

# M-CORES = Big Sham, Big Bucks, Big Questions

## 1. The task force process is looking more and more like a big *sham*; a *rubber stamp* of Senate President Galvano's costly whim.

- We found out on August 27 that the task forces will not be involved in determining routes. In fact, FDOT announced on October 16 that the routes will be announced in January 2020!
- The law signed by Governor DeSantis doesn't give the task forces the final say on whether the roads get built; it calls for highway construction to begin by 2022 no matter what the task forces recommend.
- At the House Transportation & Tourism Appropriations Subcommittee Wednesday, October 16, 2019, Rep. Jay Trumbull, R-Panama City said "The onus is on the department to make sure that there's enough public input moving forward, that it doesn't look like a card trick."

## 2. To add insult to injury, the "no build" recommendation may not even be an official option for the task forces.

- On October 16, the Sarasota Herald-Tribune reported that Will Watts, FDOT Chief Engineer, said "*No build is always an option*" and "*task forces can make any recommendation they want to.*"
- But, another FDOT source says "*the M-CORES Task Forces will develop guiding principles regarding avoid, minimize, mitigate, and enhance to guide the Department's planning and project development work and make related recommendations. The "no-build" option will be considered during the project development process.*" FDOT is in charge of the project development process, not the task forces.

**Bottom line:** Whether or not they can recommend "no build," task force members have no authority to actually stop these toll roads. They will only be able to recommend "minimizing" the catastrophic destruction these roads will inflict (whatever that means).

## 3. The "consensus based" decision-making mechanism being used with the task forces is part of the problem. It appears to be designed to effectively eliminate the "no build" recommendation option and to push task force members to stay quiet if they want to oppose or vote "no" on any proposed recommendation:

Straight from the FDOT M-CORES slide show:

### *Consensus Building Process*

- *Task forces will seek consensus on recommendations*
- *Consensus is striving for agreements members **can support, accept, live with, or agree not to oppose***
- *Task forces will develop recommendations using consensus building techniques with the assistance of facilitators*

## 4. "Nobody" wants these roads!

- Who spoke up for adding 300 miles to Florida's toll roads? Only road builders! Tampa Bay Times reporter Lawrence Mower revealed on October 6 that "*Out of hundreds of public comments solicited by the Florida Department of Transportation in August about the largest toll system expansion in 60 years, only two dozen came*

*from people in favor of building the three roads. Of those, nearly all came from road builders, contractors and engineers who sent their endorsements via personal email addresses without disclosing their employers."*

- A "Heartland Parkway" which would have connected Polk and Lee counties was rejected in 2007 due to financial infeasibility and the fact that the proposed route would have environmental impacts on a grander scale ever encountered in a toll road project. This M-CORES route is even longer and includes more panther habitat than the 2007 proposal!
- In 2016, the I-75 Relief Task Force removed plans to build a new road because the task force could not reach consensus. The resulting recommendation was to enhance the existing road network.
- These "roads to ruin" represent the worst type of policy-making. It's a massively expensive pet project pushed by one powerful legislative leader, the senate president, and powerful special interests that write big campaign checks.
- Road builders, the trucking industry and big developers decided we needed 300 plus miles of new rural toll roads, not the engineers, planners and other experts at FDOT. This plan was not in the FDOT 5-year plan until Governor DeSantis signed the bill.

**5. We have a lot of questions.** And task force members should be able to answer all of them. We encourage you to include one or more in your public comments:

- Is a "no build" recommendation a possible conclusion of the Task Force's deliberations?
- Is consensus required for a recommendation to be made by the task force?
- What happens if consensus on an issue or proposal is not achieved?
- If consensus is required, does that mean that one task force member can stop any particular recommendation?
- If consensus is *not required*, then what will "oppose" votes mean and how will they be represented in the official record?

If the task forces have no authority, are discouraged from voting "no" on proposed recommendations, and have no ability to stop the plans, then the process not only looks like a card trick but is a big, fat tax-payer funded card trick. A sham. Nothing but a rubber stamp.

### **Terrible Trend**

The "roads to ruin" toll road plan is the worst Florida infrastructure idea since the Everglades Jetport scheme and the Cross-Florida Barge Canal fiasco.

These unwanted, unneeded, outrageously expensive toll roads and the failure to provide funding for the Land Acquisition Trust Fund (by completely ignoring the 2014 constitutional amendment) are part of a trend on the part of the Florida Legislature and Governor DeSantis to use Floridians' tax dollars and land for their own and special interest purposes, rather than for what the state's voters want and need. **It is maddening, should be criminal, and requires forceful action by people like us to STOP IT.**

