

**For Immediate Release**

**October 14, 2020**

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## **\*\*PRESS RELEASE\*\***

### **M-CORES PUBLIC COMMENT ANALYSIS RELEASED**

#### ***93 percent of the public says “no” to M-CORES***

**TALLAHASSEE**--The *No Roads to Ruin Coalition* (NRTR) held a virtual Zoom press conference today to release the compiled and categorized public comments submitted throughout the FDOT/M-CORES process; something FDOT has refused to do. Consistent with opposition at task force meetings, the public comment is overwhelmingly, 93 percent, opposed to continuing the M-CORES process.

After 15 months of public meetings and collecting public comment in multiple formats for the three M-CORES task forces, the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) has never provided, to the task force members or the public, a complete record and accounting of public comment submissions. While FDOT has shared a total count of comments received and a tally of broad areas of concern, it has consistently discounted form letters and denied task force members and the public any information related to the sentiments and positions (anti, unclear, pro, etc.) expressed in those public comments.

Multiple public records requests made by a number of different NRTR Coalition partners since last winter produced 9,886 total comments received from FDOT. Once received, a small army of volunteer “comment counters” from across the state engaged in reading through and categorizing each of the comments in order to identify the number of anti-M-CORES, pro-M-CORES, and unclear positions.

Kim Wheeler, Founder of Rural Levy Says No Toll Roads, stated: “Determining the position from each of the comment submissions was actually easy. I wish I could share all the comments with you. They are passionate, reasoned and sometimes angry. The people who are against the roads talk about protecting our water and our wild places, habitats for panthers, black bears and numerous birds. They talk about protecting our farms, ranches and our rural way of life. They are against the toll roads because of the cost, worried more now with the revenue shortfall caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many people discussed the tourists who come here for our springs, rivers and parks. Many people wrote about the need to repair the roads we have and to consider other means of transportation. There was no legitimate excuse for FDOT to withhold that information from the public or the task force members.”

“What we found, after going through each of the comments submitted between August 2019 and

October 7, 2020, is that 93 percent of the public comments were opposed to the M-CORES program, 3 percent of the comments were unclear, and only 4 percent were in favor,” stated Jon Bleyer, Progress Florida Online Communications Specialist.

“It is pretty clear why FDOT omitted any mention of the public sentiment. With well over ninety (90) percent of comments opposing M-CORES, it doesn't support their public relations narrative. FDOT has consistently claimed that ‘public participation is vital to the M-CORES process’ but has refused to tell task force members the true extent of public opposition. The M-CORES process has been a sham from the beginning and this just underscores that fact,” said Ryan Smart, Florida Springs Council Executive Director.

“FDOT has gone to great lengths to obfuscate the truth and hide public sentiment. They refuse to share what they have received through public comment, they don't want to count form letters as public comments, and at meetings, whether in-person or virtual, the public has been made to wait until the very end of the day, after many task force members have already left the building or the virtual space,” said Sarah Younger, Chair of the Suwannee St. Johns Sierra Club.

South Florida watercolor artist Kim Heise said, “Enough is enough already. Shut M-CORES down. This proves that everyone knows it is a disaster.”

Bleyer added: “FDOT is set to release final task force reports by November 15, 2020 and we expect the fact that 93 percent of all public comments were in opposition to M-CORES to be included in those reports. Task force members have a duty to take the public's overwhelming opposition into consideration as they finalize their report and recommendations to the Legislature and the Governor.”

“Today marks the last day for the public to submit comments regarding the three draft task force reports. Yesterday, a joint letter, signed by 110 organizations and businesses, was delivered to FDOT calling for a “No Build” decision from the task forces, FDOT, the Governor, and the Legislature, “ said Smart.

**October 13, 2020 Joint Comment Letter:**

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1E48OpMnNKQhK2iz6BYJYlj0K5On58hKZ/view?usp=sharing>

**Graphics:**

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1xn5aDDAO6bPSmeTVP3qXd7PyJtTOSmHV/view?usp=sharing>

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ChzbOv5YY7fe7OEKwiyteN0MI9tSNnu-/view?usp=sharing>

**Comment count:**

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/19iB27UT-4vwwormxChlOTZBDWgTIGRY350xx15fUX8kc/edit?usp=sharing>

**10/12/20 FDOT email to Task Force members containing comment files:**

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1w9pnDrU-mC0Kmf-9N-USsFg6TkjT6uaF/view?usp=sharing>

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**Video recording of press conference:**

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1lCCNWUaTcwSPda6Ga7MuNsdRAkkq4Dm/view?usp=sharing>

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**Slides:**

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1nTM3fkRa--DAldgP7wxXEA6iANOOaJ4P/view?usp=sharing>

**Background:**

In 2019, the Florida state legislature passed SB 7068 to authorize the design and construction of 330 miles of new toll roads through the heart of rural Florida. If built, these new toll roads will destroy large swaths of Florida's last remaining rural lands and communities, pollute waterways, and threaten endangered wildlife, including the iconic Florida panther.

The bill creating the Multi-use Corridors of Regional Economic Significance (M-CORES) was signed into law by Governor Ron DeSantis on May 17, 2019, despite a veto request from over 90 organizations and businesses from across Florida ([link](#)).

The *No Roads to Ruin Coalition*, devoted to stopping the unneeded and costly plan for 330 miles of new toll roads across the state, was launched in August 2019 and is now 98 organizations and businesses strong. The *No Roads to Ruin Coalition* Steering Committee includes representatives from the Center of Biological Diversity, Conservancy of Southwest Florida, Florida Conservation Voters, Florida Springs Council, Progress Florida, Save the Manatee Club, and Sierra Club.

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