

Thanks to toll roads, Florida keeps moving: My Word



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By **Atlee Mercer**

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Toll roads are worth the cost to motorists who use them: Columnist.

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Tolled expressways provide enormous benefits to Central Florida (and all of Florida), but they also make easy targets for criticism. Orlando Sentinel columnist **Scott Maxwell** recently complained about toll roads. Unfortunately, he buried the lead.

At the end of his column ("Florida addicted to tolls — at expense of strapped drivers," July 26), he points out that the alternative to toll roads — which are only paid for by those who use them — is an increase in gas taxes and sales tax.

Policy makers and voters decide how to fund public roads, but user-funded toll roads provide a beneficial alternative.

Toll roads are optional. If you don't want to pay a toll, you don't have to use those roads — you have a choice. Tolloed expressways exist only because, for some motorists, the time saved by using them is worth much more than the toll.

Better yet, when motorists choose to use a toll road, they reduce traffic on nontolled roads. This provides measurable relief for motorists who travel nontolled roads. Toll roads remove many thousands of trips a day from our taxpayer-funded roads.

Because Florida, and Central Florida in particular, is the world's top tourist destination, visitors to our region pay a substantial portion of the tolls. Having these toll roads means those millions of tourists make less of an impact on existing roads while paying their fair share for the use of our expressways and turnpike.

It's hard to imagine the nightmare we'd face in Central Florida if we didn't have our tolled expressways. As bad as traffic congestion seems now, it would certainly be much worse without these additional roadways.

Plus, it's not just commuter convenience that's at stake here. Our businesses would be crippled without toll roads. The inability to get products to and from markets in a timely way would mean fewer jobs and lower wages for Central Floridians. In addition, without tolled expressways, the economic development that has taken place around these roads wouldn't have happened.

So, toll roads are a choice. They are an option that offers benefits to those who use them and — more important — to those who don't.

It's easy to complain about having to pay a toll, but the alternative of no toll roads would be much worse for all of us.

Atlee Mercer is chairman of TEAMFL, Transportation & Expressway Authority Membership of Florida.

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