



# 95 EXPRESS



## News Clip

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From: *Miami Herald*, , Thursday, December 4, 2008  
Subject: **Editorial- Allure of fast lanes leads to easy money**

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### **Allure of fast lanes leads to easy money**

**OUR OPINION:** Judge HOT project by its impact on traffic congestion

Ready or not, tolls are coming to Interstate-95 -- but this doesn't mean we have to like it. Count us among the many thousands of South Florida motorists who dislike tolls, especially when they are assessed without our approval and for travel on roadways built and maintained by our tax dollars.

Such healthy skepticism about the purpose and viability of the experimental I-95 project is why the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) needs to make sure that the managed-toll concept delivers as advertised. If this project doesn't ease congestion, then we've been had.

Managed-toll lanes are supposed to deliver modest traffic relief on I-95 during the morning and evening commutes, which today vary from stop-and-go to sit-and-wait. FDOT says that there is no room for adding more lanes on I-95 and other major arteries to accommodate South Florida's explosive population growth. Building elevated lanes isn't a good option, either. Construction for that kind of project would bring traffic to a virtual halt for years and cost billions of dollars.

So FDOT and the federal government (which has kicked in half of the \$122 million cost) are pitching managed tolls -- hard. If the project works here, you will see it touted all across the country as a viable way to manage congestion. Less often mentioned in these pitches is that tolls give the government another revenue source for maintaining highway infrastructure without politicians having to perform the disdainful task of raising taxes.

On Friday, northbound motorists will begin paying fluctuating rates to use the HOT lanes for the first time, while completion of the southbound lanes will take another year or more. It is gratifying to see that during the construction and pre-launch phases, the project has been tweaked to improve its chances for success. The number of entry points to the HOT lanes has been reduced, eliminating the certainty of collisions with drivers forced to scurry across four lanes of slow traffic to merge into fast-moving toll lanes.

Nevertheless, toll-lane success is still a dicey proposition. The HOT lanes' shoulder is so narrow that stalled cars and fender-benders will slow traffic to a crawl. Toll collection will be dependent on vagaries such as spikes in gas prices or economic downturns.



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The biggest factor in HOT success, though, will be whether enough motorists choose to commute by bus or carpool. HOT lanes can improve overall traffic flow only if lots of people choose these options.

## **First-time bus riders**

Recent experience, however, suggests that Miami-Dade County Transit hasn't learned how to lure and keep new riders. The recent spike in gas prices put thousands of new riders on buses for the first time ever. A business-savvy operator would have cleaned up the stations, extended hours and flooded bus stops with schedules and route maps that cater to riders who use mass transit by choice, rather than necessity.

This didn't happen. At the Golden Glades Park and Ride, for example, new riders were greeted with graffiti, lots filled with trash and litter and few clues about when buses would arrive and the stops they would make. Collecting tolls is the easy part. But building a coordinated, well-run transit system that justifies tolls requires real effort.