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## Don Shula, Snapper Creek expressways to get electronic toll collection

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Two more expressways in Miami-Dade, Don Shula and Snapper Creek, turn to electronic toll collection this weekend.

At midnight Saturday, the toll plaza on State Road 874 -- Don Shula -- will close and cash will no longer be accepted as payment. As of that moment, all tolls on the expressway will be collected electronically either via SunPass or a new system called Toll-by-Plate.

As Don Shula goes cashless, tolls will be collected for the first time on Snapper Creek, one of the shortest expressways on the Miami-Dade Expressway Authority system linking Don Shula with U.S. 1 in the Kendall area.

While electronic tolling has dawned largely without controversy, the decision to charge tolls on the Snapper Creek Expressway angered many people who live near the road because it will be the first time they will be compelled to pay tolls on that road.

But the anger lessened somewhat after MDX board members passed a resolution June 29 ordering authority staffers to explore the possibility of giving some motorists rebates on toll payments.

"We look forward to working with MDX to develop a meaningful customer rewards program," said a statement issued by leaders of Kendall Homeowners Association and the Citizens Against Nonconcurrency Task Force, David Lyons and Barry J. White.

Activation of electronic toll collection on Snapper Creek and Don Shula continues the inexorable trend in South Florida aimed at rendering cashless virtually all major expressways in the region.

The first expressway to go cashless was the Gratigny Parkway in north Miami-Dade on June 7.

Next up will be the 47-mile-long Homestead Extension of Florida's Turnpike from Florida City to the Broward County line -- on schedule for electronic conversion early next year, turnpike spokeswoman Sonyha Rodríguez-Miller said Thursday.

State Road 112, the Airport Expressway, is scheduled to convert sometime in 2012. And State Road 836, possibly the busiest expressway on the Miami-Dade Expressway Authority system, is not scheduled for conversion until sometime in 2013, said Cindy Polo-Serantes, a spokeswoman for the authority known as MDX.

Polo-Serantes said cashless roads are not just a path to a more technological future, but a way for commuters to contribute their share of the authority's cost of operating and maintaining its five toll roads.

For decades, many motorists drove only on the untolled segments of the authority system -- never paying a toll either electronically or in cash. With electronic toll collection, which does not depend on toll plazas, drivers will pay a toll whether they use the entire road or only a small stretch. The electronic toll, known as Open Road Tolling or ORT, is based on distance traveled.

“MDX receives no federal funding, no property, sales or gasoline tax,” said Polo-Serantes. “The five roadways MDX operates and maintains are almost entirely funded by toll revenues.”

Polo-Serantes said increased toll collection will be used not only for continued operation and maintenance of existing roadways, but to expand them. Among pending projects is the lengthening of the Gratigny Parkway east to Interstate 95 and west to the turnpike.

SunPass, the transponder many motorists attach to their windshield, chirps in some models when the vehicle passes under a signal-reading device. The toll is then deducted from a prepaid account.

Images the camera takes are used for toll collection as part of the Toll-by-Plate program. People who don't have or don't want SunPass can simply use the MDX expressways and then wait for a bill in the mail with a convenience surcharge.

For more information, including maps and new toll rates, visit [www.mdxort.com](http://www.mdxort.com).

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