



# 95 EXPRESS



## News Clip

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Subject: **Plan to install I-95 express toll lanes advances**

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### INTERSTATE 95

## Plan to install I-95 express toll lanes advances

**A plan to install express toll lanes on Interstate 95 inched closer to reality, with Uncle Sam possibly picking up part of the bill.**

*BY EVAN S. BENN*

Move outta the way, New York. Stop honking, Atlanta.

South Florida's moving into the fast lane. For a price.

A state plan to install express toll lanes on Interstate 95 between Miami and Fort Lauderdale moved forward Thursday when the federal transportation chief announced South Florida is among nine badly congested areas competing for \$1.1 billion to ease traffic woes.

"We're asking cities to try something different, innovative and daring when it comes to fighting traffic," U.S. Transportation Secretary Mary Peters said.

South Florida and the other eight places -- New York, Atlanta, Dallas, Denver, Minneapolis-St. Paul, San Diego, San Francisco and Seattle -- handle about 20 percent of all vehicle traffic in the country, Peters said.

State and local traffic departments in those cities submitted applications explaining how they would impose varying tolls based on traffic volume and improve mass transit. Federal transportation officials will choose five winners by mid-August to share the \$1.1 billion.

Here, the 95 Express plan would convert the highway's high-occupancy vehicle lane in each direction to two express toll lanes in each direction for the 21 miles between Interstate 395 in Miami and Interstate 595 in Fort Lauderdale.

### NARROWER LANES

The highway's current configuration would change some to squeeze in the extra lanes: Most lanes would be reduced from 12 to 11 feet, and the median and shoulders also would be cut down.

The possibility of the federal government picking up half of the project's cost -- which could be upward of \$200 million -- pleases traffic planners. The rest would come from the state budget.



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Without the federal help, it could be awhile before the state has enough money to spend on the project.

"We're very excited about it," said Alice Bravo, director of transportation systems development at the Florida Department of Transportation in Miami. "We're so pleased the project has made it through this first step."

Drivers could buy their way out of traffic jams by hopping into one of the express toll lanes. Tolls would be collected electronically through SunPass, and they would vary depending on the amount of traffic on the highway.

When traffic is light, the toll would be low; as more cars opt to use the express lanes, the price would rise. Sensors, cameras and transit workers would monitor traffic volume.

Electronic signs posted before the express lanes would flash the toll rate and how much time drivers would save by taking the express route. Traffic planners speculated a driver during rush hour might pay 30 cents a mile or \$6 to go from Miami to Fort Lauderdale. During less traveled times, the toll would be much lower.

Traffic in the express lanes would maintain at least a 50-mph clip, regardless of the congestion in the regular lanes, traffic planners said.

Public buses and registered carpoolers with three or more occupants will be allowed to use the express lanes for free. Besides the promise of speeding up bus rides, the 95 Express plan also could lead to inter-county rapid bus routes, instead of riders having to transfer buses between Miami-Dade and Broward.

## **START THIS YEAR**

Traffic planners hope to begin the project this year and complete it by late 2008.

Gov. Charlie Crist said he supports the 95 Express plan, and he urged federal officials to give South Florida a portion of the \$1.1 billion grant.

"I am firmly committed to giving Florida's families transportation options so they can spend less time on congested corridors fighting traffic," Crist said in a written statement.

*Miami Herald staff writer Larry Lebowitz contributed to this report.*