



The Suncoast Connector: What We Still Need to Know

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Senator Pat Neal
Chairman of the Board of Trustees

Dominic M. Calabro
President & Chief Executive Officer

Dear Fellow Taxpayers

Florida recently began one of the largest transportation infrastructure projects in modern Florida history: the Multi-use Corridors of Regional Economic Significance (M-CORES) program.

Since its creation through legislation in 2019, the program has been the subject of study by official entities and the focus of significant public debate. Initially, numerous respected and credible business associations expressed strong support for the program while many environmental groups strongly opposed it. Since then, battle lines have continued to grow and shift as new issues arise, additional information emerges, and more and more stakeholders make their voices heard.

Despite this extensive public discourse, what they are arguing about is largely theoretical, as many questions remain about the program itself and the specific projects which comprise it.

One of the foundational elements of the M-CORES program is the expansion of the state's toll road system (the Florida Turnpike System) through the creation of three new major road segments. One of these segments is the Suncoast Connector, which will traverse approximately 150 miles north-south on Florida's west coast from Citrus County to Jefferson County (and the Florida-Georgia state line), and is the focus of this report.

The benefits of a massive rural infrastructure project could range from increased mobility to improved access to enhanced economic development, all of which would benefit the communities served and the state as a whole. On the other hand, environmental issues, traffic concerns, and the possibility of further isolating already pocket-sized communities are reasonable concerns which should be taken seriously.

While much remains unknown about the specifics of the Suncoast Parkway (including the exact route of the road) this Florida TaxWatch report examines the potential costs and long-term financial challenges and obligations of constructing the Suncoast Connector portion of the M-CORES program. Essentially, this analysis focuses on the need for, cost of, and revenue potential from the Suncoast Connector toll road as an expansion of Florida's Turnpike System.

These questions are especially important because the turnpike system is generally self-financing through tolls paid by users and little or no state and local tax dollars flow to the turnpike system for maintenance or even recovery of building costs. This user-fee-based arrangement makes the turnpike system both beneficial for taxpayers and the financial wellbeing of the Florida Turnpike System. State law even recognizes the vital importance of protecting this financial arrangement by requiring an economic feasibility test for new projects so the system does not become overloaded with costs and debt, which could eventually require a bailout.

Florida TaxWatch has historically been and continues to be a strong and effective advocate for public investments in Florida transportation infrastructure, which among other benefits generally have short- and long-term economic stimulus effects by creating jobs and capital investment. But as with all taxpayer-funded investments, what must be carefully analyzed—and yet remains to be examined—is whether this multi-billion-dollar investment is likely to pay off for Floridians in the expected time frame. It is vitally important for these fiscal issues to be thoroughly examined beforehand to protect current and future taxpayers, as well as Florida's financial health. It is our hope that this report can be a catalyst for that important conversation.

Sincerely,


Dominic M. Calabro

President & CEO

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2019, the Florida Legislature passed SB 7068, creating the Multi-Use Corridors of Regional Economic Significance (M-CORES) program. M-CORES would build three major new toll roads to be part of the Florida Turnpike System. The ambitious goals of these projects go beyond expanding toll roads. These corridors will accommodate multiple modes of transportation and multiple types of infrastructure, bringing broadband, sewer and stormwater to rural communities that have been historically underserved.

The law designates three corridors for the new roads:

- Suncoast Connector - Citrus County to Jefferson County (150 miles)
- Northern Turnpike Connector - Northern terminus of the Florida Turnpike northwest to the Suncoast Parkway (40 miles); and
- Southwest-Central Florida Connector - Collier County to Polk County (140 miles).

The M-CORES law was passed before an analysis of the need for, or the impacts of, these new roads was completed. These projects were not in FDOT work programs or under study, and there is no requirement, or even a designated opportunity, for the Legislature to approve the projects after they are approved and developed by FDOT.

There are many prominent supporters of M-CORES and they believe it is a forward-looking project that will accommodate the state's rapid growth, bring economic development and needed infrastructure to rural communities, and relieve congestion. There are also many opponents who are vocal in their concerns that the road is not needed, will be expensive and not economically feasible, bring sprawl and development to communities that do not want it, and cause considerable damage to the environment and agriculture.

The M-CORES legislation provides some funding for the project that previously went to General Revenue and will grow to just over \$100 million annually. Additionally, \$35 million of existing turnpike revenue was dedicated annually to the program (for corridor access and connectivity). This funding will likely not be enough to complete the project on its own. The new roads must be tolled facilities, so toll revenue and bonds will be used (subject to a feasibility test).

Three task forces were created by the law to study each of the corridors and their work is underway. The task forces must issue their written reports by November 15, 2020. To the extent feasible, the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) shall adhere to the task force recommendations in its development of the project, but they have no power to stop the project. The law mandates the construction of the projects must begin no later than December 31, 2022 and be open to traffic no later than December 31, 2030.

No cost estimates have been developed since the routes are not established and specifics are unknown. This report uses cost estimates and data from other toll projects to establish a potential range of estimated costs for the Suncoast Connector. Using these other projects, this report estimates a range of cost from \$4.0 billion to \$10.5 billion, which makes it doubtful that using bonds alone to pay for the construction portion of total costs would be feasible, at least with toll rates that are in-line with the rest of the Turnpike. At the midpoint cost estimate, the Connector would need to produce \$2.37 million per mile in toll revenue to pay off the bonds to fund 70 percent of total costs (excluding design and right of way). This is 10 percent more than the

average revenue per mile of the whole Turnpike system. At the high point cost estimate, the Suncoast Connector would have to produce \$3.43 million per mile, 60 percent higher than the average for the Turnpike. This is 83 percent of the top per-mile revenue-producing segment of the Turnpike; however, the Turnpike has an average DVMT per lane mile that is more than eight times that of U.S. 19—the main road in the Suncoast Corridor.

If toll revenues are not sufficient to meet debt service requirements, the rest of the Turnpike will have to subsidize it. The tolls paid by drivers on other segments would help pay for the Connector and take revenue away from other turnpike improvement projects. The new toll road may also require funding from the State Transportation Trust Fund, diverting money from needed transportation projects.

This TaxWatch analysis finds that the Suncoast Connector is a risky project with what is sure to be a large price tag and little demonstrated transportation need. Complicating the process is that this project is moving forward while COVID-19 has the state facing major reductions in government revenue—including gas taxes and tolls.

INTRODUCTION

Florida is in the early stages of one of the biggest transportation projects in the state's history. The Multi-Use Corridors of Regional Economic Significance (M-CORES) project adds three new components to the Florida Turnpike System, and the law designates that “projects undertaken in the corridors identified...are tolled facilities and approved turkpike projects...considered as Strategic Intermodal System facilities.”¹ The ambitious goals of the project go beyond enhancement of the state's highway system—the roads are supposed to accommodate multiple modes of transportation and multiple types of infrastructure, bringing broadband, sewer and stormwater to rural communities that have been historically underserved.

The scope of this project is immense. It would add 330 miles to Florida's current 498-mile Turnpike system. The Turnpike's Mainline is only 320 miles. The largest of the previous 10 completed turnpike expansion projects is 42 miles (Suncoast Parkway).² The Suncoast Connector is the largest of the M-CORES project and perhaps the one with the most immediate and vocal opposition and concerns.

While it will examine M-CORES as a whole, this report focuses on the Suncoast Connector and, using cost estimates from other new toll road projects, develops an estimate of the potential range of total costs (design and engineering, right of way, and construction) and how much toll revenue must be produced to fund the bond debt service.

BACKGROUND ON M-CORES

M-CORES was created during the 2019 Florida Legislative Session (SB 7068). The stated purpose of M-CORES is to “revitalize rural communities, encourage job creation, and provide regional connectivity while leveraging technology, enhancing quality of life and public safety, and protecting the environment and natural resources.”³ The law created three task forces to study each of the corridors. They are large groups,

¹ Section 338.2278 (3), Florida Statutes

² The currently underway First Coast Expressway will be 49 miles when completed in 2026

³ Section 338.2278 (1), Florida Statutes

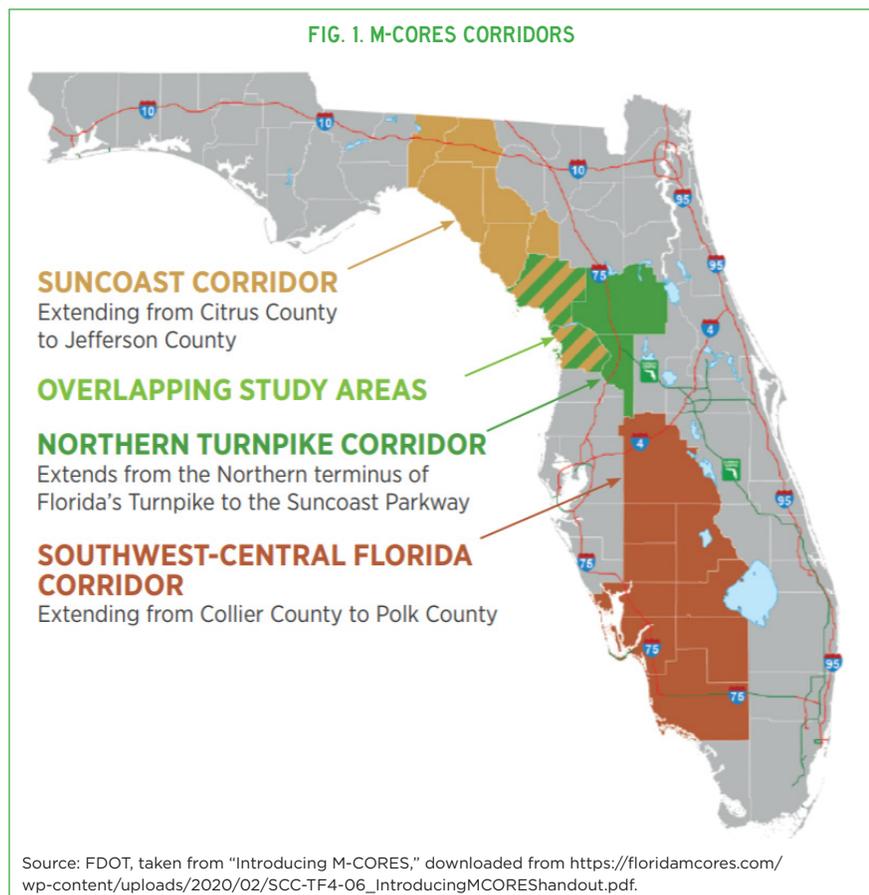
ranging from 39 to 47 members. The law required members from various state agencies,⁴ water management districts, MPOs, regional planning councils, one member from each local government in the corridor,⁵ and appropriate environmental groups. Representatives of non-profits were allowed to be included.⁶ The task forces will coordinate with the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) on all aspects of corridor analysis, including the use of multiple types of infrastructure to achieve the goals of the program. They must evaluate the need for the corridors and the impacts on the economy, the environment, and land use. To the extent feasible, FDOT shall adhere to the task force recommendations in its development of the project. The task forces have each met four times, had three webinars and held several “community open houses.”

Project development must be done in accordance with the FDOT’s rules, policies, and procedures and the projects are subject to economic and environmental feasibility requirements. The M-CORES law was passed before any analysis of the need for, or the impacts of, these new roads. They were not in the FDOT work program or under study. There is no requirement, or even a designated opportunity, for the Legislature to approve the projects after they are approved and developed by FDOT.

No specific routes have been set, but the law designates three relatively broad corridors:

- Suncoast Connector - Citrus County to Jefferson County (150 miles);
- Northern Turnpike Connector - Northern terminus of the Florida Turnpike northwest to the Suncoast Parkway (40 miles); and
- Southwest-Central Florida Connector - Collier County to Polk County (140 miles).

The task force must issue a written report by November 15, 2020 (extended from the original October 1, 2020 date due to COVID-19).



4 The Departments of: Environmental Protection, Education, Health , Economic Opportunity, Agriculture and Consumer Services, the Fish and Wildlife Commission and several state colleges. Though not required, there are also members from the Department of Business and Professional Regulation, the Public Service Commission, Enterprise Florida, CareerSource Florida, and Volunteer Florida.

5 Although the law specified a member from each local government, there are only county commissioners, no city or town is directly represented.

6 There are 4-6 environmental members and six representatives from (the same) non-profits on each task force.

To the maximum extent feasible, construction of the projects must begin no later than December 31, 2022 and be open to traffic no later than December 31, 2030.

There has not been any formal analysis of cost performed, and with no route or specifications yet determined, and the requirement for multiple modes of transportation and types of infrastructure, the actual cost is a great unknown.

Where all the funding will come from is also uncertain. The roads must be toll roads, so bonds will almost certainly be used. But due to the massive cost of this undertaking, and the associated non-transportation costs, it is almost certain that bonds will not cover all of the costs. The M-CORES law provides that any combination of: turnpike revenue bonds (paid for with tolls); right-of-way and bridge construction bonds (paid for with fuel taxes through the State Transportation Trust Fund (STTF)); bonds or other financing through the FDOT Financing Corporation;⁷ advances from the STTF; and/or public-private partnerships may be used. Unobligated toll revenues from the whole Turnpike system must be used to repay any advances from the STTF.

The M-CORES legislation also provides limited funding by redirecting the portion of license taxes for certain motor vehicles (heavy trucks, vehicle for hire, motor homes, etc.) that currently goes to General Revenue to the STTF to be used for M-CORES and other specified uses. This will be phased-in, with the STTF getting \$45 million in FY2019-20, \$90 million in FY2020-21, and all of the money (approximately \$132.5 million) in FY2021-22 and each year thereafter. Of this amount, M-CORES gets \$12.5 million the first year, \$57.5 million the second year and just over \$100 million each year thereafter.

Part of this redirected funding will be used for other transportation programs. The M-CORES law provides \$10 million (each) to the Small County Road Assistance Program (SCRAP), the Small County Outreach Program (SCOP) and the Transportation Disadvantaged Trust Fund (TDTF). A construction workforce development program—intended to address the existing construction labor shortage by training people to work on transportation projects—will receive \$2.5 million annually for three years (see table below).

**TABLE 1. DISTRIBUTION OF FUNDING PROVIDED BY M-CORES LAW
(APPROXIMATELY \$130 MILLION ANNUALLY TRANSFERRED FROM GR TO STTF)**
\$ MILLIONS

	M-CORES	SCRAP	SCOP	TDTF	Workforce Development	General Revenue
2019-20	\$12.5	\$10.0	\$10.0	\$10.0	\$2.5	\$73.1*
2020-21	\$57.5	\$10.0	\$10.0	\$10.0	\$2.5	\$44.1*
2021-22	\$100.0*	\$10.0	\$10.0	\$10.0	\$2.5	0
2022-23 & thereafter	\$104.2*	\$10.0	\$10.0	\$10.0	0	0

* Estimated. Beginning in 2021-21, the amount for M-CORES will rise or fall with the total revenue from the specified motor vehicle licenses types.

The M-CORES legislation also dedicates \$35 million of turnpike revenue annually to the program. In 2012, the Legislature re-directed \$200 million annually from GR to the STTF and \$35 million of that is transferred

⁷ The FDOT Financing Corporation is a non-profit corporation created by the Legislature (Section 339.0809, F.S.) to finance or refinance FDOT projects. It is governed by a board consisting of the Governor's budget director, the director of the Division of Bond Finance, and the FDOT secretary. The corporation may issue bonds or other obligations (with a term of up to 35 years) to finance projects in the FDOT's work program. FDOT makes payments solely from amounts available in the STTF, subject to annual appropriation. These loans do not constitute a state debt and are not backed by the full faith and credit of the state. There has been one bond issue and \$154 million is currently outstanding.

to the Turnpike Enterprise. This turnpike revenue is currently used—to the maximum extent feasible—for projects that facilitate access to the Turnpike, such as feeder roads and interchanges.

The M-CORES legislation directed that, beginning in FY2022-23, the \$35 million would be dedicated to M-CORES, “with preference to feeder roads, interchanges, and appurtenances that create or facilitate multi-use corridor access and connectivity.”

Building on the connectivity concept, the 2020 Legislature passed a bill (SB 969) to provide that \$5 million of that \$35 million may be used for projects that assist in the development of broadband infrastructure within or adjacent to a multiuse corridor. Priority must be given to broadband projects in rural areas of opportunity (RAOs)⁸ that are adjacent to a corridor.

The money provided by SB 7068 (2019) and SB 969 (2020) will certainly not be enough to fund the necessary projects. It remains to be seen how much in bonds will be issued, or if any of the other authorized funding sources are used. There is currently \$760 million programmed (a mix of STTF and turnpike revenue) for M-CORES,⁹ with \$15.6 million spent in FY2019-20 and \$744.1 million programmed in the Final Tentative Five Year Work Program (FY2020-21 to FY2024-25).

So far, funding has been allocated to:

- Suncoast Connector—\$168.0 Million
- Southwest-Central Florida Connector—\$166.1 million
- Northern Turnpike Connector—\$108.5 million
- Not Project-Specific—\$317.1 million (including \$283.5 million in construction costs in FY2023-24 and FY2024-25)

By type of spending:

- Transportation Planning—\$71.4 million
- Preliminary Engineering/PD&E—\$296.9 million
- Right-of-Way—\$71.8 million
- Environmental—\$36.0 million
- Construction—\$283.5 million

Costs will go up considerably when construction starts. The money already programmed is outpacing the money provided by the M-CORES legislation. Of the \$760 million in the Work Program through FY2024-25, \$645 million is coming from the STTF, exceeding the \$484 million provided by the M-CORES legislation. This means \$161 million will come from other projects and spending already in the work program (see Table 1).

The other \$115 million already in the Work Program is coming from revenues of the existing Turnpike. The new \$35 million in turnpike revenue becomes dedicated to M-CORES beginning in FY2022-23, totaling

⁸ RAOs are rural community, designated by the Governor, that has been adversely affected by an extraordinary economic event, severe or chronic distress, or natural disaster that presents a unique economic development opportunity of regional impact. RAO's are eligible for assistance and other support through the Rural Economic Development Initiative, administered by DEO. All counties in the Suncoast Connector corridor, with the exception of Citrus, are in the North Central RAO.

⁹ FDOT, Five Year Work Program, 2020-2025, updated January 15, 2020. <https://fdotewp1.dot.state.fl.us/fmsupportapps/workprogram/WorkProgram.aspx>

\$105 million in the last three years of the work program. This money is supposed to be allocated with a preference to M-CORES projects that increase access to the roads and connectivity. Until the new roads beginning collecting tolls, all turnpike revenue spent on M-CORES will displace revenue currently being spent on improving, maintaining and operating the existing Turnpike.

PROPOSED BENEFITS OF THE M-CORES PROGRAM AND THE SUNCOAST CONNECTOR

The stated purpose of M-CORES is to “revitalize rural communities, encourage job creation, and provide regional connectivity while leveraging technology, enhancing quality of life and public safety, and protecting the environment and natural resources.”¹⁰ As a result, many respected and credible business organizations support the M-CORES project for a variety of reasons.¹¹

The M-CORES law also lists the benefits supporters hope it will bring:¹²

- Hurricane evacuation;
- Congestion mitigation;
- Trade and logistics;
- Broadband, water, and sewer connectivity;
- Energy distribution;
- Autonomous, connected, shared, and electric vehicle technology;
- Other transportation modes, such as shared-use nonmotorized trails, freight and passenger rail, and public transit;
- Mobility as a service;
- Availability of a trained workforce skilled in traditional and emerging technologies;
- Protection or enhancement of wildlife corridors or environmentally sensitive areas; and
- Protection or enhancement of primary springs protection zones and farmland preservation areas designated within local comprehensive plans.

Senate President Bill Galvano, a strong supporter of the M-CORES, explained:

*“Recent estimates tell us Florida is gaining over 850 people a day, or a population the size of the city of Orlando every year. We need to be ready. I am confident these new infrastructure corridors will help achieve Florida’s goal of strategically planning for future population growth, while at the same time revitalizing rural communities and enhancing public safety. The benefits of this type of long-term investment in our infrastructure include regional connectivity that enhances trade and tourism, congestion mitigation and evacuation routes, as well as broadband, water, and sewer connectivity that helps preserve our natural resources while improving quality of life for residents in rural areas of our state.”*¹³

The percentage of travel on Florida roads considered “heavily congested”¹⁴ has risen by 30 percent in ten years. During peak travel times, just over 25 percent of travel on state freeways and 30 percent of traffic in

¹⁰ Section 338.2278 (1), Florida Statutes

¹¹ Florida Connect, News Release, “Florida Voices Join ‘Connecting Florida’ in Support of Future Infrastructure Needs in the Sunshine State,” June 13, 2019.

¹² Section 338.2278 (1), Florida Statutes

¹³ Florida Senate, President’s Office, Press Release, “Senate Passes Legislation to Create New Multi-Use Infrastructure Corridors,” April 24, 2019.

¹⁴ “Heavily congested” is defined as roadways with Level-of-Service (LOS) rating of D or E. It should be noted that congestion is not a problem in the Suncoast Corridor (discussed later in this report).

Florida's seven largest MPOs is heavily congested.¹⁵ “The cost of congestion to the trucking industry was \$5.6 billion in 2016, increasing the cost which ultimately affects every Floridian—in the cost of goods and quality of life.”¹⁶ A potential benefit of M-CORES is that by giving motorists another option going north, congestion on I-75 will be relieved.

Similarly, the economic opportunities from enhanced flow of goods and people is a large part of the support base. Many business groups and professional associations have focused on these corridors as an opportunity to increase the flow of trade and tourism even while acknowledging the need for sensitivity to the environmental impacts. On that note, supporters often cite the creation of the Task Forces as a safety-value for ensuring the balance of environmental and local concerns with the benefits of transportation and economic development.

The value of additional north-south running corridors has also been touted as important for evacuation planning. Former Federal Emergency Management Agency administrator and former Florida Emergency Management director Craig Fugate has supported the additional “hurricane evacuation routes for a state that only has so many ways to travel from the bottom to the top.”

In the aggregate, increased public safety is cited as a benefit of the new corridors. According to Senate President Bill Galvano: “Our state’s infrastructure is at the core of government’s responsibility regarding public safety. Expanding fixed broadband in rural areas of our state will help our first responders quickly and accurately reach Floridians in need, while the development of permanent staging areas for emergencies will improve the efficiency of emergency response, expediting the dissemination of crucial emergency supplies, including food, water, personal protective equipment, ventilators, and fuel.”¹⁷

Much of Florida’s past infrastructure funding has been in the state’s urban areas, but large portions of rural Florida have not always received the same focus. Rural Florida compares less favorably to urban regions in other ways, including labor workforce availability, access to education and healthcare, high unemployment rates, and low wages.¹⁸ The loss of population, commerce and trade, and employment opportunities impacts the local tax base, restricting a rural county’s ability to provide roads, clean water, sewer, and energy-distribution infrastructure.

The expansion of broadband connection has also been a major tenet of support. Local economic development groups and statewide associations have touted the benefits of “high-speed broadband connectivity through smart infrastructure” that are part of the M-CORES program. Some local community leaders have embraced the corridors proposed in their community. Some support is tied to the future needs, such as former House Speaker Will Weatherford, who has cited the value of investing and planning for future economic and transportation needs.¹⁹ Although the M-CORES projects were not under formal consideration when the legislation surfaced, some similar projects have been considered in the past.²⁰

¹⁵ Florida Department of Transportation, Forecasting and Trends Office, “The FDOT Sourcebook – 2019,” updated February 12, 2020.

¹⁶ Florida Trucking Association, quoted in press release announcing the formation of the “Connecting Florida” coalition, June 13, 2019.

¹⁷ “Key Infrastructure Legislation Signed Into Law: Bills to expand broadband, create strategic staging areas for emergencies signed by Governor,” Release from the Office of the Senate President, June 9, 2020

¹⁸ Florida Chamber of Commerce, “The Future of Florida’s Rural Communities,” November 13, 2017, available at <https://www.flchamber.com/the-future-of-floridas-rural-communities-2/> (last accessed May 20, 2020).

¹⁹ See, e.g., Jacob ogles, “Business leaders rally around toll road expansion plan,” Florida Politics, May 14, 2019.

²⁰ FDOT, Multi-use Corridors of Regional Economic Significance Prior Reports and Studies, <https://www.fdot.gov/procurement/M-CoresProcAndConflict-FAQS/PriorReportsandStudies>, last accessed July 10, 2020.

Many envision economic development benefits from M-CORES. It could provide businesses with improved trade and logistics options, such as freight rail and potential connections to facilities such as intermodal logistic centers. The increased infrastructure and availability of broadband could make the region more attractive to business seeking to establish or re-locate their operations. Additionally, infrastructure investments create jobs. As Tom Feeney of AIF has said: “Infrastructure and transportation projects produce jobs and economic activity and have significant effects on our state’s ability to keep pace with our popular demands.”²¹

Finally, there is support for the idea that these projects could be done, at least in part, though public-private partnerships or use newer solutions such as land-swaps to reduce some project costs.²²

OPPOSITION TO M-CORES AND THE SUNCOAST CONNECTOR

Opposition to the new toll roads was immediate and vocal. This may be especially true of the Suncoast Connector. Much of the opposition has come from residents of the corridors and environmental groups. While opponents to new government actions are often more vocal than supporters, the public testimony at the task force meetings has been overwhelmingly against the toll roads.²³

While many local government representatives support the Suncoast Connector, many do not. The Levy County Commission adopted a resolution opposing the road. Levy County spans the entire width of the corridor and is the first county after its southern terminus in Citrus County. Levy is the only county the Suncoast Connector must go through.

Arguments against the project cited at the meetings, in the media, and on organizations’ websites include: *The Road is not Needed* – Many opponents question the need for the road. No needs assessment was performed. It was not part of FDOT’s Work Program or any formal plan for future transportation projects in Florida. The area’s current road system has plenty of capacity. As a result of the study area’s low population, there is relatively very little traffic on the current roads in the Suncoast Corridor. (See “Current Traffic in the Suncoast Corridor” for more information).

The Road will Harm the Environment – Environmental organizations and advocates have been quite fervent in their condemnation of the Suncoast Connector and the other M-CORES projects, viewing them as a threat to water quality, wildlife, and natural, undeveloped lands. Agricultural, recreational, and parklands comprise 88.1 percent of the entire Suncoast Corridor.²⁴ The corridor includes many important environmental features including the Big Bend Seagrass Aquatic Preserve, springs, aquifer recharge areas, wildlife corridors, and conservation and Florida Forever lands.

More than 40 percent of Taylor County and 43 percent of Lafayette County are wetlands.²⁵ A major new road will alter the flow of freshwater across the Big Bend, affecting rivers, wetlands, and estuaries. Florida’s battle

21 Tom Feeney quoted in Tallahassee Democrat, “Environmentalists to Florida governor: Veto ‘Toll Roads to Nowhere’ bill,” May 14, 2019

22 See, e.g., Mike Vogel, “Florida’s plan to build 330 miles of new toll roads,” Florida Trend, April 27, 2020.

23 Out of hundreds of public comments solicited by the Florida Department of Transportation in August 2019 about the largest toll system expansion in 60 years, only two dozen came from people in favor of building the three roads. At the April 2020 meetings—which were webinars due to COVID-19—almost every citizen speaking (88 out of approximately 90) voiced their opposition. Only one person spoke in favor of the Suncoast Connector.

24 FDOT, “Suncoast Connector Study Area Considerations,” presented at Suncoast Connector Task Force Meeting #1, August 27, 2019, retrieved from <https://floridamcores.com/event/suncoast-connector-task-force-meeting-1/#documents>, last accessed May 20, 2020.

25 FDOT, “Avoidance & Minimization Considerations,” presented at Suncoast Connector Task Force Meeting #2, October 23, 2019, retrieved from <https://floridamcores.com/event/suncoast-connector-task-force-meeting-2/#documents>, last accessed May 20, 2020.

with Georgia over water from the Flint and Chattahoochee Rivers and how reduced freshwater flows into Apalachicola Bay decimated Florida's oyster industry should be a cautionary tale. The natural purification and storage of water in Florida's aquifer will be disrupted. Rainwater will flow down the roads, taking pollutants with it. This stormwater will either end up in waterways or will have to be treated.

The loss of habitat and blockage of migration paths are seen as a threat to Florida's wildlife and a high-speed road will increase animal roadkills. There are at least 20 endangered or threatened wildlife species that live in the corridor, including manatees, gopher tortoises, scrub jays, wood storks, and Suwannee Moccasinshell mussels.²⁶ The area also contains threatened plants. Critics and some Task Force members state that the toll road corridor will make it harder to perform prescribed burns, which are critical for ecosystem health and wildfire mitigation.

Damage to Farming – Agriculture is a vital part of Florida's economy and this is especially true of the Suncoast Connector Corridor. Farmland makes up 69.3 percent of the total land area in the corridor (see "Avoidance Map").²⁷ It will be difficult for the toll road not to bisect farms and there are concerns about the difficulty in moving farm equipment and livestock across a major roadway.

No Assurance of Economic Development Gains – Many have been skeptical that the Suncoast Connector will bring economic development to these northwest Florida communities. The example of I-10 has been raised repeatedly. A former Chair of the Jefferson County Chamber of Commerce claims that I-10 caused businesses to close, a setback it took years for the county to recover from. "It didn't bring any economic development to us. It brought fast food, gas stations and now we're talking about a north-south road that does the same thing."²⁸ Many communities are worried that if the limited access roads do not allow for easy access to their towns, whatever visitor traffic they now get on north-south roads will be lost. The M-CORES law calls for bringing more infrastructure (water, sewer, broadband, health facilities), but there is no plan or money allocated to do so.²⁹

Road Will Create Urban Sprawl - The Suncoast Connector, along with related infrastructure, will encourage unplanned growth to areas that might not develop naturally, thereby removing more public and private conservation land. Additionally, the idea that rural living is a choice has been raised by residents of the corridor. The Lafayette County Commission Chair (and Suncoast Task Force member) said residents in his county like the fact that, at fewer than 10,000 people, it has the lowest population in the state. "It's easy to surmise that they might want their area to remain rural."³⁰

26 FDOT, "Suncoast Connector Study Area Considerations", presented at Suncoast Connector Task Force Meeting #1, August 27, 2019, retrieved from <https://floridamcores.com/event/suncoast-connector-task-force-meeting-1/#documents>, last accessed May 20, 2020.

27 Ibid.

28 Michele Arceneaux quoted in Florida Politics, "Environmental and rural groups protest toll roads plan," December 6, 2019, by Renzo Downey, retrieved from <https://floridapolitics.com/archives/312688-environmental-and-rural-groups-protest-m-cores>, last accessed May 20, 2020.

29 See "Background on M-CORES" Section above (page 6).

30 Commissioner Anthony Adams, quoted in Florida Politics, "Florida's new toll roads are supposed to help these counties. But they do not want it," August 28, 2019, by Lawrence Mower, retrieved from <https://www.tampabay.com/florida-politics/buzz/2019/08/28/floridas-new-toll-roads-are-supposed-to-help-these-counties-but-they-dont-want-it/>, last accessed May 20, 2020.

CURRENT TRAFFIC IN THE SUNCOAST CORRIDOR STUDY AREA

The Suncoast Corridor study area goes through the most rural area of the state. Five of the nine Florida counties with the lowest population density are in the corridor.³¹ Notably, 86.2 percent of the population in the corridor’s eight counties live in unincorporated areas, and the eight counties comprise 11 percent of Florida’s total land area, but only 1 percent of its population. As is clear in Figure 2, the majority of the study area (shown in yellow) includes no towns or concentrated residential areas at all.

FIG. 2. SUNCOAST CONNECTOR CORRIDOR DETAIL



Source: FDOT, "Suncoast Connector Study Area," downloaded from https://floridamcores.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Fig03_Suncoast_Connector_11x17.pdf

31 Florida TaxWatch, 2019 How Florida Counties Compare, December 17, 2019, available at <https://floridatxwatch.org/Research/Full-Library/ArticleID/34407/ArticleID/18800/2019-How-Florida-Counties-Compare>.

As a result, the area's current road system has plenty of capacity, and very little traffic. By comparison, the statewide average of Daily Vehicle Miles Traveled (DVMT) in Florida is 7,523 per lane mile and the average on the Turnpike is 12,814 per lane mile,³² whereas 6 of the 8 counties in the study area are among the lowest in the state, averaging 1,801 per lane mile.

With the exception of Citrus County, this area also has some of the best peak hour Level-of-Service (LOS) ratings in the state, with no "D" grades (below FDOT rural standard) except for a 1.7-mile stretch of U.S. 221 inside of Perry and an 8.5-mile stretch of S.R. 26 leaving Trenton east towards Gainesville.³³

Current projections predict the population of the eight counties in the Suncoast corridor will grow by only 13.1 percent (9.1 percent if Citrus County is excluded) over the next 25 years, compared to 26.7 percent for the rest of the state.³⁴ These projections mean that there is not an appreciable decline in District 2's Suncoast Corridor counties' projected LOS grades through 2045.

The use and capacity of the area's main existing corridor, U.S. 19 which runs the entire length of the Suncoast Connector study area, also bolsters perceptions of a lack of need for the Suncoast Connector. Currently, there are approximately 123 center-line miles of U.S. 19 in FDOT District 2, running through Levy, Dixie, and Taylor counties, and cutting through a small part of Madison County. More than 90 percent of those miles have a "B" LOS rating at peak hour traffic, which is above the standard; the remaining 10% of miles meet the FDOT standard with a "C" rating at peak hour traffic. U.S. 19 also has plenty of room to grow without a decline in LOS.

For all of U.S. 19 in FDOT District 2,³⁵ the road is operating at 16.3 percent³⁶ capacity at peak hour times. Based on FDOT District 2 projections, the traffic volume on U.S. 19 is not likely to change much. Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT) is only projected to grow by 22.3 percent from 2018 to 2045, and peak hour operating capacity is only expected to increase from 16.3 percent to 18.8 percent. There is expected to be no drop in LOS grades.

All roads in Jefferson County (FDOT District 3)—at the top end of the corridor—have "B" (above standard) LOS ratings. The 18 miles of U.S. 19 in the County are at 10 percent maximum AADT volume and 20 percent maximum peak hour volume.³⁷

Citrus County (District 7)—at the southern end—does have more traffic than the rest of the corridor, with more LOS grades at or below standard and fewer segments with above standard grades.³⁸

32 Florida TaxWatch, data from FDOT Traffic Data and Analytics Office, Reports of Highway Mileage and Travel, 2018 SHS Report. <https://www.fdot.gov/statistics/mileage-rpts/>

33 FDOT, District 2 LOS Reporting Tool 2019, available at <https://www.fdot.gov/planning/systems/programs/sm/los/districts/district2/default.shtm>, last accessed May 20, 2020.

34 Florida TaxWatch calculations, using data from Projections of Florida Population by County, 2020–2045, Florida Demographic Estimating Conference, February 2019 and the University of Florida, Bureau of Economic and Business Research, Florida Population Studies, Volume 52, Bulletin 183, April 2019.

35 District 2 is an 18-county area that contains six of the eight Suncoast Corridor counties: Levy, Dixie, Gilchrist, Lafayette, Madison and Taylor.

36 Florida TaxWatch calculation, using data from FDOT, District 2 LOS Reporting Tool 2019, available at <https://www.fdot.gov/planning/systems/programs/sm/los/districts/district2/default.shtm>, last accessed May 20, 2020.

37 FDOT, Jefferson County 2016 LOS Report, <https://www.fdot.gov/planning/systems/programs/sm/los/districts/district3/default.shtm>

38 FDOT, District Seven Project Development and Analysis, email response to request by Florida TaxWatch, May 6, 2020.

Proponents counter that the Suncoast Connector will relieve congestion on roads outside the corridor, especially I-75; however, an FDOT task force was formed in 2016 to develop strategies for relieving congestion on I-75, including the potential for new corridors west of the interstate. Its consensus conclusion was that a better approach would be to increase the capacity of I-75 and explore increasing the efficiency of existing parallel and east-west roads.³⁹ The task force did raise the potential of future study of a new reliever corridor to the west starting at the terminus of the Suncoast Parkway; however, it had that corridor running northeast to I-75 in Marion or Alachua County, not north to Jefferson County.

HOW MUCH WILL THE SUNCOAST CONNECTOR COST?

No formal estimates of costs associated with M-CORES have been developed since the routes are not established and specifics are unknown; however, cost estimates for new and currently underway toll roads can be examined to get a sense of the scope of this endeavor.

FDOT compiles average cost estimates to construct one mile of various types of new road, but an accompanying disclaimer makes clear that they are generalized,⁴⁰ and they do not tell the whole story, as they do not account for all construction costs, preliminary engineering and design costs (often estimated at 15 percent of construction costs), right-of-way acquisition, construction inspection, environment mitigation, utility and railroad relocation and other costs, and the cost of financing. Also, the cost variables in a yet-to-be developed major road project are many and significant.

Below are examples of new Florida toll roads that are partially finished or still in the design phase. Examining these projects can help in developing a very broad range of the costs in store for the Suncoast Parkway.

Note: All cost estimates for the following projects were determined by Florida TaxWatch using the FDOT Five Year Work Program and published estimates from various sources.

WEKIVA PARKWAY

When complete, the 25-mile Wekiva Parkway will finish the beltway around the Orlando metropolitan area by connecting the Daniel Webster Western Beltway (SR 429) and the John Land Apopka Expressway (SR 414) in Apopka with I-4/SR 417 in Orlando. This is a cooperative effort by FDOT, the Central Florida Expressway (CFX) and the Florida Turnpike. FDOT is responsible for the sections in Lake and Seminole Counties, CFX for Orange County, and the Turnpike helped with the design and operates the tolls in the FDOT sections.

This is a very expensive project, with a total cost of \$1.76 billion. This includes \$500 million in non-toll improvements, including widening seven miles of SR 46 in Lake and Seminole counties, rebuilding US 441/SR 46 interchange in Mount Dora, shifting part of CR 46A out of the Seminole State Forest so wildlife can move more easily and safely between habitats, non-tolled service roads parallel to the parkway, and a 10-mile, multi-use trail in east Lake and Seminole counties.

³⁹ Florida Department of Transportation, "I-75 Relief Task Force Recommendations Report," October 2016.

⁴⁰ "These models are generic in nature, and not based on actual construction projects. They are for reference purposes only and are not intended to predict or support future estimates." Florida Department of Transportation, "Cost Per Mile Models for Long Range Estimating," <https://www.fdot.gov/programmanagement/Estimates/LRE/CostPerMileModels/CPMSummary.shtm>, last accessed May 20, 2020.

The high price tag is due in part to the extensive environmental protection features in the design, including minimizing impacts to the Wekiva River Basin, a largely elevated roadway, three wildlife bridges and a new longer, higher-profile bridge over the river that will provide 7,900 feet of safe passage underneath travel lanes for wildlife (currently 80 feet of passage). Part of a road was removed from the Seminole State Forest to reduce animal/vehicle collisions and 3,400 acres were set aside for conservation.⁴¹ The Wekiva Parkway was awarded the 2019 Toll Excellence Award for Social Responsibility⁴² for completing the project while protecting wildlife and other natural resources. With the statutory mandate for minimizing environmental impacts and a strong environmental presence on the task force, the proposed Suncoast Connector will likely look to utilize at least some of these features.

TABLE 2. COST OF THE WEKIVA PARKWAY
\$ MILLIONS

	FDOT D5 Segments	CFX Segments	Total
Environmental	\$7.139	\$1.500	\$8.639
PD&E	\$6.377	\$14.000	\$20.377
Preliminary Engineering	\$54.167	\$45.700	\$99.867
Right-of-Way	\$255.112	\$262.800	\$517.912
Construction	\$690.003	\$275.200	\$985.203
Utilities	\$43.933	\$7.300	\$51.233
Const. Engineering/Insp	\$53.280	\$24.300	\$77.580
Total	\$1,110.011	\$630.800	\$1,760.811

Construction costs include \$20.0 million for interchange operation enhancements. Source: FDOT District 5 from Wekiva Parkway Financial Plan Annual Update reports.

Thirteen miles of the Wekiva Parkway are open to toll traffic and the whole project is expected to be finished in 2022. The total \$1.76 billion cost translates \$70 million per mile.

FIRST COAST EXPRESSWAY

The First Coast Expressway⁴³ will be a 46-mile toll road traveling through parts of Duval, Clay, and St. Johns counties. It stretches from U.S. 90, just north of I-10 in Duval County, south along SR 21 through Clay County, across the St. Johns River and finally reaching I-95 in St. Johns County. It is comprised of three segments. The first—from I-10/US 90 to SR 21—added two lanes to SR 23 (part of the existing road became a non-tolled frontage road). Existing roads were resurfaced, and six interchanges, overpasses, tolls facilities, noise walls, drainage ponds, and underground stormwater systems were built. The construction cost of this first segment was \$208 million. This first segment was completed in Spring 2019 and tolls began to be collected in July 2019.

The second segment will construct 20.2 miles of new, multi-lane, limited access toll roads from SR 21 to the St. Johns River. There will be five new all-electronic toll facilities, numerous bridges over land and water, drainage system and ponds, new lighting, signage, guardrails, and noise walls. This second segment has a construction cost of \$471 million and a total cost of \$675 million. Construction has begun and will be completed in 2026.

41 The Wekiva Parkway, www.wekivaparkway.com, last accessed May 20, 2020.

42 Awarded to the Central Florida Expressway Authority, FDOT, and Florida's Turnpike Enterprise by the International Bridge, Tunnel and Turnpike Association.

43 Florida Turnpike, <http://firstcoastexpressway.com/>, last accessed May 20, 2020.

The third, and most expensive segment, includes a new bridge over the St. Johns River, replacing the current Shands Bridge. The bridge will have 20 more feet of clearance, allowing for greater shipping opportunity. A new toll road will extend to I-95. Design and right-of-way activities will be completed this year and construction will begin in 2023 and is expected to be completed by 2030. This segment will have a total cost of over \$1 billion. This brings the estimated total cost of the First Coast Expressway to more than \$2 billion, or \$46 million per mile. Excluding the bridge segment results in a cost of \$27 million per mile. The cost for segment 2—a 20-mile new road through a rural area—is \$33 million per mile.

SUNCOAST PARKWAY 2

This is a 16-mile extension of the current 42-mile Suncoast Parkway⁴⁴ (SR 589) from U.S. 98 in northern Hernando County to CR 486 in Citrus County. This is where the new Suncoast Connector will begin.

Phase 1—a 13-mile new toll road from U.S. 19 to SR 44 in Lecanto—is under construction and expected to be finished in 2022. Phase 2—the last three miles—is currently in the design phase with right-of-way acquisition beginning this year and construction commencing in 2023. The road includes three interchanges, one wildlife corridor and three wildlife culverts, 15 bridges, three toll facilities, drainage, lighting, highway signage, traffic signalization, guardrail and sidewalk, and a pedestrian overpass over US 98. The Suncoast Trail, which currently runs parallel to the existing Parkway, will also be extended. The Suncoast Parkway 2 will be funded entirely with turnpike revenues (tolls and concessions.) A third phase was planned to add ten more miles, but that is currently on hold, presumably because of the proposed Suncoast Connector.

Phase 1 carries a construction cost of \$157 million, total right-of way costs of \$56 million (including \$11 million in mitigation). Phase 2 is funded at \$100 million the 2021-2025 final tentative work program (plus FY2019-20) for right-of-way, construction, and some preliminary engineering and environmental consulting. Including design and using FDOT cost escalators to bring the costs to 2023, the total cost of the Suncoast Parkway 2 is \$25 million per mile.

CENTRAL POLK PARKWAY

The Central Polk Parkway⁴⁵ will be part of the Turnpike system and is currently in the design phase. Back in 2011, FDOT completed the Project Development and Environment (PD&E) study for a 40-mile road that would extend south from the Polk Parkway before heading north to connect to I-4. The Polk Parkway begins at I-4 near Lakeland, so the Central Polk Parkway would create a loop around Winter Haven back to I-4. This project had its beginnings in the proposed 152-mile Heartland Parkway, linking Polk County to Ft. Myers (see below). Like the Heartland Parkway, the \$1.8 billion Central Polk Parkway was shelved due to economic feasibility concerns, but now the first two segments (at least) have new life.

The first segment would run from the Polk Parkway (part of the Turnpike system) at SR 540 south to US 17 in Bartow. This project is in the design phase, right-of-way acquisition begins this year, and construction commences in 2023. The second segment continues south to SR 60. The PD&E study is scheduled to be completed later this year. Construction is funded in 2025. These two segments total nine miles in length and

44 Florida Turnpike, <http://suncoastparkway2.com/>, last accessed May 20, 2020.

45 Florida Turnpike, <http://centralpolkparkway.com/>, last accessed May 20, 2020.

are funded at \$424 million in the current work program (plus the current year). Add in prior funding and the cost rises to \$437 million or \$49 million per mile.

HEARTLAND PARKWAY

The Heartland Parkway was a proposed 152-mile four-lane toll road that would have stretched from Interstate 4 near the Polk/Osceola county line southward to SR 82 east of Fort Myers near the Lee/Hendry county line. The route was generally between U.S. 17 and U.S. 27. This mainline was 140 miles. In Polk County, a 12-mile “spur” would also be built to connect to the Polk Parkway at Lakeland. While the Heartland Parkway was shelved, the spur is basically the first segment of the new Central Polk Parkway and the M-CORES project—the Southwest-Central Florida Connector—encompasses the proposed Heartland route. The project was stopped after the Turnpike Enterprise completed a feasibility analysis. The planning-level estimate of total costs (design, right of way, and construction) was \$5.6 billion in 2007 dollars, which the analysis escalated to a 2012 (the proposed construction start year) estimate of just under \$7.0 billion. It was estimated that the projected traffic would only produce enough toll revenue for \$1.1 billion in bond capacity (16-17 percent of costs) leaving a \$5.8 billion toll revenue shortfall.⁴⁶

Since the Heartland Parkway would have been the same length as the Suncoast Connector and also traversed largely rural areas, it may help inform cost estimates for the Connector. The \$7.0 billion estimate from the feasibility analysis results in a cost-per-mile of \$46 million. Using the FDOT cost escalation factors increases the estimated cost of the Heartland Parkway to \$8.4 billion—\$56 million per mile—in 2022.

The estimated cost of the Heartland Parkway suggests that a major project such as the 150-mile Suncoast Connector may not be comparable to the 16-mile Suncoast Parkway 2 and its cost would likely be higher up the range.

OSCEOLA PARKWAY EXTENSION

Another example of how expensive a new toll road can be is the Central Florida Expressway Authority’s proposed Osceola Parkway Extension. Like the Suncoast Connector, the road through Split Oak Forest in east Orange and Osceola counties is also facing vocal opposition from many environmentalists and area residents. A preliminary estimate of the cost of the road is \$790 million.⁴⁷ The proposed road is only nine miles long, so this estimate would result in a cost per mile of \$88 million. The road was approved by CFX last year but was recently tentatively postponed for ten years—until 2034—due to concerns over falling toll revenues.

WHAT DOES THE EXPERIENCE OF OTHER TOLL ROADS TELL US ABOUT THE POTENTIAL COST OF THE SUNCOAST CONNECTOR?

Estimating the cost of a transportation project is a difficult task, even in the best of circumstances. The details of the Suncoast Connector are far from decided, all that is known is the broad corridor it will traverse. Many factors will impact cost, including road specifications, the number of interchanges and bridges (both over water and land), if the roads go through towns or bypass them, the amount of “co-location” (use of existing roadways), environmental mitigation, and wildlife protection. The cost of acquiring right-of-way, including

⁴⁶ Florida Turnpike Enterprise, “Heartland Parkway, Preliminary Planning and Feasibility Analysis,” May 2007.

⁴⁷ Kevin Spear, Orlando Sentinel, “Controversial Split Oak Forest toll road likely delayed until 2034,” May 28, 2020.

business damages and moving expenses, can vary considerably. Acquisition costs will also be impacted by the extent to which land already owned by the state can be used. Donations of land are also a possibility. Moreover, the M-CORES law directs the task forces to consider and recommend innovative concepts to combine right-of-way acquisition with the acquisition of lands or easements to facilitate environmental mitigation or the protection and restoration of ecosystems, wildlife habitat, and water quality protection or restoration. Since the Connector goes through rural areas, land prices should be lower than urban areas, but bisecting farmland presents its own challenges.

It must be noted that the costs associated with the current toll projects discussed above are outdated estimates. While this report updates some estimates using information from the work programs, comparisons between old estimates and the potential costs of the Suncoast Connector do not fully take inflation into account. Although some construction of the comparison projects is ongoing, much of it began years ago. Where cost-escalators were used, costs were only inflated to projected 2022 dollars. Construction of the Suncoast Connector and the other M-CORES projects is supposed to begin by the end of 2022 and be open to traffic by 2030.

FDOT publishes past inflationary factors that are used for planning purposes to update past costs to the present day (2019 is the most current data). It also publishes future inflation factors for use in the work program. Using these two sources, construction costs in 2016 would increase by 15.4 percent by 2022.⁴⁸ Applying this factor to the Wekiva Parkway adds another \$270 million to the cost, pushing the total to just more than \$2.0 billion.

The cost of “connectivity” is another unknown factor. One of the stated purposes of the M-CORES program is to bring water, sewer, broadband, and multiple modes of transportation to underserved areas. FDOT is directed to adhere to task force recommendations in the design of these multiple types of infrastructure for the corridors, but there is little direction as to how this will be funded. Beginning in 2023, \$35 million in turnpike revenue will be available to improve both access to the new toll roads and connectivity, including \$5 million dedicated to broadband. This money would be a drop in the bucket for comprehensively addressing infrastructure and multi-modal transportation for the communities in the Suncoast Connector corridor. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection already provides hundreds of millions of dollars annually (more than \$600 million in the current budget) to assist local governments with projects such as drinking water, wastewater, water quality, and septic-to-sewer conversions.⁴⁹ This report does not attempt to address these costs in developing a broad range of estimates for the Suncoast Connector.

Among the four current projects examined earlier in this report, the one with the lowest cost per mile (Suncoast Parkway II - \$25 million) and the one with the highest (Wekiva Parkway - \$70 million) both have similarities with the Suncoast Connector: the Suncoast Parkway because the Connector would start where the Parkway ends, and the Wekiva Parkway is often held up as model for the Suncoast Connector due to its environmental sensitivity. Environmental protection in Florida is probably a higher focus than it was in the past and it has certainly become a priority of Florida’s elected leaders. When he signed the M-CORES

⁴⁸ FDOT, Work Program Instructions FY2020/21 to 2024/25 <https://fdotewp1.dot.state.fl.us/fmsupportapps/Documents/development/WorkProgramInstructions.pdf> and FDOT, Advisory Inflation Factors For Previous Years (1987-2018), February 19, 2019.

⁴⁹ Florida Legislature, 2020-21 Florida General Appropriations Act (HB 5001).

legislation, Governor Ron DeSantis said “These infrastructure improvements will be built with great sensitivity toward the protection of the environment and there are mechanisms within the legislation that help ensure that occurs. We have a great precedent already with the Wekiva Parkway in the Central Florida Beltway that is a passageway through the environmentally sensitive Wekiva River Basin area and I am confident we will be able to manage this effort with equal or better care.”⁵⁰ Parts of the Wekiva Parkway run through much more populated areas than the Suncoast Connector would (driving up costs), but the magnitude and scope of the Connector’s environmental challenges could be greater; however, there is likely to be significant “co-location” of the Suncoast Connector, which would allow FDOT to use land it already owns and reduce right-of-way costs. But it should be noted that “co-location” was used in the Wekiva Parkway, and one of the Wekiva Parkway Task Force’s guiding principles was to use co-location wherever possible.⁵¹

Applying the lowest and highest costs per mile for the comparison toll projects to the 150-mile Suncoast Connector results in a range of potential total costs between \$4.0 billion and \$10.5 billion, with a midpoint of \$7.25 billion, and these estimates are used for the analysis below. These costs are for the toll road project only and do not consider costs for providing multiple modes of transportation and other connectivity infrastructure as called for in the M-CORES law.

THE COST OF FINANCING

Bonds can be used to fund turnpike projects. Bonds allow expensive projects like major construction to be undertaken and defer paying for them, but they do add to the cost of the projects. This is why new toll projects have an economic feasibility test in statute.⁵² The toll revenue from the new roads must be sufficient to pay the annual debt service.

There are two major transportation bond programs authorized by the Legislature to be used for the M-CORES projects and are likely to be utilized:

Turnpike Revenue Bonds are used to finance roads, bridges, interchanges, and toll facilities that are part of the Florida Turnpike Enterprise. These bonds are secured solely from net revenue of the Turnpike system (gross revenues minus operations and maintenance costs). They are not backed by the full faith and credit of the state but are additionally secured by a debt service reserve fund.⁵³ There is an additional bond test in order for new turnpike revenue bonds to be issued which requires net revenue for the entire Turnpike to equal at least 120 percent of the total annual debt service on turnpike outstanding bonds. The Turnpike currently has significant capacity under this requirement, but current law does cap the amount of outstanding Turnpike bonds at \$10 billion.

50 Executive Office of the Governor, Press Release, Governor Ron DeSantis Signs CS/SB 7068, May 17, 2019.

51 Video on the Wekiva Parkway’s use of co-location, presented at the Suncoast Corridor Task Force Meeting #4, February 11, 2020. Video available at <https://floridamcores.com/event/suncoast-connector-task-force-meeting-4/>, last accessed May 20, 2020.

52 Section 338.223(1)(a) and s. 338.221(8)(a), Florida Statutes. The estimated net revenues (gross revenue minus operations and maintenance costs) of a new 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 by the end of the 12th year of operation and to pay at least 100 percent of debt service on the bonds by the end of the 30th year of operation.

53 Balance must be equal to the lesser of (1) 125 percent of the average annual debt service requirement on the bonds; (2) maximum annual debt service on the bonds; and (3) 10 percent of the par amount of the bonds.

The outstanding principal balance of Turnpike bonds was approximately \$2.6 billion at the end of FY2019 and another \$2.2 billion in new issues are planned through 2024. The Legislature could increase the bonding cap, but under the current limit, there is likely not enough capacity to bond the majority of costs for all three M-CORES projects.

Right of Way (ROW) Acquisition and Bridge Construction Bonds are the major source of funding for acquiring the needed land for myriad state transportation projects in Florida, not just turnpike projects. They are backed by the full faith and credit of the state but are payable primarily from motor and diesel fuel taxes (“gas taxes”), and there is no debt service reserve fund required for these bonds. Total pledged revenues must exceed 111 percent of total annual debt service for these bonds before additional bonds can be issued.

Bonds from both of these programs (except for refunding bonds)⁵⁴ are generally 30-year obligations and recent issues have generally carried an interest rate starting at five percent and dropping to four percent (or even three percent) later in the bond’s term. Both programs are in good shape, their debt service coverage is well in excess of the required ratio.⁵⁵ Turnpike bonds carry AA bond ratings and ROW bonds carry a AAA rating.⁵⁶

Based on the last five bond issues⁵⁷ for each of these programs (excluding refunding bonds), interest adds 68 percent to the amount financed, meaning \$100 million in bond proceeds will cost \$168 million to pay back. Assuming that same interest rate, bonding could add as much as \$5 billion to \$6 billion to the cost of the Suncoast Connector. Interest rates have been favorable, but that could change in our present economic environment. Also, the riskier a bond issue is deemed to be, the higher the interest rate.

This could happen if there is doubt the Suncoast Connector (or other M-CORES roads) can produce sufficient revenue, an outcome made more likely by the impact of COVID-19 on government revenues (see “COVID-19 Increases the Financial Risk” below).

Bonding for right of way acquisition could add hundreds of millions more to the full cost of the Suncoast Connector; however, these potential ROW costs may be funded with Right of Way Acquisition and Bridge Construction Bonds. These bonds are general obligation bonds, with motor and diesel fuel taxes pledged first.⁵⁸ Toll revenue is not spent repaying these bonds and they are not subject to the turnpike economic feasibility test. To the extent bonds are used to pay the Suncoast Connector’s ROW costs, funding for other transportation projects from the STTF will be reduced.

54 Refinancing earlier bonds to take advantage of lower interest rates to reduce debt service costs. These generally have a shorter term.

55 FDOT, Debt and Debt-Like Financing Report, 2019.

56 State Board of Administration, Summary of Bond Program Ratings, January 2020.

57 Florida Division of Bond Finance, Official Statements for various bond issues, retrieved from <https://www.sbafla.com/bond/>.

58 Fuel taxes go into the STTF and the amount needed to pay debt service (up to seven percent of STTF funds) are transferred annually to the Right of Way Acquisition and Bridge Construction Trust Fund. Section 206.26(2), Florida Statutes.

WILL THE SUNCOAST CONNECTOR'S TOLLS BE ENOUGH TO COVER DEBT SERVICE?

The next two tables examine two bonding scenarios: both excluding and including right of way costs from turnpike revenue bonding. The tables use the Florida TaxWatch estimated range of potential costs for the Suncoast Connector to calculate the estimated average annual debt service costs and the toll revenue per mile needed to pay 100 percent of average annual debt service (over 30 years).

Turnpike bonds are generally issued when design and engineering work has been completed and the project has moved to the construction phase. The first table assumes 70 percent of total costs are bonded and interest adds 68 percent to those costs (see previous section). Design and right of way costs are not included. Turnpike bonds are funded with net revenue, after subtracting operations and maintenance expenses (OME). These expenses average between 22-24 percent of gross revenue on the entire turnpike⁵⁹ and the calculations below assume OME of 20 percent for the Suncoast Connector. The estimated needed toll revenue per mile is the average over the term of the bonds, and state law requires tolls to be indexed to inflation at least once every five years.

TABLE 3. ANNUAL DEBT SERVICE AND TOLL REVENUE PER MILE NEEDED TO BOND 70% OF PROJECT COST, BASED ON HYPOTHETICAL COSTS OF THE SUNCOAST CONNECTOR
\$ MILLIONS

	Estimated Total Cost	Bonded Costs	30 year Interest	Principal plus Interest	Ave. Annual Debt Service	Toll Revenue Needed/Mile
Low	\$4,000	\$2,800	\$1,904	\$4,704	\$157	\$1.31
Middle	\$7,250	\$5,075	\$3,451	\$8,526	\$284	\$2.37
High	\$10,500	\$7,350	\$4,998	\$12,348	\$412	\$3.43

Source: Florida TaxWatch, using data from the Florida Turnpike System and the State Board of Administration.

At the midpoint cost estimate, the Connector would have to produce \$2.37 million per mile in toll revenue to pay off the bonds to fund construction costs. This is ten percent more than the average revenue per mile of the Turnpike system as a whole and slightly greater than that of the Mainline (see table below).

The only segment close in size to the Suncoast Connector—the 155-mile Ticket System going from Palm Beach County to Osceola County—brings in \$1.19 million per mile,⁶⁰ half as much as the Suncoast Connector would need at the mid-point estimate.

At the high point cost estimate, the Suncoast Connector would have to produce \$3.43 million per mile, 60 percent higher than the average for the Turnpike. This is 83 percent of the top per-mile revenue producing segment of the Turnpike, the 43-mile Southern Coin System, which runs through Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach Counties and is one of the busiest segments in the Turnpike, producing \$4.12 million per mile.

If right of way costs for the Suncoast Connector are funded with turnpike revenue bonds, financing costs (and required toll revenue) will increase. The table below includes right of way costs, assuming 85 percent of total project costs are bonded (total costs minus 15 percent for planning and design costs).

59 Finance Department of Florida's Turnpike System, "2019 Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR)," December 2019.

60 Florida TaxWatch using data from Florida's Turnpike System, "2019 Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR)," December 2019.

TABLE 4. ANNUAL DEBT SERVICE AND TOLL REVENUE PER MILE NEEDED TO BOND 85% OF PROJECT COST, BASED ON HYPOTHETICAL COSTS OF THE SUNCOAST CONNECTOR
\$ MILLIONS

	Estimated Total Cost	Bonded Costs	30 year Interest	Principal plus Interest	Ave. Annual Debt Service	Toll Revenue Needed/Mile
Low	\$4,000	\$3,400	\$2,312	\$5,712	\$190	\$1.59
Middle	\$7,250	\$6,163	\$4,191	\$10,353	\$345	\$2.88
High	\$10,500	\$8,925	\$6,069	\$14,994	\$500	\$4.17

Source: Florida TaxWatch, using data from the Florida Turnpike System and the State Board of Administration.

Adding right of way costs increases interest costs by 21 percent, adding \$0.51 million to the middle estimate of the needed toll revenue per mile, bringing it to \$2.88 million. This is 34 percent higher than the average for the entire turnpike. At the high point cost estimate, the needed revenue per mile would exceed that of the Southern Coin System.

In addition to the statutory feasibility requirement that net revenues generated by the new toll project be sufficient to pay 100 percent of debt service by the 30th year, net revenues must be enough to fund 50 percent of debt service by the 12th year. Toll revenues are generally lower in the initial years of a new road, which could make meeting the feasibility test more difficult.

The above tables are not meant as a substitute for the economic feasibility test required by law for new turnpike projects, nor is the data to perform that test available. But it can be used to get a sense of how much toll revenue the Suncoast Connector would have to produce to fund bonding at various estimated cost levels.

As discussed earlier, the relatively minimal traffic in the Suncoast Corridor casts doubt on whether the Connector can produce the ridership and toll revenue needed to make it feasible. The mid-point cost estimate produces a required toll revenue per mile figure that is a little above the average for the entire Turnpike; however, the Turnpike has an average DVMT per lane mile that is more than eight times that of U.S. 19—the main road in the Suncoast Corridor.⁶¹ This is a significant gap. Where will that many new toll-payers come from?

⁶¹ Florida TaxWatch, from FDOT traffic data for District 2 plus Jefferson County, retrieved from <https://www.fdot.gov/statistics/mileage-rpts/default.shtm#Public>

TABLE 5. FLORIDA TURNPIKE TOLL REVENUE AND TRANSACTIONS

	Length (miles)	Toll Revenue (\$ millions)	Transactions (millions)	\$/mile (\$ millions)	Transactions/mile (millions)	Toll/mile* (cents)
Southern Coin System	43	\$177.24	174.28	\$4.12	\$4.05	7
Sawgrass Expressway	23	\$88.75	96.56	\$3.86	\$4.20	9
Veterans Expressway	15	\$56.58	70.16	\$3.77	\$4.68	12
Homestead Extension (HEFT)	47	\$172.81	202.54	\$3.68	\$4.31	9
Beachline West Expressway	8	\$29.32	35.64	\$3.67	\$4.45	10
Seminole Expressway	18	\$60.21	45.40	\$3.34	\$2.52	12
Southern Connector	6	\$15.15	18.83	\$2.52	\$3.14	13
Northern Coin System	67	\$164.12	97.95	\$2.45	\$1.46	6
Western Beltway	11	\$16.94	16.64	\$1.54	\$1.51	10
Polk Parkway	25	\$36.48	38.12	\$1.46	\$1.52	13
Ticket System	155	\$183.92	57.80	\$1.19	\$0.37	7
Suncoast Parkway	42	\$29.21	36.81	\$0.70	\$0.88	8
Beachline East Expressway	22	\$6.87	21.15	\$0.31	\$0.96	2
Total	482	\$1,037.60	\$911.88	\$2.15	\$1.89	9
Mainline	320	\$747.41	\$568.22	\$2.34	\$1.78	7

Table does not include the 1-4 connector, a 1-mile elevated bridge with a higher toll rate. * Toll per mile to traverse the full length. SunPass rate, cash rate is higher. Source: Florida Turnpike System, 2019 Comprehensive Annual Financial Report.

The portion of the Suncoast’s total costs financed by bonding could be reduced in order to scale back toll revenue requirements, but other funding sources would have to be used. Taking more money from the STTF would mean less money for needed transportation improvements.

The projections used in the final economic feasibility analysis must be based on solid estimates. If revenues fall short, more successful segments of the Turnpike will have to subsidize a new toll road, which can be unfair to turnpike users in other parts of the state who may never use the new facilities.

COVID-19 INCREASES THE FINANCIAL RISK

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted just about every facet of our lives. The virus has brought the economy to a standstill. People are spending and driving much less and tourists are not visiting our state, and the impact on government revenue has been profound. We are now in a period that will see government revenues drop by billions of dollars, and no one knows how long it will last. With one month of collections left in this fiscal year (FY 2019-20),⁶² year-to-date General Revenue was \$598 million below estimate, leading to a total GR reduction of \$878 million for the month.⁶³ What makes that even more remarkable is that April collections are \$1.455 billion under the estimate made in January.⁶⁴ Less driving will also have a direct impact on transportation funding, including M-CORES and the Suncoast Connector. Fewer cars on the road means less in gas taxes, rental car surcharges, and tolls, all dedicated transportation revenue sources. Total fuel tax collections in May were down \$130.0 million (37.5 percent) compared to May 2019.⁶⁵

62 Final collections data for June 2020--the last month of the fiscal year--will not be available until late in July. New revenue estimates will be produced in August 2020.

63 Florida TaxWatch, Budget Watch, "April's General Revenue Collections Come in \$878 Million Below Estimate for the Month," May 27, 2020.

64 Florida TaxWatch, Budget Watch, June 26, 2020. <https://floridatxwatch.org/Research/Full-Library/ArtMID/34407/ArticleID/18893/Budget-Watch-General-Revenue-1455-Billion-Below-Estimate>

65 Florida Department of Revenue, Revenue Collection Report May 2020, June 30, 2020.

The Florida Turnpike reports that it is experiencing decreasing traffic counts, reaching 51.0 percent on March 27. This means that, even without a stay-at-home order in place yet, there were half as many vehicles on the Turnpike as there were on the same date last year.⁶⁶ In April, there were less than half as many turnpike toll transactions as in April 2019, a drop of 41.2 million transactions. This created a \$41.1 million (45.5 percent) drop in revenue.⁶⁷ Toll revenues were down \$28.6 million (26.3 percent) in March. Alligator Alley and the Sunshine Skyway (not part of the Turnpike) had even larger percentage declines in revenue during April—57.7 percent and 62.6 percent, respectively. This pushes the two-month toll decline for the Turnpike and the two other facilities to almost \$75 million.

The Central Florida Expressway Authority was concerned enough about falling toll revenues to postpone the extension of the Osceola Parkway. The nine-mile road through Split Oak Forest in east Orange and Osceola counties was recently tentatively delayed by ten years—until 2034.⁶⁸

The International Bridge, Tunnel and Turnpike Association (IBTTA), an association of toll facility owners and operators, have predicted toll revenue losses will peak at 75 percent in June due to COVID-19. They expect losses of 15 percent to continue to March 2021. IBTTA has asked Congress to provide \$9.245 billion in flexible federal funding to the toll industry to “offset the huge loss in toll revenues expected in the next 12 months.”

It is still too early to see the full impact of reduced traffic on gas tax and other transportation revenue collections (gas taxes are collected at the wholesale level). But a similar reduction could mean a \$160 million hit to the STTF in fuel taxes and rental car surcharges. The uncertainty created by COVID-19 makes investing in major transportation projects that Floridians will be paying off for more than 30 years even riskier. The Suncoast Connector will already take money from needed transportation improvements and this will be exacerbated by falling transportation revenues.

FEASIBILITY PROJECTIONS HAVE BEEN WRONG BEFORE

Projecting costs for transportation projects is difficult and accurate traffic projections might be even more elusive. These are the two factors in an economic feasibility analysis of a new toll road. So not surprisingly, there are plenty of examples of toll revenues falling short of expectations. One example with implications for the Suncoast Connector is the Suncoast Parkway. Before it opened, the state’s consultant predicted \$150 million annually in toll collections by 2014. Projections were scaled back twice, all the way down to \$38 million a year (a reduction of 75 percent). Actual collections fell far short, with \$22 million collected in 2014. The economic fallout from the Great Recession had an impact and collections are now growing at a higher rate; however, in 2019 they are still only at \$29 million.⁶⁹ The Suncoast’s per-mile collections in 2019 of \$695,000 is by far the lowest of any segment of the Turnpike, with the exception of the Beachline East Expressway which has by far the lowest toll charges on the system.⁷⁰

66 State Board of Administration, Division of Bond Finance, “Traffic & Toll Revenue Information through May 2020,” June 8, 2020.

67 State Board of Administration, Division of Bond Finance, “Traffic & Toll Revenue Information through April 2020,” May 19, 2020.

68 Kevin Spear, Orlando Sentinel, “Controversial Split Oak Forest toll road likely delayed until 2034,” May 28, 2020.

69 Finance Department of Florida’s Turnpike System, 2019 Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR), December 2019.

70 Florida TaxWatch, using data from Florida’s Turnpike System, 2019 Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR), December 2019.

There are other examples of revenues not meeting expectations, such as the Veterans Expressway, the Seminole Parkway, and the Polk Parkway. The under-construction Suncoast 2 has also seen its initial projections decreased significantly.

The most glaring example is the Garcon Point Bridge near Pensacola—the infamous “Bridge to Nowhere” or “Bo’s Bridge,” named for the former House Speaker that pushed it through. The bridge failed to meet financial projections and the bridge authority went into default. After the amount owed bondholders grew to \$135 million in July 2018, they sued the state to compel FDOT to raise tolls.⁷¹ A judge recently ruled in the bondholders’ favor and the cash toll was raised to \$5—the highest in the state—on March 1, 2020. The Garcon Point Bridge was rushed through and bypassed FDOT’s rigorous planning process. The financial results have proven disastrous. While much smaller in scale and cost, Garcon Point Bridge may serve as a cautionary tale for the Suncoast Connector toll road.

CONCLUSION

One of the largest infrastructure projects ever undertaken in Florida has been set in motion. Florida already has more toll roads than any other state and M-CORES will increase the size of the Florida Turnpike System by two-thirds. The 150-mile Suncoast Connector alone will be the second largest segment of the Turnpike System. This is a multi-billion dollar project.

There are many supporters of M-CORES and they believe it is a forward-looking project that will accommodate the state’s rapid growth, bring economic development and needed infrastructure to rural communities, and relieve congestion, which are all worthwhile goals.

There are also many opponents who are vocal in their concerns that the road is not needed, will be expensive and not economically feasible, bring sprawl and development to communities that do not want it, bypass local businesses, and cause considerable damage to the environment and agriculture.

Moving forward with such a major, costly project with so many legitimate objections, without fully studying it (or even studying it at all), raises significant concerns. The Suncoast Connector toll road subverts Florida’s normal transportation planning process, which is a very deliberative, cooperative process with extensive coordination between local, state, and regional entities and is consistent with the State Transportation Plan and state and local comprehensive plans. FDOT also has a three-stage process for planning future statewide corridors that is supposed to take place before implementation: Concept (define area and identify needs), Evaluation (define potential corridors), and Project Development (identify alternatives for detailed analysis.)

The law creating the M-CORES project mandated the new toll roads be built, set a schedule for completion, and assigned dedicated revenue. This occurred before any needs assessment, Project Development and Environment (PD&E) report, or feasibility analysis was performed. Three task forces are now “developing” the roads with FDOT.⁷²

71 Jim Saunders, News Service of Florida, “Toll Increase Pushed for Panhandle Bridge,” February 10, 2020, retrieved from <https://www.pnj.com/story/news/2020/02/10/toll-increases-pushed-for-garcon-point-bridge/4715572002/>, last accessed May 20, 2020.

72 The task forces have mostly worked on developing guiding principles. The M-CORES law directs them to evaluate the need for, and the economic and environmental impacts of, hurricane evacuation impacts of, and land use impacts of, the corridors. They may also make recommendations on the design, accommodation and co-location of multiple modes of transportation and types of infrastructure and recommend ways to combine acquisition of right-of-way and environmental land. The actual design of the project, including the P, D & E study and preliminary engineering, will be performed by FDOT (consultants) at a later date.

The idea of a “no build” recommendation has been raised, but that may not have any impact. As Senate President Bill Galvano, the chief proponent of M-CORES said, “the task forces are not deciding whether or not we need the infrastructure and whether or not it’s happening.”⁷³

The Suncoast Connector will almost certainly be extremely expensive. With no specific route or specifications yet determined, estimating that cost is more than difficult. This report examined four current and one failed Turnpike projects and one proposed local toll road. Based on their costs, the Connector could cost between \$4.0 billion and \$10.5 billion, with the cost likely closer to the higher end of the range. The supporters say this can be built while mitigating environmental impacts. The Wekiva Parkway is cited as an example of how this can be done. That 25-mile toll road cost \$1.76 billion, or \$70 million per mile. The Suncoast Connector is six times as long.

At almost any cost in that range, it is highly doubtful that the new road would produce the necessary toll revenue to support the bonds to pay for it, at least with toll rates in-line with the rest of the Turnpike, and COVID-19 increases financial concerns dramatically. In March 2020, toll collections on the Turnpike fell 26 percent from the same month last year. April 2020 was worse, with toll transactions falling by 51.7 percent and toll collections by \$45.4 million. No one knows how long the economic effects of the virus will linger, which may negatively impact revenue even after it is gone. This also does not bode well for gas taxes and other transportation funding sources, not to mention sales taxes which fund much of the rest of state government. It is going to take some time to fill the hole in turnpike, transportation, and general revenue. Even discounting COVID-19 effects on revenue, the Suncoast Connector and M-CORES will take money away from other needed transportation projects throughout Florida — projects that have gone through FDOT’s deliberative planning process.

Florida TaxWatch supports some of the provisions of the M-CORES law, including redirecting more motor vehicle license revenue to the State Transportation Trust Fund (a past TaxWatch recommendation) and increasing funding for small county transportation assistance (SCOP and SCRAP), transportation disadvantaged, and construction workforce development. Bringing needed infrastructure—such as water, sewer, and broadband—to underserved communities is also laudable goal. But creating additional infrastructure needs by creating growth and development these communities may not want, may only further burden these rural counties. The M-CORES law has no provisions identifying or providing funding for this infrastructure. Perhaps the most important of these to foster economic development in existing communities is broadband access, which does have some dedicated funding and could be accomplished without a toll road.

The Suncoast Connector is a risky project with a significant price tag and little transportation need, proposed in a highly sensitive environmental area that is vulnerable to coastal flooding and rising sea levels. Moreover, this project subverts the normal deliberative transportation planning process mandating that the roads be built before any analysis has been completed. To do this with the largest transportation project in Florida in at least 60 years brings significant challenges that must be addressed in order to protect both taxpayers and the fiscal integrity of the Florida Turnpike System.

⁷³ John Kennedy, Gannet Capital Bureau, The Ledger, “Big Florida highway expansion continues to generate big concerns,” August 29, 2019, retrieved from <https://www.theledger.com/news/20190825/major-florida-highway-expansion-continues-to-generate-big-concerns>, last accessed May 20, 2020.

APPENDIX A: FUNDING FOR M-CORES IN THE CURRENT WORK PROGRAM

		2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	Total
SUNCOAST CONNECTOR								
Transportation Planning	State	\$3,066,539	\$4,000,000	\$4,000,000	\$4,000,000			\$15,066,539
	Toll/Turnpike		\$2,000,000	\$2,000,000	\$2,000,000			\$6,000,000
Preliminary Engineering & PD&E	State	\$510,000	\$19,000,000	\$35,000,000	\$38,000,000			\$92,510,000
	Toll/Turnpike		\$7,000,000	\$7,000,000	\$6,000,000			\$20,000,000
Right-of-Way	State	\$410,000	\$2,000,000	\$8,000,000	\$8,000,000			\$18,410,000
	Toll/Turnpike		\$4,000,000					\$4,000,000
Environmental	State		\$2,000,000	\$5,000,000	\$5,000,000			\$12,000,000
	Toll/Turnpike							
Total State		\$3,986,539	\$27,000,000	\$52,000,000	\$55,000,000			\$137,986,539
Total Toll/Turnpike			\$13,000,000	\$9,000,000	\$8,000,000			\$30,000,000
Total Funding in Work Program		\$3,986,539	\$40,000,000	\$61,000,000	\$63,000,000			\$167,986,539
SOUTHWEST-CENTRAL FLORIDA CONNECTOR								
Transportation Planning	State	\$3,110,000	\$4,000,000	\$4,000,000	\$4,000,000			\$15,110,000
	Toll/Turnpike		\$2,000,000	\$2,000,000	\$2,000,000			\$6,000,000
Preliminary Engineering & PD&E	State	\$525,635	\$15,000,000	\$30,000,000	\$33,000,000			\$78,525,635
	Toll/Turnpike		\$11,000,000	\$12,000,000	\$11,000,000			\$34,000,000
Right-of-Way	State	\$410,000	\$2,000,000	\$8,000,000	\$6,100,000			\$16,510,000
	Toll/Turnpike		\$4,000,000					\$4,000,000
Environmental	State			\$5,000,000	\$5,000,000			\$10,000,000
	Toll/Turnpike		\$2,000,000					\$2,000,000
Total State		\$4,045,635	\$21,000,000	\$47,000,000	\$48,100,000			\$120,145,635
Total Toll/Turnpike			\$19,000,000	\$14,000,000	\$13,000,000			\$46,000,000
Total Funding in Work Program		\$4,045,635	\$40,000,000	\$61,000,000	\$61,100,000			\$166,145,635
NORTHERN TURNPIKE CONNECTOR								
Transportation Planning	State	\$2,137,342	\$2,000,000	\$3,000,000	\$3,000,000			\$10,137,342
	Toll/Turnpike			\$2,000,000	\$2,000,000			\$4,000,000
Preliminary Engineering & PD&E	State	\$410,000	\$10,000,000	\$11,400,000	\$11,000,000			\$32,810,000
	Toll/Turnpike		\$12,000,000	\$8,100,000	\$8,500,000			\$28,600,000
Right-of-Way	State	\$410,000	\$2,000,000	\$7,500,000	\$7,000,000			\$16,910,000
	Toll/Turnpike		\$4,000,000					\$4,000,000
Environmental	State			\$5,000,000	\$5,000,000			\$10,000,000
	Toll/Turnpike		\$2,000,000					\$2,000,000
Total State		\$2,957,342	\$14,000,000	\$26,900,000	\$26,000,000			\$69,857,342
Total Toll/Turnpike			\$18,000,000	\$10,100,000	\$10,500,000			\$38,600,000
Total Funding in Work Program		\$2,957,342	\$32,000,000	\$37,000,000	\$36,500,000			\$108,457,342
PROJECT WIDE								
Transportation Planning	State	\$4,503,707	\$4,000,000	\$4,200,000	\$2,400,000			\$15,103,707
Preliminary Engineering (Risk Mgt)	State		\$2,000,000	\$4,000,000	\$4,500,000			\$10,500,000
Right-of-Way	State	\$125,000	\$2,000,000	\$2,940,000	\$2,940,000			\$8,005,000
Construction (Contingency)	State		\$1,000			\$140,800,000	\$142,700,000	\$283,501,000
Total Funding in Work Program		\$4,628,707	\$8,001,000	\$11,140,000	\$9,840,000	\$140,800,000	\$142,700,000	\$317,109,707
TOTAL M-CORES								
Total State		\$15,618,223	\$70,001,000	\$137,040,000	\$138,940,000	\$140,800,000	\$142,700,000	\$645,099,223
Total Toll/Turnpike		\$-	\$50,000,000	\$33,100,000	\$31,500,000	\$-	\$-	\$114,600,000
Total Funding in Work Program		\$15,618,223	\$120,001,000	\$170,140,000	\$170,440,000	\$140,800,000	\$142,700,000	\$759,699,223
STTF Funding in the M-CORES Act		\$12,500,000	\$57,500,000	\$100,000,000	\$104,200,000	\$105,000,000	\$105,000,000	\$484,200,000
Work Program Expenditures in Excess of M-CORES Act Funds		\$3,118,223	\$12,501,000	\$37,040,000	\$34,740,000	\$35,800,000	\$37,700,000	\$160,899,223

Source: Florida TaxWatch, using information from FDOT's Five Year Work Program

APPENDIX B: SUNCOAST CONNECTOR AVOIDANCE AREAS



Suncoast Corridor
Task Force Meeting #4

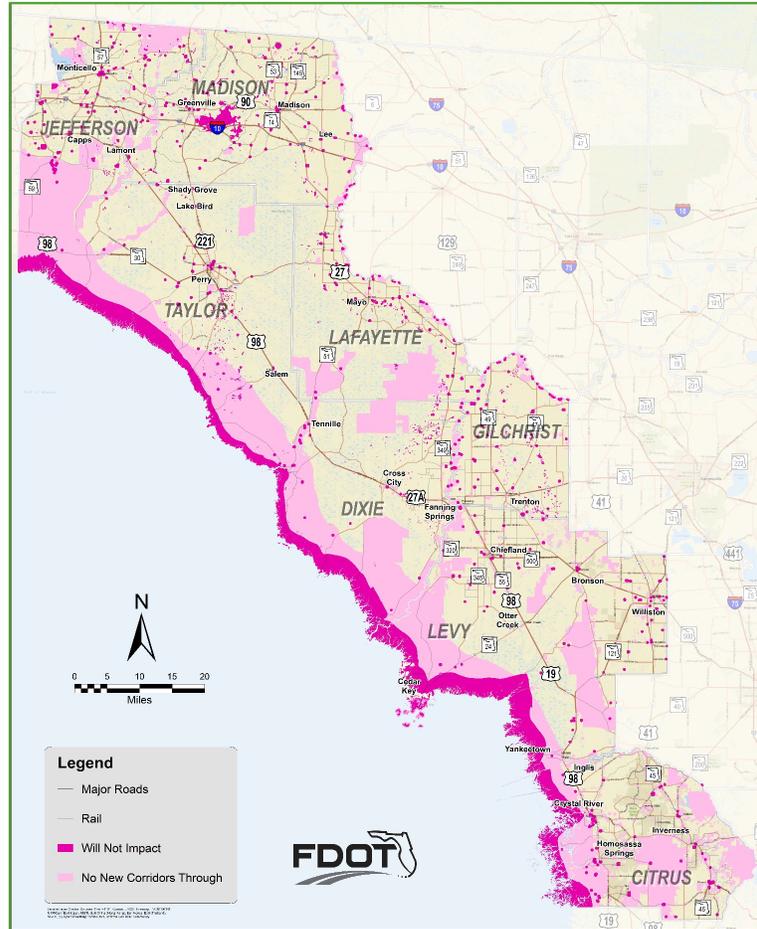
Avoidance Features and Map (Full Extent)

“Will not Impact” layers:

- » Springheads
- » Tribal Lands
- » Cultural Sites
- » Cemeteries
- » Listed National Register Sites
- » High-Risk Coastal Areas
- » Lakes

“No New Corridor Through” Layers

- » Aquatic Preserves
- » Coastal Area
- » Florida Forever-Owned Properties
- » Managed Areas
- » Mitigation Banks
- » State Forests
- » State Parks*
- » Certified Power Plants
- » Hospitals
- » Prisons
- » Public Water Supply Plants
- » Wastewater Facilities
- » Airports
- » Schools



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1

* Preserve ability to transverse the Cross Florida Greenway with potential enhancement opportunities

Source: FDOT, “[Suncoast Connector] Avoidance Features and Map,” downloaded from https://floridamcores.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/SCC-TF4-21_DraftAvoidanceAreasMaps.pdf

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RESEARCH PROJECT TEAM

Robert E. Weissert	Executive Vice President & General Counsel
Kurt Wenner	VP of Research <i>Principal Author</i>
Chris Barry	Dir. of Communications & External Affairs <i>Design, Layout, Publication</i>

All Florida TaxWatch research done under the direction of Dominic M. Calabro, President, CEO, Publisher & Editor.
FOR MORE INFORMATION: WWW.FLORIDATAXWATCH.ORG

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Please feel free to contact us if you can bring additional facts or context to enhance the quality of information on this transportation endeavor that will have a significant impact on the taxpaying residents, businesses, and visitors of Florida for decades to come.

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Florida TaxWatch
106 N. Bronough St.
Tallahassee, FL 32301

o: 850.222.5052

f: 850.222.7476

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