

Palmetto Bay 87th Ave. Bridge Task Force
Report to the Transportation Planning Organization (TPO)
Request to Postpone the 87th Ave. Bridge Project

March 15, 2021

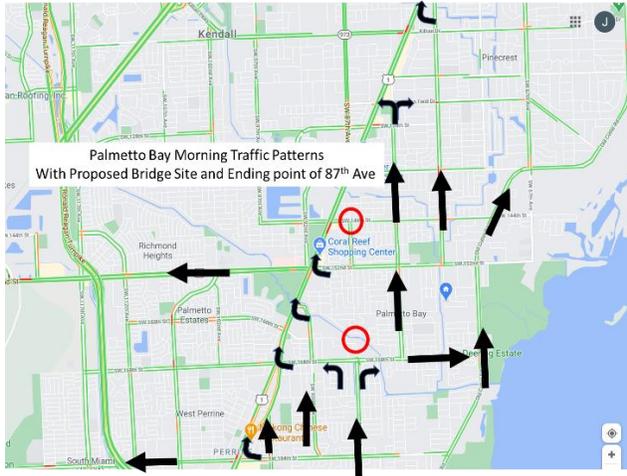
The Palmetto Bay 87th Ave. Bridge Task Force urges the TPO to postpone a decision on the proposed 87th Ave. bridge project. We are a group of four residents asked by the Palmetto Bay mayor and manager to hold multiple public meetings, collect residents' opinions, and write a report for the TPO. It is our unanimous judgment based on our findings that a bridge at 87th Ave. would further spread traffic congestion throughout the Village, negatively affect our quality of life, create unsafe streets for our children, and fail to solve the county's goal of effectively moving commuters north and south during rush hours. We find that the bridge proposal has created not only hostility between Palmetto Bay and Cutler Bay, but between Palmetto Bay residents. We recommend postponing the bridge decision to calm the rancor which did not exist before the proposal and allow time to conduct a 2021 study of traffic in Palmetto Bay and District 8. We join with the current and previous Palmetto Bay Village Councils in opposing the bridge project.

Postpone the bridge in order to conduct an accurate, current traffic analysis.

The county relies primarily on a dated 2016 traffic study to justify the bridge, even though commuter traffic on 87th Ave. has declined since March, 2020. We ask that the TPO postpone any decision to build the bridge until an up-to-date study of traffic in South Miami-Dade County is conducted which reflects the reality of District 8 commuting today, not five years ago.

What is the traffic situation in Palmetto Bay and District 8?

Palmetto Bay is a quiet, single-family residential village of 25,000 people. The village has not contributed to increased population and traffic, as our population has remained the same since 2000. Two major roads, U.S. 1 on the west and Old Cutler Road on the east funnel District 8 commuter traffic north and south, while five busy roads provide east-west accessibility. District 8 drivers commuting to work and taking children to Palmetto Bay schools head north in the morning and south later in the day. Before the pandemic in March, 2020, traffic from the south was severely backed up on U.S. 1 and Old Cutler, forcing drivers onto local and residential north-south streets, including 87th Ave., all of which became congested with cut through traffic. Since the pandemic began, traffic from the south has declined. More people are working from home and children are attending virtually or remaining at their neighborhood schools. The changed environment requires a new analysis of traffic patterns to assess whether a bridge is needed in the future.



The 87th Ave. bridge would move traffic deeper into Palmetto Bay, where it would be trapped by another canal which cannot be bridged.

Even if the 87th Ave. bridge were to be built, frustrated drivers would remain bottled up on Palmetto Bay’s residential streets. The county’s proposal is flawed because the 87th Ave. bridge at the 161 St. canal would carry traffic 21 blocks north only to be stopped at the 141 Ter. canal. This canal can never be bridged, because commercial buildings on its north side permanently block 87th Ave. Unable to proceed north, commuters would spread out into quiet residential streets in central Palmetto Bay, resulting in a traffic nightmare affecting hundreds of homes and thousands of residents.

How are four minutes in travel time saved by building the bridge?

The four minutes travel time the county asserts would be gained by a bridge is the result of dispersing more traffic through more neighborhood streets. The major streets of U.S. 1 and Old Cutler Road are over-capacity. Consequently, a bridge would allow greater vehicle spread over a greater number of neighborhood streets to gain the four minutes. More vehicles on neighborhood streets would lessen the load for congested major streets. Apps like WAZE and Google Maps direct traffic through the local streets of central Palmetto Bay.

What has the county done to reduce the need for a bridge?

The county has initiated several alternatives, which should alleviate traffic:

- Traffic “flow” on Old Cutler Road will increase by 30-50% by **four traffic circles on Old Cutler Road**, to be completed in 2023.
- Traffic “flow” on U.S. 1 will also increase once the county’s Smart Lights **synchronization of U.S. 1 traffic lights** is completed in 2022.
- Traffic in South Miami-Dade County is similarly projected to decrease when **Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)** is built, breaking ground in 2021.

What has Palmetto Bay done to reduce the need for a bridge?

- **Shuttle buses at two park-and-ride locations**, near U.S. 1 and near Old Cutler Road, take anyone via the busway directly to Dadeland South metro station during rush hours.

- At no charge, **Freebee electric vehicles** take anyone in Palmetto Bay to any location in Palmetto Bay, including the U.S. 1 commercial area, homes, and businesses six days a week from 7 am to 7 pm.
- Palmetto Bay has partnered with the county and neighboring Pinecrest to build an **updated street, bridge, and shared path on 136th St. for bicyclists and pedestrians**, to be built in 2021. This is part of the 10.5-mile perimeter Palmetto Bay Path, which allows people to traverse the village east-west from Old Cutler Road to the U.S. 1/busway and north-south from 136th St to 184th St.
- Palmetto Bay installed **no-right turn signs and stop sign on 87th Ave. to protect Millbrook**, a severely traffic-impacted neighborhood in south Palmetto Bay. The signs worked. Installed 2020.
- **Two traffic circles on 168th St at 87th Ave. and 82nd Ave.** move traffic on 168th St. when several schools' drop-off times create back-ups during morning rush hour. Currently flowing as planned.
- **A new, lower-density zoning code reduced by almost 2/3 the number of future residential units** permitted in Palmetto Bay's Downtown. Less traffic will be generated in the U.S.1 corridor. Passed in 2020.
- Village of Palmetto Bay **Mobility Hub and Transit Infrastructure Plan** (Concept Design Completed 2020) TPO Grant. Proposed Village Transit Shelters: 152nd Street & S.W. 77th Ave. (Coral Reef Hub), S.W. 168 Street & S.W. Old Cutler Road (Old Cutler Hub), Franjo Road & Hibiscus Street (Downtown Hub), S.W. 184th Street & Old Cutler Road (Village Center/Eureka Hub)

Unfair procedure was used in passing the bridge project.

We reject the idea that the procedural underpinnings of the current proposal comport with principles of equity. Equity required due process. The people of the Village of Palmetto Bay who reside near the termination points of 87th Ave. deserve full notice of this proposal, along with full committee meetings. Equity demands a full consideration of the pros and cons of the proposal, along with consideration of alternative plans that will work better for everyone. Without this, the proposal is corrosive to the American dream that these residents continue to work to maintain.

County commissioners amended Comm. Danielle Cohen Higgins resolution to exempt their districts from bridge projects. It is unfair for District 8 to "complete the grid," when 59 proposed bridge projects exist in other commission districts.