

How to Reduce Traffic in South Tampa



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Everyday South Tampa streets flow with thousands of cars going to and coming from McDill Air Force Base. The flow starts at about 5am. How do I know this? I live on one of the main arteries to the base. I don't need an alarm clock any more. I am a patriot and I am proud that our city is host to the base and that we as a city have the responsibility for housing both Central Command and Special Operations Command. It is unfortunate that to get to the base our warriors must go through the city.

As I lie in bed listening to the cars flowing by I am both grateful to be an American living in Tampa and annoyed that so much traffic is going by. I've spent more than a little time thinking about a solution. I think that I have one.

While not perfect we do have a marvelous artery that takes traffic through the town it is the solution to the traffic flow to and from McDill Air Force Base:

The Leroy Selmon Expressway

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee_Roy_Selmon_Crosstown_Expressway). The expressway has been substantially improved since I moved to Tampa some 16 years ago. It has had its challenges as we all know from reading about it in the press. During the last decade it has received a number of upgrades. For this discussion the most important one is the electronic toll pass known as the Sunpass.

We have a modern marvel in the Sunpass. It allows the authority to take funds from us automatically if not painlessly as we drive on the expressway.

What an amazing taxing machine called "Open-Road Tolling"

([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee_Roy_Selmon_Crosstown_Expressway#Open-Road Tolling](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee_Roy_Selmon_Crosstown_Expressway#Open-Road_Tolling)). I have had a Sunpass since they came out and it is amazing, you drive along the road and occasionally the pass bongs as you go under a detector. The first pass used to show you how much you paid and how much you had left in the account that you loaded from your credit card. The latest version is a slim piece of plastic with no indication of what happened. You have to wait for your monthly bill to see what you paid. This is a very efficient way to transfer money from you to the Authority.

Now back to our troops. While being a US Service Person is service, perhaps the only real service left if you read the papers about how much most government employees make compared to the shrinking number to private employees in our great country, it does carry the problem of being somewhat pinched for cash and on a budget.

I would therefore make the assumption that the vast majority of our troops who come to the base from distant parts of the town avoid having their budgets wacked by tolls, especially tolls that might not be as transparent as they used to be when you dropped coins into a toll box or the outstretched human hand of a toll collector.

If my assumption is right we would be able to take a lot of traffic off the streets of Tampa, if we could get our troops to use the expressway instead. Road wear and tear is not an issue as I see it. Most of us realize that trucks, not light vehicles like cars and pickups and the motor cycle which is very popular as cheap and cool transportation for our young people, are the culprits when it comes to destruction of the road surface. If you have traveled the Interstate just note the heaving around that your car does in the right lane compared to the smooth ride you enjoy in the passing lanes. It's the trucks that make the right lane the way it is.

Here is the breakthrough idea for traffic in our town. Let's give every service person a Sunpass that works for free at the large shift change periods.

If they want to use it at other hours it will revert to be just like the ones that we all have now. They can load it with a credit card and use it. Since this is not money that the authority is getting now and since the traffic is all cars and light trucks the road surface will have imperceptible wear. With the marvel of the computer and cooperation of the base offices I feel sure that we can get this done. A few key strokes on the computer that takes the tolls will be the only significant cost. Beyond traffic there are a number of other benefits to our community: The expressway is safer than city streets and the stop and go traffic and lights and signs that must be paid attention to be a safe driver. We will have a large savings in fuel usage and street level moving vehicle pollution since stop and go traffic will be reduced considerable.

There is likely to be a decrease in accidents which takes a load off the police and fire departments who are the first responders to most traffic accidents.

I think our troops will like the idea as well. And maybe I will get to sleep past 5am, as will my neighbors.

If you agree write the Tampa-Hillsborough Expressway Authority %

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C. Birge Sigety is the founder and principal of Bison Investments, Inc. This specialty financial firm, located in Tampa, has funded many companies since Birge formed it in 1996.

Birge has lived in South Tampa for over 15 years and is an ardent supporter of our troops and all the folks who work at McDill Air force Base.