



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

**News Clip**

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*Miami-Dade County commissioners took another step toward changing the face of downtown Miami -- and giving the Marlins a permanent home.*

Miami-Dade commissioners continued a lightning-quick march Tuesday toward a massive face-lift for downtown Miami, voting to help finance four major projects worth billions of dollars.

After eight hours of debate, commissioners voted 9-4 to adopt a pact with Miami to extend the life and boundaries of the city's Community Redevelopment Agencies as a way to spur a wide array of projects.

Among them: building a tunnel from Watson Island to the Port of Miami, creating a museum park, paying off hundreds of millions in construction debt at the Performing Arts Center and generating millions in affordable housing in Overtown.

Another major beneficiary: the Florida Marlins, whose hopes for a permanent home are closer than ever. By paying off the PAC debts, the agreement shifts money toward construction of a \$525 million baseball stadium in Little Havana.

If the financial details work, South Florida's two-time World Champions would have a new home by Opening Day 2011 and a new name: the Miami Marlins.

"It's the biggest vote to date, but the next vote will be the biggest ever," said a relieved David Samson, Marlins team president, who has seen previous plans stall at the last moment.

County commissioners are scheduled to vote Thursday on a funding plan in which the county would spend \$249 million and the city \$121 million from mostly tourist tax dollars to pay for the stadium. The Marlins would pay \$155 million.

Some commissioners who approved the massive city-county pact say they didn't necessarily endorse a new stadium. Yet they signed off, they said, because the larger vision would benefit a wide range of constituencies.

"Today," said Commissioner Katy Sorenson, a longtime stadium critic, "I think we have the opportunity to embark on greatness, and we have to take the leap of faith."

## **CRITICISM DISCOUNTED**

She and colleagues approved the blueprint despite criticism the deal was rushed with little say from voters -- and little time for commissioners to digest it.

"You have to have foresight, and you have to have guts to stand in front of these issues," said Commissioner Jose "Pepe" Diaz.

Tuesday's marathon session began a day after Assistant County Manager Ian Yorty dashed across the county visiting as many commissioners as possible to explain the agreement.

Though in the works for years, the plan came to light only a week ago during a specially called meeting between County Commission Chairman Bruno Barreiro and Diaz. Two days later, Miami commissioners voted 4-1 to adopt the agreement, with Tomás Regalado the lone dissenter.

The speed of passage, rare for government and particularly so for a bureaucracy as vast as Miami-Dade, spurred protests from some quarters.

Morningside activist Elvis Cruz called the process, "unethical, deceitful and illegal."

Before the meeting, a small gathering of critics assembled outside County Hall, led by the Overtown activist group Power U Center for Change. On Monday, car magnate Norman Braman said he would finance a media campaign against the initiative and is researching a legal challenge.

Some commissioners had concerns of their own.

"This is way too much for us to try and absorb today," said Commissioner Natacha Seijas, who said she was briefed by Yorty only on Monday and didn't have time to study the consequences of such a historic pact.

Commissioner Joe Martinez tried but failed to delay the vote until Thursday.

"I just don't have enough knowledge to go ahead. All in all, I just don't know if it's good," he said.

Seijas, Martinez and Commissioners Rebeca Sosa and Javier Souto voted against.

But in the end, too many commissioners said they saw too many benefits to kill the mammoth plan.

"Guess what? The time is here, right now," said Commissioner Diaz. `` This is to take care of the future of our people."

## **CAUTION URGED**

It was a move approved by County Mayor Carlos Alvarez, who began the proceedings with a speech telling his commission to move forward -- but with caution.

"Let's be clear," Alvarez said. "I am supporting this interlocal agreement today because each project will come back for individual approval and public hearings by this board. This is crucial for citizen involvement."

Tuesday's vote sets in motion a long-term spending plan of some \$3 billion that is expected to accumulate by extending the Overtown/Park West and Omni CRAs.

CRAs are special districts where new tax revenue created within an area stays there. By expanding both districts, the city envisions massive new dollars that would become the wheel from which the financing spins.

Most would come from the Omni CRA. The agency is expected to accumulate enough money to pay off a \$484 million debt at the Carnival Center for the Performing Arts, allow for an \$88 million contribution to the nearly \$1 billion port tunnel, and set aside \$130 million to renovate Bicentennial Park, where voters in 2004 approved a plan for two museums.

### **MONEY FOR STADIUM**

It also would free up \$370 million in tourist tax dollars, much of which will go toward a baseball stadium. That money can be used only for sports and convention facilities.

Another \$50 million will go for a soccer stadium next to the proposed ballpark at the current site of the Orange Bowl.

"It's an investment in our city, our county, our region," Miami Mayor Manny Diaz, one of the plan's key architects, told commissioners.

Finally, the deal adds a projected \$605 million to revitalize Overtown and Park West, likely for affordable housing, infrastructure and job creation. An additional \$326 million will go to the city's general budget and \$196 million to the county -- but \$20 million will come out of the county's share to fund a controversial streetcar project for downtown.

County Commissioners Audrey Edmonson and Dennis Moss agreed to back the plan only after assurances that Overtown residents would get some affordable housing.

After being told that as much as \$175 million would be used for affordable housing well into the future, Edmonson voted yes.

"When it comes to Overtown, I will fight with all my will," she said.