
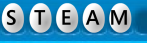




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## Broward commissioners prefer I-595 lanes not be elevated








By Scott Wyman and Michael Turnbull | sun-sentinel.com  
5:09 PM EDT, September 11, 2007

FORT LAUDERDALE - With state transportation officials now looking at reversible toll lanes in the median of Interstate 595, Broward County commissioners told them that they would prefer that to elevated lanes.

Commissioners unanimously opposed elevated lanes Tuesday because of concern expressed among nearby homeowners about noise and pollution. "I want to strike a balance," Commissioner Lois Wexler said, noting an elevated road would be 30 feet in the air.

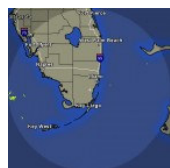
The state Department of Transportation had been planning to build elevated reversible lanes to ease congestion on I-595, but announced Monday that it is considering an alternative to use the median between Florida's Turnpike and Interstate 75.

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The state had chosen elevated lanes because the median has room only for two lanes and because the median was supposed to be reserved for a future light rail line. Traffic forecasts show two additional lanes wouldn't be enough to keep pace with population growth.

Now state officials say there is room for three lanes, if westbound I-595 and westbound State Road 84 are shifted to the north next to the North New River Canal. If they choose to shift the current lanes, the planned light rail line will have to be elevated, most likely between eastbound I-595 and eastbound S.R. 84.

"In the past several months, we've analyzed whether there is some way to get three lanes on the ground. We've found a way to do that," said Jim Wolfe, secretary of the Department of Transportation's District 4 office in Fort Lauderdale.

Residents in Davie and Plantation who live along I-595 say the elevated lanes would create a ribbon of urban blight through the western suburbs.

There are a couple of catches to putting the reversible lanes on the ground, however.

Moving I-595 and S.R. 84 next to the canal means a bulk head or wall will have to be built to separate the road from the water. Keeping the reversible lanes on the ground will shave about \$200 million off the cost of the \$1.5 billion project, Wolfe said.

But it will add \$200 million or more to the light rail project because elevated structures are more expensive. Wolfe said it's too early to know the exact cost because the light rail project isn't as advanced as the plans for adding lanes to I-595.

A decision on the reversible lanes, which is up to Wolfe and his staff, is expected by the end of the month. In October, the state intends to begin seeking qualified contractors.

Regardless of what plan is chosen, state officials hope to begin construction in 2009 and open the new lanes by 2014.

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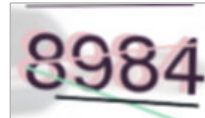
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