

This My Word Column by Harry Barley appeared in the September 20 edition of the Orlando Sentinel. It was written in response to a front page article in the Orlando Sentinel on September 13 that gave the impression that the METROPLAN ORLANDO Board of Directors had approved developing toll roads on I-4.

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OTHER VIEWS - My WORD

I-4 toll lanes just an option

By Harold W. Barley

"Toll Lanes on I-4 Appear Likely."

I am sure this headline about Interstate 4 toll lanes on the front page of the Orlando Sentinel's Sept. 13 edition caught the attention of many people. Interstate 4 is the spine of Central Florida's transportation system and is critical for moving both people and freight. As a result, anything having to do with I-4 is important to everyone.

A workshop was held recently for the MetroPlan Orlando board to begin work on updating Central Florida's long-range transportation plan. Traffic congestion is already a major problem and, if current trends continue, traffic is expected to get worse. If this is allowed to happen, it will impact the quality of our lives, our environment and our economic competitiveness.

Yesterday's solutions will not solve tomorrow's problems, so this is a time for bold, new thinking. This was reaffirmed through the region's growth visioning process ("How Shall We Grow?"), in which people were very clear about wanting to see changes in our region's transportation system.

The recent board workshop was an excellent forum for exchanging information and getting preliminary feedback on a wide range of prospective solutions. We found there was a strong consensus on some options. For some other options, such as the concept of creating new toll lanes down the middle of I-4, results were mixed.

No final decisions were made at that workshop. Rather, this was an early step in a planning process that will involve the entire community over the next two years. Following that, the board will adopt a new Long Range Transportation Plan.

Metropolitan areas across the country and around the world are struggling to combat traffic congestion. While there are no easy answers, there are plenty of options -- and many can work here in Central Florida.

New toll lanes down the middle of I-4, while providing the same number of non-tolled lanes as there are today, may be one of them. It is important that all options be considered -- and for people to know the information behind the headlines.

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