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Fl. Gov. May Cut Future Corridors Project

St. Petersburg Times, March 6, 2007

TALLAHASSEE – Florida Gov. Charlie Crist is indicating that he may not continue former Gov. Jeb Bush's Future Corridors plan for new toll roads. Crist said Monday that instead, the state needs to expand existing roads. The Future Corridors project proposed to build toll roads throughout rural parts of the state to help prepare for future growth.

The state needs to "prioritize and have roads where the people are and where we need them. Right now, that's South Florida, southeast Florida," Crist said. "I want us to expand I-75 south, I-95 south down to Miami and then I-4." The governor has previously been silent publicly regarding his take on the Future Corridors since he took office in January.

It has also been reported that one of the project's nine roads, the Heartland Parkway, a planned 152-mile toll road between Collier and Polk counties, was lobbied for by Sen. J.D. Alexander, R-Lake Wales. Alexander controls companies that own land along the proposed route and assisted in forming the group that is campaigning for the road. When Crist was asked if he was concerned that a lawmaker who had financial claims in the area had helped lobby for the road, Crist said, "Yes, that why I haven't jumped on it. They've been talking to me about it for months."

The governor has not yet named a successor to Denver Stutler, Bush's secretary of transportation, who supported the Heartland Parkway. The state is continuing to further study the road. Crist's new head of the state's growth management department, Thomas Pelham, says Future Corridors is the wrong approach. He believes the comprehensive land planning should come first, and the appropriate transportation should follow, not the reverse.

Express Lane Tolls May Be High

Virginia - Drivers in northern Virginia may soon be paying the highest tolls in the nation if a recent proposal to establish express toll lanes on the traffic-clogged interstates 95 and 395. Two companies planning to build the project have proposed tolls as high as a dollar a mile in some areas of the 36-mile route during peak travel times.

According to regional transportation planners, the fees for using the toll road could be even higher – up to \$1.60 per mile in some spots. This increase would bring the cost of one round-trip 31-mile commute from the Pentagon to Prince William Parkway during rush hour to \$41.46.

Currently, the highest highway toll rate is on the SR-91 in California, at a rate of \$9.25 for ten miles. The Virginia DOT supports the \$882 million project by Fluor Virginia Inc. and Transurban Development Inc. to convert the two existing carpool lanes into HOT lanes. The cost of using the lanes would increase during peak travel times to keep traffic moving. Vehicles with at least three occupants and buses would travel for free, along with users of the regular lanes.

The project also plans to add a third lane, and new ramps and bridges, as well as increased transit service. Fluor-Transurban hopes to begin construction on the project next year, and have all lanes open by 2010.

Congestion Charging Support 'Greater than Ever'

The Local, March 5, 2007

Sweden - Swedes support the congestion charge in Stockholm more than ever before, a recent poll reported. With the congestion charge, drivers pay to enter central Stockholm during weekdays. The charge is expected to be reintroduced to the local government July 1.

In the poll, 67 percent of the 1,021 residents surveyed said they agreed with the new government's decision to reintroduce the fees, which were initially introduced by the former Social Democratic government during the first half of 2006 for a trial run. 33 percent of survey respondents said they disapproved the decision to bring back the charge.

In a referendum in September, 51.3 percent voted in favor of keeping the charge. The incoming center-right administration vowed to honor the vote, but said that the revenue from the charge would go to road-building, not public transportation as the Social Democrats had planned.

Construction Co. Fined over False Report

The Roanoke Times, March 6, 2007

Virginia - A Virginia-based construction company has been fined \$2.5 million by the federal government for misrepresenting subcontract work performed by a business owned by a minority on the U.S. 460 Bypasses in Montgomery County, reported federal prosecutors Monday. Ten-percent of English Construction Co.'s work on the bypasses was required to be sub-contracted to a disadvantaged business enterprise, meaning they are owned by minorities or women.

Federal prosecutor Tom Bondurant said English hired DBE-qualified Colyer Construction Co., and then used Colyer as a front while actually doing the work themselves. English subcontracted other DBE companies for the job as well, so it met the 10 percent standard required by law even without Colyer's work, according to English Construction spokeswoman Beverly English Dalton.

"We didn't benefit economically or any other way," she said.

Bondurant said the \$2.5 million settlement eliminates the profit English made on the work, and serves to punish the company. But because the settlement is a civil forfeiture, state agencies such as VDOT can share the money. Dalton said the settlement was not a setback for the company, as "English is in strong financial condition."

Penn. Turnpike Unveils Safety Partnership

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, March 2, 2007

Pennsylvania - The Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission announced a three-year partnership with State Farm Insurance last week to increase highway safety for turnpike drivers. With the program, 23 pickup trucks will be deployed to act as first responders to highway emergencies 24/7, and highway safety advisors will staff five additional cars. The vehicles will bear the logos of State Farm and the turnpike commission in highly reflective material to make them easily visible.

The commission's general fund will receive a \$1.32 million sponsorship fee from State Farm over the three years, which will be used to expand its safety and information system for drivers. The turnpike commission launched its safety effort at the Mon-Fayette Expressway project office in Duquesne, unveiling the patrol vehicles which are now patrolling throughout the 359-mile toll road.

"By entering into this unique partnership with State Farm, the Pennsylvania Turnpike further enhances safety and peace-of-mind for the more than 186 million motorists who annually drive our toll road," said commission Chief Executive Officer Joe Brimmeier.

Florida and California have instituted similar safety programs featuring the State Farm Safety Patrol on two other U.S. Highways.

Mayor: No Light Rail on Scottsdale Road

East Valley Tribune, March 1, 2007

SCOTTSDALE, Arizona - The Scottsdale Mayor who claimed transportation to be "the number one issue" has announced she does not support light rail on Scottsdale Road, and instead proposed a bond issue election next year to fund tourism projects. After calling transportation the top priority in her annual State of the City address, Mayor Mary Manross said the proposed 20 mile rail line is not the way to go. At a cost of \$70 million per mile, Manross says she prefers to wait to see if the connecting lines in Phoenix, Tempe, and Mesa will be effective.

Manross believes downtown Scottsdale and Old town need to be preserved. "Let there be no question about it, that while I support improved transit opportunities on our signature road, I do not support light rail on Scottsdale Road going through the heart of our downtown," the mayor said.

The mayor said the city's transportation plan should be complete this fall, which will include bus rapid transit, park and ride lots and other local transit connectors, as well as an expansion of its network of bicycle, pedestrian, and equestrian paths. Manross also touted the success of Scottsdale's photo speed enforcement campaign on Loop 101. "This initiative has captured the attention of the nation," she said. "Speeding, collisions, and injuries were significantly reduced."



I feel like Yogi Berra who said, "This is like deja vu all over again." Years ago, a previous Scottsdale mayor opposed Loop 101 going along the edge of the city. A long and difficult process ensued. In the end it was built ¼ mile east on the Pima Indian Reservation. Development along the 101 has been amazing with the Pima Indian Nation being the financial beneficiaries of all the Scottsdale residents shopping in their stores. In retrospect, Scottsdale's decision to oppose the 101 was a poor choice. Looks like they are headed in the same direction again. A few bike and equestrian paths aren't going to solve the transportation problems plaguing Scottsdale. TW

Bay Area Battle for Funds Pays Off

Inside Bay Area; San Francisco Chronicle, March 4, 2007

California - The California Transportation Commission yielded to the public outcry to amend its allocation of \$4.5 billion in congestion relief funding Wednesday. The outcome was a complete reversal of the CTC staff's recommendations less than two weeks earlier, which gave equal allotments to rural areas with minor congestion problems as to the Bay Area and Los Angeles, the busiest areas in the state.

The initial plan triggered a flood of protests from Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and Bay Area transportation and business leaders, citizens, and the press, asking the CTC to reconsider. Bogged down with 85 percent of the traffic congestion in northern California, the Bay Area's original \$700 million proposal was increased to a final \$1.29 billion – 70 percent of the transportation funds. Additionally, Caltrans Director Will Kempton has earmarked another \$405 million to the Doyle Drive approach to the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco.

Commissioners cut the \$177 million Willits Bypass in Mendocino County, and replaced it with widening the Novato Narrows on Highway 101 in Marin County, adding merge lanes at Highway 101/I-580 interchange in San Rafael, and installing a carpool lane westbound on I-580 in Dublin.

Randy Rentschler, of the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, called the reversal "a big win." The commission, along with the Bay Area Council of business executives, lead the campaign to reverse the initial recommendation, which suggested handing out only \$2.7 billion right now, and give out the rest in 2008, after getting more information to compare projects. "People who travel on 80, 880, 580, and 101 are going to get to spend more time with their families."

Construction on the projects will begin within a few years.

183A Toll Road Opens

CBS 42, March 2, 2007

CEDAR PARK, Texas – Commuters in north Austin, Texas celebrated the opening of the \$238 million 183A toll road Saturday after two years of construction. The 11.6 mile roadway was built to relieve congestion in southern Williamson County, stretching from US 183 at RR 620 to US 183, north of Leander.

The new toll road is expected to cut travel time by 60 percent on this corridor with no signals to slow down drivers. A drive which previously took 10-15 minutes during rush hour will now take only four minutes. All tolls will be waived on the route through May 1, to encourage drivers to try the new road, and Tx-Tag users will receive June free as well.

Florida Awards Biggest Contract in State History

Naples News, March 3, 2007

Florida - Florida awarded the biggest construction contract in state history last Friday to widen Interstate 75 to six lanes between Golden Gate Parkway in Naples and Colonial Boulevard in Fort Meyers. A team led by Anderson Columbia and Ajax Paving was selected for the \$430.5 million contract to expand the 30 miles of interstate and rebuild the Immokalee Road interchange. The project, budgeted over five years, is expected to be completed in three years. The state has offered \$100,000-per-day incentives for finishing early, with a \$15 million cap.

State officials had hoped that the project would continue five miles further north, and replace the Daniels Parkway interchange, but reality set in when they received the high bids. Southwest Florida Expressway Authority board member Jim Coletta said the high bids for the larger project are additional proof that tolls are necessary for an even wider I-75. "It's another example of the necessity of the authority moving forward toward tolling lanes five and six," Coletta said.

Consultants for the authority are now looking into a 10-lane interstate, funded by express lane tolls they have recommended in the new FDOT contract. The 10-lane project is estimated to cost up to \$1.8 billion. "The truth of the matter is there just isn't enough funding out there," Coletta said. "We're going to have to make a choice between tolls and no tolls, and if we don't toll, it means we're going to leave it for the next generation."

Privatization Alternative: Use Turnpike as Credit Card

March 3, 2007, AM New York

TRENTON, N.J. – New Jersey is considering using future revenue from its toll roads to ease the state's budget deficit. State officials are considering alternatives to leasing the state's busiest toll roads, the New Jersey Turnpike and the Garden State Parkway, including using the roads as a credit card to borrow against future toll revenue, in order to reduce property taxes, pay debt, and fund other needs. In the plan, the state would estimate the amount it would collect in tolls on the turnpike and the parkway over the next 15 years. It would then borrow that lump sum, and pay it back annually with interest, like a credit card or mortgage.

Transportation and finance experts say this would be an unusual move for state government. "You could raise a lot of money here very quickly," said Peter Humphreys, of the New York law firm McDermott Will & Emery, which has years of experience in helping private companies do this sort of borrowing. He isn't aware of any state that has done it.

And while it would allow the state to maintain control of its assets, some fear it would result in the same steady increase in tolls as privatization. Humphreys said that while the quick cash infusion would build new schools, improve health care and enhance state colleges, tolls would have to be increased to pay the interest and ensure the loan could be paid back if toll traffic is lower than expected.

"It's not one (option) that I would embrace on day one," said Assemblyman John Wisniewski, D-Middlesex, the Assembly Transportation Committee chairman. "It's not one that I think we should do automatically, but if we had to do something it's certainly the least offensive of the possible options."



New Jersey has significant debt issues already. They have significant needs and no easy answer for funding critical improvements. In light of that, it seems ill-

advised, when desperate for transportation funding, to borrow against future revenues and then use that infusion of cash to reduce property taxes, pay for schools and other non-transportation related needs. TW

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