



Commuters' Frustration Will Get Worse, With 1 Exception

By [RICH SHOPES](#) of The Tampa Tribune

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Vicki Perez has learned a few time-saving tricks on her 33-mile commute from Dade City to her insurance job at West Shore: Avoid Veterans Expressway, stay in the middle lane and leave home at around 8:15 a.m.

But even if she observes those rules, Perez spends up to an hour behind the wheel each morning. If she leaves at 7:45 a.m., she'll run into a knot of traffic and arrive at work at the same time anyway.

"If I leave a half hour later I can save a half hour, but it's still unpredictable. You just hope you don't get into a jam or, if there is one, that it clears up quickly," she said.

Fifteen years ago, Perez's commute took half as long. Over the next 15 years it will get even longer.

Despite a projected \$1.6 billion in road improvements between 2010 and 2025, today's morning commute is about as good as it's going to get for most commuters in the Tampa Bay area.

Data from the Florida Department of Transportation indicates that by 2025, morning commute times will increase between 22 and 33 percent along the most popular routes to downtown Tampa and West Shore, the region's employment hubs.

The sharpest increase found in the sampling is expected to occur on State Road 60 between Lithia Pinecrest in East Hillsborough County to downtown Tampa. According to the data, drivers taking that route will spend a third more time in traffic, making what's now a 45-minute morning commute 60 minutes by 2025.

The one bright spot is the Veterans Expressway between Carrollwood and West Shore. Motorists taking the toll road will catch a break thanks to a \$550 million widening project between 2010 and 2015. Their one-way trip will actually drop from 45 minutes to 37 minutes.

For just about everyone else, the commutes will get increasingly bleak. DOT planner Danny



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Lamb, who conducted the sampling, said the problem comes down to funding and population growth.

Hillsborough's population is expected to surge by 300,000 people to 1.6 million by 2025. At the same time, the gap between funding and the amount of road work needed to keep up with the growth will widen to \$2.8 billion by 2025. That's just in Hillsborough County.

As a result, roads will reach capacity almost as soon as they're widened, which is the case today, Lamb said.

"As soon as we add the capacity, the traffic finds that road and fills it up," he said. "People will drive the freeway no matter what."

More time in traffic means less time with family and more frustration at work, say researchers at the Texas Transportation Institute, which chronicled commuting trends.

An institute study found motorists in the Tampa-St. Petersburg area spent a combined 56 million hours sitting in rush-hour traffic in 2005, or 45 hours per driver.

Of the 85 large metropolitan areas looked at by the researchers, the Bay area ranked as the 20th most congested.

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