

Dear Mayor and City Commissioners,

I appreciate the City of Key West's interest in addressing transportation challenges that affect visitors, residents, and businesses alike. Mobility is a real issue in the Florida Keys, and it is one that deserves thoughtful, lawful, and strategic consideration.

I want to be clear at the outset: I am not opposed, in principle, to the idea of tourism-related transportation being supported by Tourist Development Tax (TDT) revenues if such use is structured in a manner that is consistent with Florida law, fiscally responsible, and equitable across Monroe County.

However, there are several important considerations that must be part of this discussion.

First, Tourist Development Tax revenues are governed by Florida Statute §125.0104, which narrowly defines allowable uses. The statute, and subsequent Florida Attorney General opinions, make clear that TDT is not a general-purpose funding source. Transportation expenditures are only permissible where the primary purpose of the service is to promote and support tourism, not to fund general public transit. Any application of TDT to transportation must therefore be carefully designed, documented, and justified within this legal framework.

Second, the current fiscal year budget has already been adopted. All TDT revenues for this year are allocated to approved uses through a public process, including marketing, sales, events, and visitor services that businesses rely on, particularly during shoulder and low seasons. This is not simply a policy question; it is a matter of fiduciary responsibility and compliance.

Third, Visit Florida Keys and the Tourist Development Council serve all of Monroe County, not one municipality. Transportation challenges tied to tourism exist not only in Key West, but also in Islamorada and other areas. Because TDT is a countywide tax paid by visitors throughout the Keys, any use of those funds must be evaluated through a countywide lens. Selecting a single route or island without a broader plan raises legitimate equity concerns and sets a precedent that would be difficult to defend.

For these reasons, I believe the appropriate next step is a deliberate, countywide evaluation of tourist-oriented transportation needs. That conversation belongs at the TDC and Board of County Commissioners level, where statutory authority and budgetary responsibility reside.

I raised this issue with the TDC Board in December to ensure awareness and to signal that transportation is a topic worth studying thoughtfully as part of our long-term destination management strategy. I welcome continued collaboration with the City, the County, and our business community as that discussion evolves.

Transportation is too important legally, economically, and operationally, to address piecemeal. If we pursue this, we should do so with a clear plan, proper legal process, and a commitment to fairness across the Florida Keys.

Respectfully,

Kara Franker

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