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## **I-4 “Beyond the Ultimate” Makes National List of Highway Boondoggles, Wastes Between \$1.3 billion and \$4 billion in Taxpayer Dollars**

### **New Report Identifies Nine of the Worst Highway Projects Across the Country**

A new report by the United States Public Interest Research Group (U.S. PIRG) Education Fund and Frontier Group identifies nine of the most wasteful highway expansion projects across the country, slated to collectively cost at least \$10 billion. Making the list of national highway boondoggles is the proposed I-4 “Beyond the Ultimate” near Orlando, expected to cost between \$1.3 billion and \$4 billion. This third iteration of the highway boondoggles report details how despite America’s mounting repair and maintenance backlog, and in defiance of America’s changing transportation needs, federal, state and local governments across the country, including Florida, continue to spend billions each year on expanding highways. The report disputes the claims used to justify these investments and argues that the projects are outright boondoggles.

“Continuing to try and build our way out of congestion with new and wider highways is using yesterday’s policies to solve today and tomorrow’s transportation issues,” said Lisa Frank, campaign organizer at the Florida Consumer Action Network Foundation. “Prioritizing expansion over the development of an improved public transportation system in the Orlando area is irresponsible and won’t provide a long-term solution to congestion problems,” she noted.

“Americans are fed up with their commutes, but decades of research shows us that more and wider highways aren’t the answer,” said Tony Dutzik, senior policy analyst with Frontier Group and co-author of the report. “The \$27 billion we currently spend each year on highway expansion can’t fix congestion, but it could make a big difference in fixing our streets and transit systems, and in giving Americans more transportation choices in their daily lives.”

While billions are being allocated for the “Beyond the Ultimate” construction project, the report highlights how the money could instead be partially spent to improve service on the SunRail commuter rail service. In 2014, the region launched its SunRail commuter rail service, which serves a north-south corridor roughly parallel to I-4, and expansions of the line to the north and south are planned. SunRail service, however, has been extremely limited – with trains once every half hour during rush hours, service ending mid-evening on weekdays, and no service on weekends. Ridership on the line has struggled but could be improved with investments in additional service.

Safety is another critical need in Florida that could be addressed with some of the funds proposed for I-4 “Beyond the Ultimate.”

“In 2015, 2,945 people died on Florida’s roads. And about 1 in 8 victims weren’t in a car when killed,” said Thomas Hawkins, policy and planning director of 1000 Friends of Florida. “They were walking or biking. Expensive automobile-only projects like I-4 “Beyond the Ultimate” aren’t a solution to our transportation problems. We need strategies for making roads safer to walk or bike and more choices in how to get around.”

The study recommends that states:

1. Invest in transportation solutions that reduce the need for costly and disruptive highway expansion projects by focusing investments on public transportation, land-use policy, road pricing measures and technological measures that work to help drivers avoid peak-time traffic.
2. Adopt fix-it-first policies that invest in repair and maintenance of existing road, transit and rail systems and stop the continued deference of these actions to future dates, further increasing a mounting maintenance and repair backlog of billions of dollars;
3. Use the latest transportation data and require full cost-benefit comparisons for highway projects, including future maintenance and repair needs. This includes fully evaluating potential public-private partnerships.
4. Revise transportation forecasting models and use up-to-date travel information, reflecting a range of potential future trends for housing and transportation and incorporating the potential impacts of shifts to other modes of transportation, including public transportation, rail, biking and walking, as well as newer options such as ridesharing, carsharing, and bikesharing.
5. Give priority funding to transportation projects that reduce growth in vehicle-miles traveled, to account for the public health, environmental and climate benefits as well as the reduced need to increase road capacity in the future.
6. Invest in research and data collection to better track, and more aptly react, to ongoing shifts in how people travel.

The report also looks back at the 23 highway boondoggles identified in the [2014](#) and [2016](#) versions of this report. Since the original reports came out, several states have revisited these projects, ultimately deciding that the money should be spent elsewhere. For example, the Mon-Fayette Expressway was put on hold due to the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission's mounting debt and lack of public support. In California, the Tesoro extension was denied on the ground that it would threaten local water resources. Here in Florida, the Florida Department of Transportation recently announced a "reset" for the Tampa Bay Express project called out in the 2016 report.

"Investing in a method that's been shown to be highly expensive and ineffective at reducing traffic is a waste of taxpayer money, especially since other methods to improve congestion issues exist. It just doesn't make any sense," said Frank.

The report can be read at this link: [www.fcan.org/foundation/](http://www.fcan.org/foundation/).

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*FCAN Foundation conducts research and public education on Florida consumer issues and seeks to empower consumers to fight back on utilities, health care, insurance, federal budget issues, the environment, and financial services reform. FCAN Foundation also sponsors non-partisan voter registration drives, voter education, and "Get Out The Vote" campaigns.*

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