

April 25, 2019

The Honorable House of Representatives
House Office Building
402 S. Monroe St.
Tallahassee, FL 32399

RE: Oppose proposed toll roads – HB 7113/SB 7068

To the Florida House of Representatives:

The 75 below-signed organizations and businesses ask that you oppose legislation that seeks to construct three toll roads through rural Florida. These highways will not reduce traffic or provide safety during hurricane events.

1000 Friends of Florida found in its [Florida 2070](#) report that Florida is on track to increase developed land to a full third of the State in the next half century. Sprawl is not progress. These toll roads will cost Florida hundreds of thousands of acres of farms and rural lands and [fragment landscape and wildlife habitat](#). The intended “benefits” of these toll roads include water and sewer infrastructure which, with on and off ramps, will accelerate urban sprawl.

This legislation would carve three corridors through Florida’s [undeveloped areas](#):

- "Southwest-Central Florida Connector" extending from Collier County to Polk County; a previous highway planned for the route was called the Heartland Parkway
- "Suncoast Connector" extending from Citrus County to Jefferson County
- "Northern Turnpike Connector" extending from the northern terminus of the Florida Turnpike northwest to the Suncoast Parkway

Building these roads will be very expensive. The funding would grow from \$45 million next fiscal year to \$90 million in the 2020-2021 fiscal year, about \$135 million the next year, and a recurring amount of \$140 million starting in the 2022-2023 fiscal year. And that’s just for planning. Billions will be bonded to actually build hundreds of miles of limited access highways. Florida will be paying off the debt for more than a generation instead of funding education, healthcare, or [needed infrastructure](#) for wastewater, drinking water, and the roads and bridges we already have.

These hugely expensive road projects and accompanying urban sprawl will devastate habitat for the Florida Panther and dozens of other endangered and threatened Florida species. They will destroy important wetlands, forests, springs, and aquifer recharge areas from Florida Bay to the Georgia border even though they would not serve an identified transportation purpose. In fact, [the FDOT Interstate 75 Relief Task Force](#) recommended in 2016 that rather than new roads, a better approach was expanding the vehicle capacity of the interstate and connecting highways.

Transit and planning relieve congestion, not building roads. Relieving congestion in urban areas requires a focus on transit. The American Society of Civil Engineers’ [2016 Report Card](#) notes that only 2% of Floridians’ commutes to work were made by public transit and that Florida needs to develop and connect its transit networks with an additional \$1.3 billion investment.

Road building is not a sustainable economic development strategy for rural communities. In fact, these roads will route traffic away from communities established on existing roads, harming their economies.

New tollways through west-central Florida are not the answer to hurricane preparedness. Floridians need more safe spaces in their communities to shelter during storms; only 42% of schools are designated hurricane shelters, indicating many schools do not meet the structural requirements. Providing safe shelters for evacuees is a more practical and affordable response to extreme weather events than new toll expressways.

We urge you to spend Florida tax payer dollars wisely and reject the toll roads.

Sincerely,

1000 Friends of Florida

Thomas Hawkins, Policy & Planning
Director

Aquatics for Life

Susan Steinhauer, President

Audubon Everglades

Scott Zucker, Vice President &
Conservation Co-Chair

ASBRO LLC.

E. Allen Stewart III, P.E. Managing Partner

Bullsugar Alliance

Alex Gillen, Policy Director

Catalyst Miami

Gretchen Beesing, CEO

Central Florida Astronomical Society

Eric Hoin, President

Center for Biological Diversity

Jaelyn Lopez, Florida Director

Chart 411

Lucinda Johnston, Executive Director

Citizens For Sanity

Dan Rametta, Director

City of Seminole Community Garden

Mary Ann Kirk, Garden Coordinator

**Clean Water Coalition of Indian River
County**

Judy Orcutt, Vice President

**Concerned Citizens of Bayshore
Community, Inc.**

Steven Brodtkin. Vice President/Secretary

Conservancy of Southwest Florida

Nicole Johnson, Director of Environmental
Policy

**Conservation Foundation of the Gulf
Coast**

Christine P. Johnson, President

Defenders of Wildlife

Kent L. Wimmer, AICP, Senior
Representative

Ding Darling Wildlife Society

Mike Baldwin, President

Emerald Coastkeeper, Inc.

Laurie Murphy, Executive Director

Englewood Indivisible

Jane Hunter, Leader

Environmental Confederation of Southwest Florida (ECOSWF)
Becky Ayeach, President

Environment Florida
Jennifer Rubiello, State Director

Florida Bay Forever - Save Our Waters
Elizabeth Jolin, Director

Florida Conservation Voters
Aliko Moncrief, Executive Director

Florida Native Plant Society
Susan Carr, President

Florida Native Plant Society, Conradina Chapter
Carol Hebert, President

Florida Native Plant Society, Pine Lily Chapter
Karina Veaudry, President

Florida PIRG
Matt Casale, Transportation Campaign Director

Florida Policy Institute
Sadaf Knight, CEO

Florida Voices for Health
Scott Darius, Executive Director

Florida Water Conservation Trust
Terry Brant, Legislative Chairman

Forging Alliances, Inc.
Alexander Easdale, Owner/Principal

Friends of the Everglades
Philip Kushlan, President

Friends of Split Oak Forest
Valerie Anderson, President

Friends of Warm Mineral Springs, Inc.
Juliette Jones, Director

Hands Along The Water
Samantha Gentrup, President

Ichetucknee Alliance, Inc.
John D. Jopling, President

Indivisible Clay County
Sandy Goldman, Chair

Indivisible Mandarin
Karen Droege, Chair

Indivisible St Johns
Mary Lawrence, Founder

Indivisible Venice
Charles Rusman, Lead Team

International Dark Sky Association, FL Chapter
Diana Umpierre, Chair

Izaak Walton League of America, Florida Keys Chapter
Michael F. Chenoweth, President

League of Women Voters of Florida
Patricia Brigham, President

Lobby For Animals
Thomas Ponce, Founder/President

Marion Audubon Society
Barbara Schwartz, Conservation Chair

Martin County Conservation Alliance
Donna Melzer, Chair

Miakka Community Club,
Cathy Lewis

Natural Resources Defense Council
Alison Kelly, Senior Attorney, Lands
Nature Program

NW St. Johns County United for Progress
Richard Chapman, President

Our Santa Fe River, Inc.
Michael Roth, President

Peace Justice Sustainability Florida
Alice Wujciak, Member Activist

Peacehome Campaigns
David Gibson, Organizing Director

Pelican Island Audubon
Richard Baker, Ph.D., President

Progress Florida
Mark Ferrulo, Executive Director

Rainbow River Conservation, Inc.
Burton Eno, PhD, President

Rebah Farm
Carol Ahearn, Owner

ReLEAF Sarasota
Leslie Harris-Senac, Board of Directors

**Responsible Growth Management
Coalition**
Connie Langmann, President

Rum 138, LLC
Merrillee Jipson, Owner

Sanibel Captiva Conservation Foundation
Rae Ann Wessel, Natural Resource Policy
Director

**Santa Fe Lake Dwellers Association Inc.
(SFLDA)**
Jill McGuire, President

Save the Manatee Club
Katie Tripp, Ph.D., Director of Science and
Conservation

**Seminole United Methodist Church
Community Garden**
Bob Huttick, Garden Coordinator

Sierra Club Florida
Frank Jackalone, Chapter Director

**South Florida Amateur Astronomers
Association**
Monroe Pattillo, President

South Florida Wildlands Association
Matthew Schwartz, Executive Director

Southern Cross Astronomical Society
Tim Khan, Vice President

Southwest Florida Astronomical Society
Brian Risley, President

Space Coast Progressive Alliance
Philip E. Stasik, President

Speak Up Wekiva, Inc.
Chuck O'Neal, President

Springs Eternal Project
John Moran, Co-director

St. Johns Riverkeeper
Lisa Rinaman, Riverkeeper

Stone Crab Alliance
Karen Dwyer, Ph.D., Co-founder

Sunshine Citizens, Inc.
Christopher Vela, President

WWALS Watershed Coalition
John S. Quarterman, Suwannee Riverkeeper