the residents.

**Q: What's the strategy to bring projects in on budget?**

A: The key to that is planning. The first approach, you assess your needs, you figure out what improvements you're moving forward with. You plan the design phase, you plan the construction phase, you have very extensive reviews to make sure that once you get into construction you don't have problems.

That's the whole purpose of the design phase, to take every precaution to identify the positions in the field. You know any type of construction project is going to provide some disruption and you want to minimize the time that the project's out there.

By doing your homework during the design phase and investigating utilities, making sure you address permitting issues, that's how you ensure that you don't encounter problems in construction.

**Q: Is that what's happening with the stadium garages?**

A: Yes. The design has to be finalized before there's a groundbreaking.

**Q: Have you had a chance to sit down with the county or the contractor?**

A: I think that will be next week.

**Q: How many staffers do you have working under you here?**

A: It's between 50 and 60.

**Q: And how does that compare to FDOT?**

A: In FDOT there was about 150 but there were different responsibilities. There's responsibilities of state oversight that were in that 150, and here we either don't perform that function or there's a different department that handles it.

But what's new is that in this role the folks that supervise the construction are also under me, which is different than FDOT.

**Q: Do you know about the trolley project?**

A: Yes. The trolley project is going to

be something great for the city. It's funded with different sources. There's stimulus funds for the trolley acquisition itself, and then the half-cent sales tax that the county passed, a portion of it that comes to the city that will help fund the operations in addition with a transit development grant from the state DOT that helps new services get going.

**Q: When will we see our first trolley here?**

A: I'm not sure yet. We have to refine the routes and see the different riderships and areas. We want to make sure the system that's put forward is sustainable, so there are some evaluation steps that need to happen.

**Q: You said you met the commissioners this week. Have they expressed some of their priorities in terms of what they hope to see coming out of your department?**

A: I don't know that we've had a chance to really discuss specifics. It's been more for me to tell them my philosophy and the approach to providing a reliable product.

**Q: And what message have you been sending them?**

A: The goal is to provide cost-effective, quality projects on schedule, on budget, and keep people informed as to the progress of those projects, and have a dependable process.

**Q: Have you had a chance to come up with concrete goals? Is there any one thing that you really plan to focus on or hope to see within the next six months here?**

A: I really want to instill a process where the timeframes set out for a project are the timeframes in which the projects are delivered, and the same thing for the budget.

So how we move that forward; that's something that has to transcend every level of the group. It has to be not only the group's goal but the goals tied to the performance of every individual.

**Q: Will you have much interaction with the state?**

A: I think so. There are many state

projects that are within the City of Miami. I plan to be involved. They're conducting their study for a future commuter rail on the FEC corridor.

They're I think on the finishing stages of the I-395 study. When that project moves forward someday, we'll certainly be involved in that.

**Q: In terms of your engineering training, how does that give you an edge in this role? Here you're also a manager.**

A: Management skills are important, but you also have to be able to evaluate the quality of the product that's being put out. A lot of times in development there are impasses and decisions that have to be made as to direction.

That's where experience really comes into play, in making those decisions to make sure the project is deliverable and that it's going to provide the intended benefit.

Having the right experience makes sure you don't shortchange the final product.

**Q: Tell us about your community involvement.**

A: I am on the board for the Girl Scout Council of South Florida. That's a role I really like because the Girl Scouts provide benefits to the community.

My favorite program is called STEM, and it's science, technology, engineering and math. The jobs in those fields generally provide salaries that are maybe 25% higher than the non-STEM jobs, but those jobs are male dominated.

So providing the girls' background in those areas really helps give them a leg up in the future knowing that that's something they can excel in.

**Q: Do you have any hobbies?**

A: I like activities with my kids, taking them to the park, bicycle riding, the beach.

**Q: Tell us about your family.**

A: I'm married. I have a 7-year-old boy and a 5-year-old girl, Aidan and Nadia.

I heard about a baseball player, Nomar Garciaparra. His name is his father's name spelled backwards, Ramon. I thought, oh, Aidan backwards – that's Nadia.