

Issue: Florida Transportation

Interstate 4 and the Elusive High-Speed Rail

Quick Overview: Florida's I-4 is a 132-mile highway that connects Tampa to Daytona Beach, running right through Orlando. It passes Disney World and Sea World, making it an important route for both locals and tourists.

Dangerous and Congested: I-4 has appeared on America's top 10 list of most dangerous highways annually since 2010, with the most fatalities of any highway. It also tops the country's list of worst traffic congestion.

The I-4 corridor is where presidents are elected: Voters who live along the I-4 corridor decide Florida's elections, and Florida decides the presidential election. Republicans rack up votes in conservative North and Southwest Florida; Democrats clean up in the population centers of South Florida; and the two sides battle it out in the high-growth areas along I-4.

"The Ultimate Project": A \$2.3 billion, six-year improvement project, "The Ultimate Project" is meant to improve flow on the highway's worst 21-mile stretch by adding two express lanes, repairing bridges, increasing speed limits, and reconfiguring intersections. It is one of the nation's largest infrastructure projects and Florida's first eco-friendly road project.

Republican Rick Scott and High-Speed Rail:

- In Feb 2011, Governor Rick Scott rejected \$2.4 billion in federal funding for a much-needed high-speed rail system from Tampa Bay to Orlando, which would run at 170 mph in contrast to traffic-congested I-4. Floridians would only have had to pay \$280 million, 1/10 of the total project cost according to Florida's Department of Transportation estimates.
- A report by the U.S. Conference of Mayors suggested that the project could have provided up to \$2.9 billion in economic benefits in the Orlando area alone and created as many as 27,500 jobs. The unemployment rate at that time was about 12%.
- Based on a bogus research report, Scott claimed that Florida taxpayers could be on the hook for \$3 billion of cost overruns, contrary to the assurances of Federal officials and the Florida Rail Enterprise. Private companies competing for the project would be required to assume the overruns as part of the bidding process.
- A *Saint Petersburg Times* editorial is representative of the opinion of many Republican and Democratic legislators and mayors: "Gov. Scott ...sacrificed the best interests of Florida by rejecting federal money for a high-speed rail. It is a reckless, devastating decision that has nothing to do with the merits of rail and everything to do with Scott's obsession with courting the Tea Party and fighting the Obama administration."

Summary: Florida's I-4 is an outdated and dangerous highway unsuited for the contemporary volume of commuters and tourists that are currently utilizing it, many of whom have a significant amount of power in choosing the nation's president. While the state is working to improve sections of the interstate, what is really needed is an alternative to driving, a high-speed rail alternative (paid for by the Federal Government) that has consistently been shot down by Republican legislators to the detriment of Florida's commuters, taxpayers, and economy.