

## OPINION

# Take your toll road away from Monticello. Far away | Opinion

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Almost everyone has been stuck in barely crawling traffic on I-95 and I-75. In Monticello, a traffic jam is four cars, and we like it that way.

However we are all Floridians and it seems stingy not to have sympathy for our fellow Floridians to the south.

Nevertheless, it seems downright imperious for the Florida Chamber of Commerce, the Florida Transportation Builders Association, the Florida Truckers Association and the American Council of Engineering Companies to be steering the boat carrying [the Suncoast Connector planned to rip through Jefferson County](#) ([./story/news/local/state/2019/05/14/environmentalists-urge-governor-veto-massive-toll-roads-package/1188810001/](#)).

Apparently this connector was not even in the long range Department of Transportation plans. Before passing a statute to enable the Suncoast Connector, they did not even talk to us serfs rowing the oars, the people of Jefferson County.



Jefferson County School Superintendent Mariane Arbulu talks to state Sen. Bill Montford. (Photo: Laz Aleman)

The *raison d'être* given for the need for the Suncoast Connector is mightily refuted around here.

- **Protect the environment.** Leagues of environmental folks are saying this new construction does not protect the environment. I, too, am not sure how asphalt is advantageous to wildlife.

- **Improve connectivity and logistics.** That is probably true, but a local bard said, "What does central Florida lack? The answer is water, water and water. Any connectivity can be used to take the plentiful water in Jefferson County and suck it south."
- **Deliver infrastructure to rural communities.** Jefferson County wants broadband, but other than that, our infrastructure seems quite suitable. In this context, the word "rural" is almost a derogatory term. We don't want to be Orlando or Tampa.
- **Mitigate congestion.** That might be true for the harried people who have to travel the congested roads in central Florida. It is not true here. Why has central Florida planned so badly?
- **Evacuation routes.** Yes, the Panhandle was mightily stung by a recent hurricane, but except for the most extreme situations, the new mantra from emergency services is shelter in place.

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**A Jefferson County Commissioner Stephen Walker talks to state Rep. Jason Shoaf. (Photo: Laz Aleman)**

If the Suncoast Connector is built, there has to be a bypass around Monticello. The business community in Jefferson County has adapted to the slower local pace. Most are happy with the steady charming growth here. We don't want Starbucks and more fast food chains. Our experience is that they detract from local business.

There are alternatives. Why not enlarge I-95 and I-75? May not be the least expensive plan for road builders, but it makes sense. How about reinvigorating the idea of railways instead of 18-wheelers?

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Jefferson County is one of the first and last enclaves of Old Florida. We have revered history here. We preserve our cultural heritage. We don't want a homogenized fast food world. We have "setting benches" all over town where people sit and talk. We have a walk able downtown where people shop and live locally.

Ken Armstrong, the CEO of the Florida Truckers Association, said — essentially — that they are tremendously affected by congestion, and that on every road, a trucker can throw a rock and hit another car.

When the Suncoast Connector rock was thrown at Jefferson County, it hit a pond. And the ripples are beginning.

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