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## Seminole rejects beltway path through county

By Robert Perez and Joe Newman | Sentinel Staff Writers

Posted December 11, 2002

SANFORD -- Seminole County on Tuesday firmly rejected an extension of the western beltway through the county.

County commissioners, saying they would not sacrifice neighborhoods for asphalt, voted unanimously to oppose any toll road that would cross the Wekiva River into Seminole, where it would link up with Interstate 4 near Sanford. They recommended going through Volusia County instead.

"There is no way Seminole County is going to allow them to bulldoze through existing communities," commission Chairman Daryl McLain said. The Seminole vote deals a serious blow to a governor's task force studying the best way to build an expressway through the sensitive Wekiva River Basin.

Last month, the task force agreed that the expressway should follow the State Road 46 corridor through eastern Lake County into Seminole, where it would connect to I-4 somewhere between the St. Johns River bridge and the new Central Florida GreeneWay interchange.

Until Tuesday, the task force had been hailed as a model of regional cooperation because it brought together various groups that had battled about the expressway for more than a decade. Officials from three counties, including Seminole, and various state agencies, as well as environmentalists, business owners and transportation officials, all have seats on the task force.

Charles Lee, an Audubon of Florida senior vice president, said he was disappointed that McLain, a member of the task force, did not give some warning of the county's opposition.

"I wish that, instead of rolling a grenade under the door, that Seminole County's member of the task force would have openly discussed this in the task-force meetings," Lee said.

McLain, Seminole's member, was not at the meeting when the task force voted on the route, but he did attend the two previous meetings. Although the county voted in 1999 to oppose a western beltway extension into Seminole, McLain said he never objected to proposed alignments because he was willing to look at all the options. "We gave them the benefit of the doubt that they could find a way to make it work," he said. "But it just ain't going to work."

The county on Tuesday recommended two alternatives: The first would be to speed up construction of the Apopka Bypass, which is to run from the extension of Maitland Boulevard at U.S. Highway 441 back to U.S. 441 west of Apopka.

The second would be to finance a connector from the GreeneWay in eastern Seminole County to Interstate 95 in Volusia County.

The task force was assigned to recommend an alignment and design for the western beltway, as well as to look for the best ways to control growth that might

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### GRAPHICS



Seminole says no to beltway extension. (SHINIKO R. FLOYD/ORLANDO SENTINEL) Dec 10, 2002

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be spurred by such a road.

Now it faces two options: It can go ahead and recommend a route through Seminole County and set up a potentially bruising political battle. Or it can alter its recommendation and shift the expressway's alignment north through Volusia County. The road would still cross the Wekiva as well as the St. Johns rivers before connecting to I-4.

But officials from Volusia, which does not have a seat on the task force, made it clear at the second task-force meeting that they have no interest in the expressway entering their county.

If the task force still recommends that the expressway cut through Seminole, the Florida Department of Transportation could be in the awkward position of having to build a major highway over the objections of a county commission.

Mike Snyder, chief of DOT's Central Florida operations, said that while that option exists, he couldn't cite any instance in which the state has overruled a local government on a road alignment. "Technically, we can, but we try to work as close with the local [governments] as we can," Snyder said.

But McLain said Seminole County has the final say.

"The bottom line is that the legislative authority to set alignments for toll roads in Seminole County belongs to the Seminole County Expressway Authority," he said. "And DOT, last I heard, doesn't build toll roads."

Seminole's actions on Tuesday don't come as a surprise, Snyder said.

"This is consistent with the position they've had for several years now," he said. "My sense is that they have their concerns, and I appreciate that. But we have to look at what is the regional big picture. What's in the region's best interest?"

The task force is supposed to make a recommendation to Gov. Jeb Bush and the Orlando-Orange County Expressway Authority by Jan. 15.

The Expressway Authority would be responsible for building the part of the beltway that would extend through northwest Orange County, but it couldn't oversee work in Lake and Seminole counties without an invitation from those county commissions.

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