



***Let's Get Busy ...
With Transportation "Investments"
To Help Our Economy***

By Doug Callaway, FBT President

Years ago, as he concluded the opening monologue on his TV talk show, Arsenio Hall would kick off each night's program by shouting to the band ... "Let's – Get – Busy!"

Although the historic 2008 Elections are now behind us – Florida's economy and our people are still hurting, and the State's budget deficit continues to grow – so it's time for Florida's leadership to "GET BUSY" stimulating our economy.

We need to borrow a page from the successful political playbook of history and get busy making strategic transportation "investments" that will:

- Help our ailing economy,
- Put our people back to work, and
- Get our State moving *forward* again!

Right now, Florida DOT has over \$6 BILLION in "ready-to-go" projects just waiting for the dollars needed to move ahead. And when one considers that these transportation projects yield at least \$5.60 in economic benefit for every \$1 invested, it's easy to understand why an August 19, 2008 USA Today story entitled "*Governments' building projects shore up economy*" stated that

"The government construction boom is winning plaudits from economists and fiscal conservatives."

To his credit Governor Charlie Crist has recently taken steps to accelerate transportation projects in order to boost Florida's economy – as recommended in Point # 1 of FBT's [T.R.I.P. Four Point Plan for Prosperity](http://www.bettertransportation.org/trip.shtml) proposal. (For more information about T.R.I.P. visit: <http://www.bettertransportation.org/trip.shtml>.)

However, without any NEW MONEY to fill the transportation funding vacuum created by speeding up \$1.4 billion worth of projects, the Governor's "Accelerate Florida" initiative will inevitably result in a huge "Cash Crunch" much like the one Florida DOT had in 1988. And it will happen at exactly the absolute worst time economically and politically.

On a personal note, I know about the so-called "Cash Crunch" firsthand. After working for a Florida Congressman in D.C., I joined the Florida DOT as the Federal Affairs Director in January 1989. Within one week of my start, a hiring freeze and a travel freeze was instituted and the Department admitted to being \$800 million short in transportation funding. What was the result? The FDOT Secretary was forced to resign within eight months and the incumbent Florida Governor was defeated for reelection the following year.

Clearly, this is our chance to learn from the past, and avoid repeating this same transportation and political mistake.

Governor Crist's former Chief of Staff, George LeMieux, really hit the nail on the head in the October 27 issue of his weekly "LeMieux Report." Commenting on the dismal new state economic predictions, he said

"Law makers need to continue to find ways to stimulate the economy. Spade work done today will grow the economy in 2009 and 2010."

By George, he's absolutely right! Transportation "investments" WILL:

- A.) stimulate the economy, and
- B.) grow the economy in 2009 and 2010.

And the good news is we already know where to find the dollars needed to make this happen! Earlier this year, the Florida Taxation & Budget Reform Commission (TBRC) made Statutory Recommendation #36 to the Florida Legislature suggesting four common sense ideas for additional transportation funding. If enacted, these very modest transportation user fee adjustments would generate an extra \$600 million in the first year alone, and an additional \$2 billion in the tenth year.

So, knowing all this, what are Florida's leaders waiting for? I say Let's Get Busy!

Douglas J. Callaway is President of Floridians for Better Transportation (FBT), a statewide business and transportation association dedicated to making transportation safer and more efficient in Florida. FBT has a growing and diverse membership of businesses, organizations, and individuals, including the Florida Chamber of Commerce, the Florida Transportation Builders Association, Publix Super Markets, SunTrust Bank, the Florida Institute of Consulting Engineers, the Florida Public Transportation Association, the Florida Ports Council, the Florida MPO Advisory Council, the Florida Airports Council, and numerous local businesses, Chambers of Commerce, MPOs, and transit providers all across the Sunshine State.