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## Finding the money

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**Author:** STAFF, FLORIDA TODAY EDITORIAL

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If you think building the pyramids was a chore, consider the St. Johns Heritage Parkway in South Brevard.

The proposed road -- formerly called the Palm Bay Parkway -- has been on the drawing board for more than a decade, but no one has a clue when it will be built.

Meanwhile, traffic in the Palm Bay, West Melbourne and Melbourne areas it would serve keeps getting worse, particularly with growth in Palm Bay putting more vehicles on already clogged arteries.

Now, one possible funding source for the \$100 million parkway has apparently bitten the dust, putting the road's future further in doubt and showing again that Brevard County commissioners face tough choices in raising money for new roads.

Choices they can no longer continue to ignore, lest the Space Coast drown in a sea of cars and trucks as its population continues to swell.

The proposal was to use tolls to help pay for the St. Johns parkway.

It surfaced when the Orlando-Orange County Expressway Authority said it was a viable option to get the parkway built and help pay for other Brevard roads that will be needed to expand Central Florida's regional transportation network.

But Bob Kamm, the director of the Brevard Metropolitan Planning Organization, says the toll idea should be nixed because it would make the parkway more costly to construct and add to its operating costs.

He also says many drivers would likely choose free alternative roads running parallel to the parkway -- including Interstate 95, Wickham Road and Minton -- making it difficult to collect enough revenue to repay bonds issued for its construction.

County commissioners haven't formally addressed Kamm's findings, but it's doubtful they'll back tolls based on such a pessimistic outlook.

Which brings us back to square one.

Namely, how will Brevard pay for the parkway, which is just part of \$450 million in unmet local road needs that grow worse and more expensive every year?

The parkway will require a mix of federal, state and local money to become reality, but Brevard officials will need the skills of a Houdini to successfully pick that funding lock anytime soon.

And no one on the County Commission wants to confront the one sure way to generate enough money to tackle all of Brevard's road problems:

That's the hot issue of trying to raise the gas or sales tax, which taxpayers show no interest in supporting.

So the whole matter remains stuck in political gridlock while commute times get longer, gas prices go up and drivers fume.

Commissioners have to honestly confront this issue in 2007 and craft a long-term solution. And the public has to keep an open mind to all proposals and be willing to back a plan that's best for the entire community.

Saying "no" promises failure and a worsening quality of life.

That's something the Space Coast can no longer afford.

Accompanying map of St. John's Heritage Parkway

--- Preferred alignment

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