

# MIAMI TODAY

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## Extend proposed Underdeck linear park to the bayfront parks

In recent days we have seen the unfortunate news that approximately \$60 million in federal funding for the so-called Underdeck has been taken back by the government. This money was pledged to the City of Miami as an incentive to dress up what is really just empty space below the "bridge to nowhere" that we now call the "Signature Bridge," with its soon to be finished tarantula arches that will adorn Miami's Park West neighborhood.



Xavier Suarez

The story is long and somewhat tragic, but it can still have a happy ending.

The dream design for the area, which was shared by my son and myself, was to underground the entire stretch of SR 836 as it connects with I-395 on its way to Miami Beach, via the MacArthur Causeway. Burying this elevated highway would have undone a bad design that tore up Overtown with awful columns and concrete ceilings to what should have been a normal, ground level offramp from I-95, as other cities have.

Doing its best to adjust to a bad hand dealt by unimaginative folks in the county and state, the City of Miami convinced the state and federal governments to not only fund a 33-acre linear park under the Signature Bridge but guarantee the maintenance thereof for the future. Now that promise was shattered.

But Miami is the little city that could. Our Downtown Development Authority is under attack for using too much of its funding for marketing events, at a time when downtown has become a thriving neighborhood that combines pleasant (if expensive)

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residential components with an arena, a performing arts center, and two museums, all surrounded (on the east) by gorgeous parks. It remains Miami's principal workplace, and is connected via Metromover to Brickell, the Health district, the civic center and the booming Edgewater area, which houses the school board headquarters. For the wealthy and near-wealthy, there is no better place to live, work and play.

There are three possible sources of funding that can revive the Underdeck's linear park to Overtown, which is quickly becoming the venue for 4,000 housing units. One is the DDA itself, with its \$21.5 million budget. Another is what remains of the Miami Forever Bonds, approved in 2017 and initially providing \$400 million in bondable capacity that includes \$100 million for resilience projects.

The third source of funds is the combined federal and state transportation funding that is managed by the Metropolitan Planning Organization. Its able executive director, Aileen Bouclé, has proposed that Biscayne Boulevard, right as it connects downtown to the Performing Arts Center, needs to be redesigned to allow emergency evacuations to flow through what is now a slow-as-molasses agglomeration of traffic signals and disjointed intersections.

The best solution is to do what is called a "cut-and-cover" undergrounding of at least one block of Biscayne Boulevard as it flows



Underdeck was proposed to become a walking park from Overtown to downtown Miami.

north from downtown. Doing this connects, in a westward direction, with the Underdeck, extending the proposed linear park from Overtown all the way to the bayfront parks.

The naysayers will say that undergrounding a boulevard is impossibly expensive, given Miami's high water table. But cut-and-cover design only reaches down about ten feet, barely touching the water table. And the "cover" part adds another 10 to 12 feet of earthen mound that allows pedestrians, cyclists, and the proverbial parent with a stroller to reach the museums and bayfront parks. It would literally connect Overtown/Park West to the bay, undoing in the process some of the disconnect and ugliness that elevated highways brought during the last century.

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