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December 1, 2021

William Burke, PLA
Project Manager
Florida's Turnpike Enterprise
P.O. Box 613069
Ocoee, FL 34761-3069

Via electronic mail

Re: Proposed Northern Turnpike Extension

Dear Mr. Burke:

As Florida's leading nonprofit advocate of environmentally and fiscally sustainable development, 1000 Friends of Florida has maintained a strong interest in transportation planning since our founding in 1986. History shows that transportation drives development in Florida.

Following the passage of the 2019 state law authorizing the M-CORES toll roads network, 1000 Friends secured appointments to citizen task forces for each of the three proposed toll roads, including the Northern Turnpike Extension. While we did not think the final task force report for the Turnpike Extension went far enough in its recommendations to prevent the highway from fueling urban sprawl, we believe the report did include important environmental and community protections. So when a bill was introduced for the 2021 legislative session to repeal and replace the 2019 law, we joined with allies in successfully appealing for the bill to be amended before its passage to include a requirement that the projects it funded would consider the task force recommendations.

We are therefore concerned that two of the four routes currently under study by the Florida Department of Transportation for the Turnpike Extension would violate the clear recommendation from the task force *not* to cut through the Cross Florida Greenway into Marion County. The same two routes would violate another task force recommendation by encroaching on other conservation lands, including the Goethe State Forest. We believe the law's requirement that FDOT consider the task force recommendations should rule out both these routes from any further study.

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We also expect FDOT to abide by other provisions in the 2021 law as it studies any routes for the Turnpike Extension. These provisions include avoiding conservation lands “to the greatest extent feasible” and following “any existing applicable requirements” for FDOT or Florida’s Turnpike Enterprise in planning highway projects, including determining need and financial feasibility, assessing environmental impacts and seriously considering a no-build option. Anything less would fall short of the standards established under state law as well as the financial and environmental stewardship that Florida’s citizens deserve from FDOT and FTE.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Paul Owens". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid, with a long, sweeping tail on the "s".

Paul Owens
President