

Elevated lanes on I-595 would harm neighborhoods near highway, residents say

By Michael Turnbull And Lisa J. Huriash
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Plantation - Some residents foresee a mass of ugly overhead bridges if Interstate 595 is rebuilt with elevated reversible lanes.

State officials, however, say today's construction standards make it possible to build a structure both "graceful and slim," supported by a single row of champagne flute-shaped piers spaced along the center of the median.

But leaders of Plantation's Hawks Landing neighborhood aren't convinced.

They've created a Web site, www.595alert.org, aiming to raise money to lobby elected officials to change the plans and hire engineers to come up with alternatives.

"We want to preserve the way life exists there right now," said David Weiss, president of the Hawks Landing homeowners association. "You don't want to look up and see a road."

Mitchell Chester, who lives about a quarter-mile from I-595 in Davie's Pasadena Estates, said the expansion would create a ribbon of urban blight through the western suburbs.

"No matter where you are living, whether in an expensive home or mobile home or apartment or condo, this issue cuts across the entire spectrum of residents in housing," Chester said.

When the federal government decided in 1980 to build I-595, the proposed route led to cow pastures and swamps. Civilization was a 40-minute trip along a two-lane stretch of State Road 84.

But I-595's opening in 1989 cut that drive in half. That was six years before Hawks Landing, a community of 443 customized mansions that sell as high as \$6 million, welcomed its first residents.

Today, I-595 is swamped with commuters at rush hour. Those old cow pastures have given way to homes, offices and shopping centers built right up to the edge of the highway.

Hemmed in by a canal and S.R. 84, I-595 can't be widened without seizing property. So the state decided to build above the median.

Details of the project have been discussed at public meetings and reported in the media over the past four years. The Federal Highway Administration approved the plans in June 2006.

Construction could begin as early as 2009, depending on how the \$1.5 billion project is financed.

"We've solicited as much input as we could and advertised the meetings everywhere we should," said Joseph Borello, I-595 project manager.

South Florida officials have looked for guidance in Tampa, where a 9-mile elevated highway in the median of the Crosstown Expressway opened last year. Like I-595, the Crosstown cuts through both commercial and residential areas. Officials there decided to build elevated lanes because it left the ground space

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available for future lanes or a light rail system.

"It truly is a work of art," said Martin Stone, the Tampa-Hillsborough Expressway Authority's planning director.

By building I-595's elevated lanes over the median and putting up 22-foot-high noise walls, Borello said, the noise will be less than what residents next to I-595 experience today.

"There is tremendous noise out there now but no noise abatement," he said.

"When we're finished, there should be a significant reduction in noise, even with the elevated lanes."

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