

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
Washington, DC 20515-0907

July 21, 2006

Central Florida Resident  
Florida's Seventh Congressional District

Dear Friends:

As your Representative in Congress, I wanted to provide a brief update on a number of Central Florida projects in which I have been involved and that may be of interest to you.

While a great deal of my time in Washington has been expended on national issues, I continue to focus on helping to bring a better life and future opportunities to those whom I represent. As you may know, improving transportation in our area has been one of my top priorities.

After many years, I am pleased that through substantial work and a cooperative effort, Commuter Rail will become a reality in Central Florida. Successful negotiations have resulted in an agreement with CSX for the State to purchase the right of way and relocate freight rail from the congested I-4 corridor. Volusia, Orange, Seminole and Osceola Counties have each committed support to this much needed alternative to commuter traffic congestion on I-4. Under the management of the Florida Department of Transportation, preliminary engineering will soon proceed and will finalize plans and costs. Enclosed you will find background information on the project. While it may be several years before commuter rail service begins, it will eventually run 61 miles from DeLand to Poinciana.

The continued and anticipated growth in Central Florida requires expansion of our highway capacity and interstates. Initial planning is underway for the future widening of I-4 through metropolitan Orlando. As you may know, I have not supported toll lanes on that portion of I-4 and was successful in including a ban on I-4 tolls in the recent federal highway bill that will bring back to Florida an additional \$2.3 billion. It is my belief that my constituents should not pay twice for their roads – once with federal gas taxes at the pump, and again at a toll booth.

Construction of a new I-4 / SR 408 (East-West Expressway) interchange began in April and will be completed in 2009 at a cost of \$119 million. This joint project between the Florida

Department of Transportation and the Orlando/Orange County Expressway Authority will add a flyover ramp from each direction of SR 408 to eastbound I-4.

Interchange improvements are underway at the junction of I-4 and John Young Parkway. This \$39 million work began in March, 2004 and is scheduled for completion in the next several months. A new exit ramp from westbound I-4 to John Young Parkway is now open. I-4's eastbound through lanes include a bridge over the Parkway and opened last October, and the eastbound exit ramp to the Parkway in November, 2004. This project includes the reconstruction of 1.7 miles of I-4 and serves as the beginning of efforts to permanently widen I-4 through the Orlando metropolitan area.

As you may be aware, I-4 will be expanded to 10 general use lanes through Orange and Seminole Counties, but with the addition of auxiliary lanes will have 12 lanes around major intersections. Design work for adding auxiliary and general use lanes from Maitland Boulevard to Ivanhoe Boulevard is planned through June, 2008; design for the portion from Ivanhoe to Kirkman Road should be completed by 2013. In addition, \$50 million in right of way along the 4.7 miles from south of Ivanhoe Boulevard to north of Kennedy Boulevard is to be purchased beginning in 2008. Additional right of way acquisition to the north and south of this segment is anticipated to continue until 2015. Pending the availability of funds, the earliest construction may begin is July, 2014. The total costs for the ultimate build-out of I-4 in Orange and Seminole Counties is \$2.25 billion.

The Orlando/Orange County Expressway Authority recently announced its intention to begin work on a major new transportation artery to extend from the GreeneWay in Seminole County to Volusia County's southern border at S.R. 46 and S.R. 415. A link from this new highway to I-95 could provide future relief from anticipated congestion, with minimal impact to the environment. For this purpose, I have proposed a limited access highway and have secured federal funds to conduct a feasibility study for that project. However, Volusia County has not yet recognized the significance of the new four-lane highway and its impact on that area. I have publicly requested that the Volusia County Council carefully consider the impact of the GreeneWay Extension and allow preliminary studies to be undertaken. It is also important that we take positive steps in planning now to preserve endangered lands in the future.

Additional projects and activities in Central Florida have kept me busy during the past months.

To address the dramatic spike in murders in the Orlando area, I convened a meeting with federal, State and local law enforcement officials in June to discuss potential courses of action. Participants included officials from the U.S. Drug Czar's office, the Central Florida High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) and State and local officials. Homicides in Orlando outpaced the national increase with a nearly 30% rise. Unfortunately, many of these murders are related to illegal drugs. We are carefully assessing and re-examining our federal efforts to ensure everything possible is done to resolve this serious problem.

Recently I had an opportunity to visit the Midway Center in Sanford, which operates the Safe Harbor Program and serves as a model of excellence for addressing the needs of at-risk students. This effort is a partnership between the Seminole County Public Schools, Seminole County Board of County Commissioners, Seminole County Sheriff's Office, Second Harvest Food Bank, the Central Florida Boys and Girls Club and YMCA - Seminole. Seminole County School Board Member Dede Schaffner, through her leadership and vision, was instrumental in the Midway Center's opening last year. We are working to secure support and federal backing for a similar center in the Goldsboro community in Sanford to assist low-income children in that area. The benefits of a new center to the Goldsboro area will have a lasting effect on their quality of life.

Improving health care services for our veterans and seniors is another of my top priorities. Federal funding for veterans programs will be increased for the new fiscal year which begins October 1<sup>st</sup>. That will help provide comprehensive health care services to aging veterans on a timely and convenient manner. After years of debate, federal authorization has finally been secured for a new veterans hospital in Central Florida.

Unfortunately for many years veterans in the Central Florida region have had inadequate access to VA medical resources. My father died in a crowded veterans hospital, and I remember taking my late uncle from Winter Park to the Tampa VA Hospital. Many veterans are forced to travel to distant VA facilities to receive specialized care and rehabilitation treatment services. The VA completed a nationwide study of its current facilities and recognized Central Florida as the highest populated area in the nation without a full-service veterans hospital. In its final report, the VA recommended that a new hospital be built in Orlando to serve the veterans of the community. The U.S. House Veterans' Affairs Committee has now authorized \$377 million for the project.

Over the past several years I have worked in Congress to secure federal funds for the planning and design phase. The VA has selected an architectural and design firm, and I am pleased that work is underway to build the long overdue hospital without further delay.

We are also providing assistance to seniors and veterans who depend on prescription drugs. Prior to the May 15th deadline for enrollment in the new Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit, we contacted all seniors in the 7th Congressional District with information, conducted workshops and surveyed participants for their comments and suggestions. Seniors interested in the program who have not enrolled can still participate with a minor premium penalty. A new enrollment period will begin in November. Today a majority of those participating in the program have lowered their costs of medications and are pleased with their coverage. However, we must continue to bring down health care costs for all Americans.

While this brief update only touches on a few of the local projects in our community, I hope that you find it informative. Currently there are many important issues before Congress

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including immigration, tax reform, deficit spending, gas prices, national security and a host of matters vital to our future. Detailed information on my position and voting record relating to any of these national issues is available on the internet at [www.house.gov/mica](http://www.house.gov/mica). You may also contact our 7th Congressional District Office in Maitland at (407) 657-8080 for assistance or information.

Please know that I always welcome your opinion and suggestions both on pending projects and national legislation. I hope you will not hesitate to contact me on matters concerning our community or issues pending before Congress.

With my regards and best wishes, I remain

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

John L. Mica  
Member of Congress