

<https://www.heraldtribune.com/news/20191016/routes-for-three-new-florida-toll-roads-to-be-unveiled-in-january>

# Routes for three new Florida toll roads to be unveiled in January

By [John Kennedy](#)

GateHouse Capital Bureau

Posted Oct 16, 2019 at 2:24 PM

Speedy timetable calls for route selection in January, though few public meetings have been held

TALLAHASSEE — Detailed routes for three new Florida toll roads, amounting to the state’s biggest highway expansion in decades, are expected to be unveiled in January, a House committee was told Wednesday.

Florida Department of Transportation Chief Engineer Will Watts said the contours of the proposed roads will be made public following two more rounds of public hearings by task forces reviewing the road-building effort, signed into law by Gov. Ron DeSantis earlier this year.

Pushed by Senate President Bill Galvano, R-Bradenton, and a powerful coalition of road-building associations over opposition from environmentalists and planning groups, the 330 miles of new roads were approved by the Republican-controlled Florida Legislature.

But even lawmakers on the House Transportation & Tourism budget panel seemed surprised at the speedy pace of the project.

“That’s pretty fast,” said Rep. Jay Trumbull, R-Panama City, when Watts told of the January timeframe.

Another round of task force meetings is planned the next two weeks in Citrus and Polk counties. A third is set for December — just before the routes for the highways are made public by FDOT, close to when the Legislature is scheduled to open the 2020 session in Tallahassee.

Trumbull said more “public input” is probably needed.

“I realize that the lines are preliminary as well, but to have a January turnaround, to have lines drawn, the way it looks after only two or three meetings ... we should probably have a few more,” Trumbull said.

He added, “The onus is on the department to make sure that there’s enough public input moving forward, that it doesn’t look like a card trick.”

Under the plan, the Tampa-area Suncoast Parkway, which now stretches less than 60 miles from Hillsborough County to Citrus County, would extend another 150 miles to the Georgia line.

The new highway would serve as a hurricane evacuation route, but also is envisioned as bringing development to mostly rural central and north Florida counties. Another new road proposed would stretch as much as 150 miles, from the ranch and citrus groves of Polk County to Collier County and the Gulf Coast, near Naples.

The third toll road is a proposed 30-mile extension of Florida’s Turnpike from where it connects to Interstate 75 near Wildwood to the expanding Suncoast Parkway, a roadway expected to ease travel on the crowded interstate.

At the first meeting of all three task forces — held in Tampa in August — DOT officials spoke frequently about the need for “consensus-building” by the panels — around land acquisition, natural resource safeguards, and business development — but all with a focus on building the roads.

Those questioning whether the three new toll roads should even be built have said they were alarmed at the tone of the opening round of discussion.

Florida Conservation Voters has joined with Sierra Club-Florida, the Center for Biological Diversity and the Conservancy of Southwest Florida to oppose the road projects, the state’s biggest undertaking since creation of Florida’s Turnpike in the 1950s.

Watts on Wednesday said, “No build is always an option,” adding that the “task forces can make any recommendation they want to.”

The new law, however, doesn’t give the task forces the final say on whether the roads get built. Instead, it calls for highway construction to begin by 2022.

“We’ve been very cautious not to get ahead of the task forces,” Watts said. “We haven’t drawn any lines.”