



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

News Clip

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Subject: **County approves port tunnel, now must figure out how to pay for it**

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By Charlotte Libov

With Miami-Dade County commissioners green-lighting a \$1.2 billion tunnel at the Port of Miami, the focus now turns to how the county will pay its share of the bill.

"This is still soft in terms of identifying the funding sources and the amounts, but it's far enough along that I think the Florida Department of Transportation will consider this a green light to go to the next level," said Ric Katz, a tunnel project spokesman. But until state transit officials see "the dollar amount and understand the sources, we'll be waiting and watching," he said.

Commissioners unanimously approved the project Oct. 12 and agreed that the county would pay \$600 million to help fund the project. The board took the step after state officials warned that unless there is some progress on the project, the state may divert its money to other projects.

State officials also said the final funding plan must be completed by late February so the transportation department can award the contract to one of the three bidders.

According to County Manager George Burgess, about \$100 million will come from a General Obligation Bond approved by voters in 2004, \$114 million from transportation fees and about \$47 million in the form of a right of way donated by the port.

Miami officials are considering a contribution of \$50 million.

County officials have said the remaining \$300 million could be generated by tolls into the port or increased user fees for cargo and cruise ships.

In a recent interview, Commissioner José "Pepe" Diaz, a longtime tunnel supporter, said he thinks the project is necessary but hopes that the toll plan does not put too much of a burden on the port's users.

"The vote was to move forward to make this a reality. As far as the little intricate parts of it, we do have a lot of work to do. The manager has to come up with a funding source so we can move forward, and the port director has to find ways of not hurting our local companies," he said.

He said a tunnel is the most financially feasible way of easing congestion at the port. "A bridge would cost twice as much," he said.

The proposed tunnel, between Interstate 395 and the port, would enable trucks to bypass surface streets and ease downtown traffic.