

**For Immediate Release**

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**Toll Roads to Nowhere Bill – A Declaration of War on Florida’s Environment**  
*It is now up to Governor DeSantis to save taxpayers, farms, and natural Florida*

**Tallahassee, FL** – The Florida House of Representatives today voted approval of the Florida Toll Expressways Bill, aka the Toll Roads to Nowhere Bill, (SB 7068). In response, Sierra Club Florida released a statement and a fact sheet titled “*In Response to Evasion, Spin, & Ignorance on the Toll Roads Legislation*” that debunks the fallacious and misleading arguments made on the House floor by bill sponsors.

**Statement of Frank Jackalone, Sierra Club Florida Chapter Director and Timothy Martin, Sierra Club Florida Chapter Conservation Chair**

Today the Republican majority of the Florida House of Representatives approved a disastrous Toll Roads to Nowhere Bill that would be ruinous to the rural heartland of Florida and our state’s nature coast. The urban sprawl that would accompany the new toll roads would be deadly, devouring hundreds of thousands of acres of rural and natural lands, [fragmenting wildlife habitat](#) and polluting our rivers, springs, lakes and coastal waters.

Passage of the Toll Roads to Nowhere Bill is the equivalent of a declaration of war by the Legislature on Florida’s Environment, and it moves Sierra Club to respond in kind. It is the worst bill for Florida’s environment we have seen in more than 20 years.

Florida taxpayers will pay over \$1 billion for these needless roads over the next decade. Money that could be spent on relieving our actual highway congestion issues will now instead be funneled into 320 miles of toll roads that will create massive sprawl and traffic. It’s a perversion of the old tax and spend analogy, taking tax money from hard working Floridians to give away to developers and landowners. In return they will pave over our rural and natural areas to line their own pockets with profits.

The Toll Roads to Nowhere bill is largely a pet project of one legislator, Senate President Bill Galvano. Galvano used his extraordinary powers over the state budget and bills sponsored by each Senator, to pressure his colleagues to approve the bill whether they liked it or not. He then did some horse-trading with Republican leadership of the Florida House of Representatives to make sure his bill would be passed there. In short, this one man imposed his will on the Senate, and then maneuvered House Republicans to vote for this terrible bill. Sierra Club is grateful to Representatives Evan Jenne, Margaret Good and 34 other House Democrats who refused to be intimidated and voted against the bill.

We join today with more than 90 other environmental organizations, citizens groups, and businesses to urge Governor DeSantis to veto the Toll Roads to Nowhere Bill. The Governor should ask Legislators to take a second look at this concept next year and broaden it into a study on how to manage Florida’s growth, stop harmful pollution, transition to clean, renewable energy, and meet the Sunshine State’s transportation needs over the next several decades.

We are hopeful that Governor DeSantis, who has stated that he is sensitive to the cost of toll roads on average Floridians, will recognize the bill as an affront to fiscal conservatism and veto it. And we haven’t forgotten that candidate DeSantis promised at a campaign stop in the Everglades on September 12, 2018,

that he would “represent, maybe, an emergence of a Teddy Roosevelt-style Republican Party here in Florida.” We remind the Governor that Roosevelt used his Presidential authority to establish 150 national forests, 51 federal bird reserves, four national game preserves, five national parks and 18 national monuments on over 230 million acres of public land; that’s quite a contrast to a Florida Legislature that just this year slashed spending for the Florida Forever program and passed a bill that would destroy much of the state’s rural and natural lands.

Should Governor DeSantis sign the Toll Roads to Nowhere Bill, Sierra Club will mobilize our resources to stop construction of the ruinous roads. We will organize opposition in impacted rural communities; activate more than 230,000 members and supporters in Florida; go to court to stop destruction of our natural lands; and hold accountable legislators who voted for the bill in the next election.

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### **In Response to Evasion, Spin, & Ignorance on the Toll Roads Legislation**

- While supporters claim the three corridors have been “well vetted”, the reality is that the FDOT Interstate 75 Relief Task Force<sup>1</sup> recommended in 2016 that rather than new roads, a better approach was expanding the vehicle capacity of the interstate and connecting highways.
- Once this bill becomes law the only thing that comes back to the legislature for approval are appropriations to fund the Multi—use Corridors of Regional Economic Significance (MCORES)
- The 2009 motor vehicle fee increases went directly into general revenues to make up for shortfall due to the recession- they were never part of the Transportation Trust Fund. This legislation permanently redirects these general revenues to the Transportation Trust fund, letting FDOT decide how to use them, and shorting programs like education and health care these needed revenues.
- Supporters claim that MCORES contemplates all types of transportation, including light rail and airports; however the legislation specifically states the project undertaken to be tolled roads.<sup>2</sup>
- The FDOT estimate of toll revenues for the original Suncoast Parkway (which allowed it to be built under the 12- 30 year rule<sup>3</sup>) was estimated to be \$150 million

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.i75relief.com/finalReport.html>

<sup>2</sup> Lines 168-171 SB 7068

<sup>3</sup> For a proposed turnpike project, that, as determined by the department before the issuance of revenue bonds for the project, the estimated net revenues of the proposed turnpike project, excluding feeder roads and turnpike improvements, will be sufficient to pay at least 50 percent of the annual debt service on the bonds associated with the project by the end of the 12th year of operation and to pay at least 100 percent of the debt service on the bonds by the end of the 30th year of operation. In implementing this

by 2014 and in reality came in at \$22 million. The revenue estimate for 2019 is just shy of \$30 million.<sup>4</sup>

- If the toll revenues for MCORES are not sufficient to support the toll roads, funding will be taken from revenues of the Florida Turnpike Enterprise, which receives tolls collected from all of Florida's toll roads.<sup>5</sup> Today the state of Florida heavily subsidizes the Suncoast Parkway with funds from other toll roads.
- What if the Florida Turnpike Connector (to the Suncoast Parkway extension) is not approved for construction but the Southwest-Central Florida Connector is? Will people simply be dumped on to I-4?
- FDOT is not obligated to accept the recommendations of the three task forces and local officials who review the proposed corridors.
- Supporters claim FDOT will follow the National Environmental Policy Act (**NEPA**) guidelines. NEPA requires Federal Agencies to assess the environmental effects of their proposed actions prior to making decisions.<sup>6</sup> FDOT is only required to follow NEPA when federal funding is used for construction. There is no indication in the legislation or statements of sponsors that federal dollars will be used or NEPA will be adhered to.
- The bill's sponsors often cited hurricane evacuation as an impetus for this bill, but the State's own emergency management website urges people to "select an evacuation destination that is nearest to your home, preferably in the same county." The money they want to spend on these tollways could be better spent shoring up local shelters so that Floridians can heed the state's advice.

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paragraph, up to 50 percent of the adopted work program costs of the project may be funded from turnpike revenues. FS **338.221(8)(a)**

<sup>4</sup>

[http://www.floridasturnpike.com/documents/reports/Traffic%20Engineers%20Annual%20Report/2017/9\\_Forecast%20Summary.pdf](http://www.floridasturnpike.com/documents/reports/Traffic%20Engineers%20Annual%20Report/2017/9_Forecast%20Summary.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Lines 275-285 SB 7068

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.fdot.gov/environment/nepaassignment.shtm>