

Miami can't afford to have Port of Miami tunnel delayed

Recent stories and the May 8 editorial, *FDOT, city should work together*, regarding Miami Beach's concerns about construction of the Port of Miami Tunnel did not present a balanced view — namely, the overwhelming benefits the tunnel will have on our region's economy and quality of life.

Failure to move the port tunnel project forward according to schedule would be devastating for downtown Miami. Each day up to 13,000 vehicles, a large percentage of which are heavy trucks and buses, enter the port by way of downtown Miami streets. This traffic is a substantial and persistent barrier to downtown's continued improvement, especially harming the emerging arts and entertainment

district near Interstate 395.

Enormous public and private investment in the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts, the Miami Art Museum, the Museum of Science and new residential development has been made in good faith with the understanding that a solution to port-related truck traffic was being expeditiously implemented.

Since 2002, downtown Miami has seen new development with a value close to \$13 billion. Downtown is now home to an estimated 70,000 residents, up from 40,000 in 2000, with another 15,000 anticipated over the next five years. Added to that, close to 200,000 workers enter downtown each day, making it the largest employment

center in the state.

The problem of truck traffic is not simply one of noise, aesthetics or inconvenience; it is one of public safety and welfare. The Downtown Development Authority and the city of Miami have been working for years to establish downtown as a pedestrian and bicycle-friendly environment. But port traffic has a negative effect on pedestrian safety.

Additionally, the economic effects of the port tunnel cannot be overstated. Second only to the airport as an economic engine in Miami-Dade County, the port generates 176,000 jobs for our community. Over the next four years, port-tunnel construction will bring an additional 600 direct jobs.

The port tunnel project has been two decades in the making, with a lengthy public process and extremely detailed traffic mitigation plans to ensure that construction does not cause congestion or disrupt traffic flow on Miami Beach's main artery, I-395.

The state Department of Transportation has expressed that if we wait, tunnel financing will fall through, and the project will be derailed. The Miami DDA appreciates Miami Beach's concerns and will work with the city to ensure its needs are well represented in the plans. But it should not be a barrier to seeing the tunnel through to fruition.

- **ALYCE ROBERTSON**, executive director, Miami Downtown Development Authority, Miami