



**Florida Department of Transportation-D-6      News Clip**  
**Port of Miami Tunnel Study**

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Subject: **Tunnel for port gets new backing**

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## **Tunnel for port gets new backing**

By *LARRY LEBOWITZ*

New moves are afoot to build community support for what would likely be one of the most expensive public works projects on a per-mile basis in Miami's brief history: a tunnel for the Port of Miami-Dade.

The Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce, the port, cargo carriers and a handful of local politicians are gearing up for another run at the alternative route for trucks beneath Government Cut.

The benefits of a tunnel linking the port with the MacArthur Causeway and Interstate 395 are becoming painfully obvious as the downtown skyline is being transformed by the new state bird, the construction crane.

Truckers currently are forced to make two horrific 90-degree turns on the downtown grid to get from I-395 to the port, tying up traffic on Biscayne Boulevard, Northeast First and Second avenues and Fifth and Sixth streets.

And then they have to navigate the stop-and-start nightmare that is the Dolphin Expressway (State Road 836) to return to the warehouses concentrated west of the airport.

"You can't drive 836 today," City Commissioner Johnny Winton said last week. "What's 836 going to look like 10 years from now? Twenty years from now? Forget about it."

A tunnel would provide truckers with a straight shot to the port from I-395, I-95 or the Dolphin and keep them off downtown streets.

The tunnel has been studied, restudied and studied some more since it was first proposed in 1981. Most of the engineering puzzles have been solved.

The price tag remains the problem: \$1.5 billion, at last count, for one mile of roadway in a state that can count its transportation tunnels on one finger.

## **THINKING B-I-G**

Winton, who likes to think B-I-G and figure out how to pay for things later, has a slightly different solution: He wants to move all the cargo from the port on rail cars. Containers would travel -- below street level -- along the FEC railroad corridor through Wynwood, Lemon City, Little Haiti and then swing west at 72nd Street toward Hialeah.

Truckers would pick up the cargo at a secure port-controlled facility that would be built in west Miami-Dade, probably an auto-auction lot or underused rail yard.

Forget the gargantuan price tag and indulge in a moment of Wintonian reflection. Look at all the benefits:

- Downtown wins. The dream of a pedestrian-friendly Miami -- peaceful sidewalks teeming with million-dollar condo-dwellers, performing arts center patrons and the suit-and-tie office crowd -- takes a giant step forward.
- Truckers win. Instead of wasting an entire day trying to make one trip between the port and the west Miami-Dade warehouses, the big rigs can make two or three trips.
- Commuters win. Imagine removing 5,000 tractor-trailers a day, some of them illegally overweight, from the already dangerous Dolphin.

(Snap fingers here.) Back to reality.

Other cities that have pushed rail lines below street level and built large inland container terminals have found the venture incredibly expensive.

Eddie Gonzalez, president of Seaboard Marine, the port's biggest client, said Winton's dream isn't feasible in today's trade climate. Gonzalez said adding another layer of off-loading -- ship-to-train and train-to-truck -- will result in time-consuming delays. Cargo carriers will look to competing ports rather than wait, he said.

Regardless, Winton -- with the aid of County Commissioners Jose "Pepe" Diaz, Bruno Barreiro and Transportation Chairman Carlos Gimenez -- intends to ask the Metropolitan Planning Organization to conduct a serious study on the viability of a suppressed cargo railway.

If the ship-to-rail scenario ultimately proves unrealistic, then the pols say they will unite behind a tunnel, with the backing and blessing of the business community, the cargo carriers and maybe even unionized truckers.

In the short term, Barreiro wants the MPO to reconsider a short-term "quick fix" for truckers: widening Northeast Fifth and Sixth streets between the port and I-95. A new I-95 on-ramp, built between the existing spans, would carry trucks directly to the westbound Dolphin.

### **SIMILAR PLAN'S DEMISE**

A similar plan died a brutal death the last time it was floated in 2003. An unlikely alliance of angry Overtown residents, fearful of increasing truck traffic in their neighborhood, and federal court judges, trying to prevent another Oklahoma City bombing, objected. The MPO killed it.

Barreiro thinks the time is right to propose the idea again, given the potential for 120,000 new residents living in 60,000 condo units between Brickell and the Design District in the next couple of years.

"With all of those new condos going up, it's going to be a nightmare if we don't do something right now," he said.