

June 5, 2020

The Honorable Ron DeSantis
Plaza Level 05, The Capitol
400 S. Monroe St.
Tallahassee, FL 32399

RE: Redirect M-CORES funding to critical state needs

Dear Governor DeSantis and Florida State Senators and Representatives:

We are currently in a time of great uncertainty. For many Florida residents and businesses, the future has never seemed so unclear. To ensure that the basic needs of Floridians are met during and after the COVID-19 pandemic will require an unprecedented fiscal response at a time when our state's primary revenue sources may be severely diminished. The below signed eighty (80) organizations and businesses ask that you strike the \$90 million in funding for M-CORES from the 2020-2021 budget, and use that funding instead to help the unemployed, small businesses, agricultural producers and workers, and other Floridians hit hard by COVID-19 and its repercussions.

We know the budget is designed in such a way as to make the extraction of M-CORES-related dollars less than straightforward, however, we also know that if regular Floridians, rather than special interests, are your first priority, you will extract and redirect those funds.

A year ago, these roads were a bad idea: they will further degrade our water resources and compromise human health, damage local businesses and rural downtowns, lead to the loss of threatened and endangered species, and misdirect tax dollars away from important state needs. Today, these toll roads are preposterous.

According to 1000 Friends of Florida's analysis, Florida is scheduled to spend \$135 million on M-CORES by July 1, 2021 and more than \$1.1 billion over the next 10 years. Most of that \$1.1 billion will be spent on just designing the toll roads. Based on similar projects completed in the past, the total cost of the M-CORES toll roads could be more than \$21 billion. These funds will be needed elsewhere, if they are available at all.

Sales tax accounts for nearly eighty (80) percent of state general revenue and about one-fifth of sales tax comes directly from the hospitality and tourism industries. Even as safer at home orders are modified to allow for limited recreation and tourism, after two months of lockdown Florida will likely lose billions of dollars in tax revenue while needing to do more than ever to care for Florida's large elderly population, address the critical needs of the unemployed, and keep small businesses afloat.

The Legislature can help communities by providing money directly to local governments who know best the needs of their communities and have long lists of shovel-ready projects waiting for state funding.

While people can disagree on whether or not the M-CORES toll roads should be built at all, it would be the height of hubris to spend more than a hundred million dollars on planning new toll roads in the middle of a global pandemic.