

## Marcus H. Higginbotham

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March 8, 2023

Jared W. Perdue, P.E., Secretary of Transportation  
State of Florida Department of Transportation  
605 Suwanne Street  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0450

Dear Mr. Perdue,

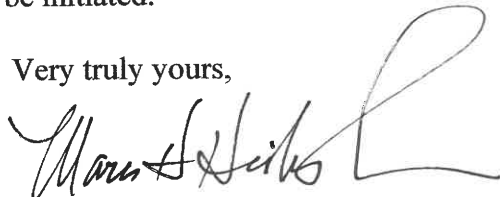
SUBJECT: Bonita-Estero Rail Trail (BERT) “Friends of BERT”

As a part-time owner/resident of Florida I have recently learned of efforts of this group to build support for a series of property acquisitions in Southwest Florida for the purpose of building bicycle/walking path linkages. My concern about their endeavor focuses on the portion of the claimed unused railroad corridor (Seminole Gulf Railroad) between Ft Myers and North Naples.

Clearly the highest and best use of this corridor would be for development of heavy or light rail passenger service linking Fort Myers and Naples and determined intermediate stops, like RSW—not as a walking or biking path. To allow this corridor to revert to that kind of use (bike/walk) would serve a very limited constituency. We in SW Florida, captive to the car, are and continue to be choked with vehicular traffic that continues to grow exponentially with no other viable options to avail ourselves. My experience is once the “rails to trails” folks prevail it is impossible to “reverse” course to serve the greater good. We are clearly confronted here in SW Florida with the looming prospect of becoming the second “Southern California” (further expansion of I-75—an ugly possibility) if efforts are not taken now to preserve this rail corridor for development of light or heavy rail service as a viable, safe alternative to driving.

I would encourage FDOT to take an active role now in preserving this rail corridor for the purpose outlined above and where/when possible supporting efforts for that kind of alternative to be initiated.

Very truly yours,



Marcus H. Higginbotham