

Public tells state to slow down on controversial toll roads

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Protestors line the street outside the first toll roads meeting in Tampa. Photo by Jim Tatum

The Florida Department of Transportation is getting the same message over and over when they have the public meetings, and that is that the public does not want the toll roads.

Seemingly putting the cart before the horse, the main theme of the last Suncoast Connector webinar dealt with automobile technology, far from the important issues of how they will be paid for and where exactly are they going.

But from the beginning, the spirit of the meetings has been

“don’t sweat the details, it’s a done deal, just vote it in.”
Along with that is the guiding principal “protecting the environment is our number one goal***”

***whenever possible, that is.

Read the entire article [here in the News Press](#).

Comments by OSFR historian Jim Tatum.

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*– A river is like a life: once taken,
it cannot be brought back © Jim Tatum*

Public tells state to slow down on controversial toll roads

Chad Gillis, Fort Myers News-Press

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Public speakers said they’d like to see the state slow down on the roads. The routes haven’t been selected, and the idea for the roadways didn’t come from traditional sources.

A task force charged with helping find a path for a major highway from the Tampa area to Georgia talked Tuesday about emerging technologies but got drowned out by the public.

Several environmental groups and residents of the area spoke against the road, which was mandated last year by Gov. Ron DeSantis.

The meeting was held online due to state restrictions on gatherings larger than 10 due to the pandemic.

Many of the public speakers said they’d like to see the state slow down on the roads. The routes haven’t been selected, and

the idea for the roadways didn't come from traditional sources.

"Attendance for this webinar is lower – and that includes task force members and everyday Floridians who are concerned about the devastating impacts of these roads," said Lindsay Cross, with Florida Conservation Voters. "This project is bad for our water, wildlife, public health and rural communities. It deserves to be fully vetted, not rushed through when peoples' lives and livelihoods are threatened. Proceeding with the roads-to-ruin project as-is in a time of unprecedented crisis is an act of bad government and a waste of taxpayer dollars."

Two members of the public spoke in favor of the toll road, saying the toll roads will provide broadband services to rural areas that currently don't have that technology.

Called the Suncoast connector, this highway would follow a similar path as Highway 19, which stretches from north of Tampa Bay to southern Georgia.

It's one of three controversial toll roads proposed by DeSantis and approved late in the 2019 legislative session.

Many in the public have criticized the entire process because the idea didn't come from the state Department of Transportation or transportation planners, as is typically the case for highways and major transportation networks.

A second toll road will connect the Naples and Orlando areas and may use the existing State Road 29 right-of-way in Collier for that route.

SR 29 borders federal parks like the Big Cypress National Preserve and the Florida Panther Wildlife Refuge.

Deviating from that roadway would likely mean more environmental impacts and, thus, more issues to deal with during the approval

and permitting process, task force members have said.

The third proposed highway would connect the Suncoast roadway to the existing Florida Turnpike network.

Backers, like the Florida Trucking Association and Florida Chamber of Commerce, say in addition to the highways bringing broadband to rural areas, they will take congestion off other major travel corridors and bring economic growth to local communities.

All three have drawn mostly criticism from people who live in those areas, at least the ones who have spoken so far at the task force meetings...