



May 11, 2012

Lee County Board of Commissioners
2120 SW Main Street
Fort Myers, FL 33901

Dear Commissioners:

BikeWalkLee, a coalition to complete the streets in Lee County, advocates for improving safety for bicyclists and pedestrians. Since the tragic death of 13-year old Ryan Santos on April 27, 2010, BikeWalkLee has been urging LeeDOT and the Board of County Commissioners to take action to improve pedestrian and cyclist safety at Del Prado Blvd. and NE 3rd Terrace, near Burton Park in Cape Coral. At your May 15th County Commission meeting you will be considering two options for how best to improve this intersection for pedestrian safety and BikeWalkLee would to share its views for your consideration.

You have two options before you--one proposed by the Cape Coral City Council (a full traffic signal) and the other by LeeDOT (pedestrian crossing signal). We would like to commend both parties for agreeing that pedestrian crossing safety is the most important factor in developing a solution. We would like to commend the Cape Coral City Council for its determination and hard work in search of a solution and for its work with RaceTrac to find funding for its preferred solution. We also commend LeeDOT for coming up with a solution that is innovative and proven in other communities to make the intersection safer for pedestrians when traffic signals may not be "warranted" (a technical term meaning not enough vehicles are coming from the intersecting streets).

First, to summarize the two options:

1. **Full traffic signal (proposed by Cape Coral):** A full traffic signal is the highest form of traffic control and federal standards (MUTCD) exist for determining when this approach is "warranted". The safety benefits at signalized intersections for pedestrians is contingent upon the application of several additional pedestrian safety features, such as marking all legs of an intersection, pedestrian signal heads in all directions, etc. (See Safe Routes to School Guide on Traffic Signals: http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/engineering/traffic_signals.cfm.) It is not clear what additional pedestrian features will accompany the installation of a full traffic signal under this option.

Full traffic signals usually require high side street volumes, which this intersection does not have. According to Federal MUTCD standards, a signal at this intersection is not warranted. The Cape Coral City Council is asking you to make a policy decision to approve installation of a "unwarranted" traffic signal and to accept RaceTrac's offer to pay for the installation and maintenance costs of this traffic signal.

2. Pedestrian crossing signal (proposed by LeeDOT): When intersections do not meet the MUTCD standards for installing a traffic signal, there are nationally recommended alternative approaches for addressing pedestrian safety, including a midblock pedestrian crossing signal.

Although the type of signal is not mentioned in your blue sheet, the staff has said they are considering the Pedestrian Hybrid Beacon System, known as the HAWK. BikeWalkLee has been advocating the use of HAWK signals in Lee County since 2009, after their successful use in St. Petersburg, FL. While experimental back in the early 2000s when St. Petersburg installed them, they are now approved by FHWA and recommended in the 2009 MUTCD. According to independent studies conducted by the Texas Transportation Institute, the HAWK is nearly as effective as a full traffic signal, with 97 percent motorist compliance.

An important component of pedestrian safety in this option is an intersection redesign that includes a two-step crossing with new islands in the middle of this long, straight, multi-lane stretch of road.

Considerations for the Board:

Both options have merit and the Board may wish to weigh several considerations:

1. Does the Board want to make a policy decision to install a traffic signal which doesn't meet MUTCD standards? You have the authority to do so, and it wouldn't be the first time that elected officials made this policy call. However, as LeeDOT points out, there are some downsides to taking this action.
2. Under Option 1, what additional pedestrian features are planned along with the installation of a full traffic light? Will all legs of the intersection be marked for pedestrians? Will pedestrian signal heads in all directions be installed? Will there be ADA-compliant curb ramps and landings on all corners? Will there be paint stop bars for motor vehicles on all approaches? Will RaceTrac agree to pay for these additional pedestrian safety features?
3. Is the issue of how to pay for the improvement a key consideration? These two options are not equal in terms of budget implications for the county. In Option 1, RaceTrac is offering to pay for the installation of the traffic signal as well as to pay for its maintenance. (Note: It's not clear whether RaceTrac is offering to pay for additional pedestrian safety features that need to go along with a traffic signal--see #2 above.) Although RaceTrac clearly would benefit from the installation of this light, the county would also benefit. Alternatively, if you choose Option 2, the funds (\$350 K) will have to come from the LeeDOT budget.
4. Should the speediest solution be given more weight? It is likely that outside funding (Option 1) may allow the solution to be installed quicker. There should be a conversation about the installation timeline for each of the two options so that you can weigh this in your deliberations.
5. Does the Board want to defer to the wishes of the community and its elected officials? The Cape Coral City Council and the citizens of the Cape have spoken clearly that they prefer a full traffic signal.
6. Does the Board want to initiate the installation of the County's first HAWK device with a pedestrian friendly intersection structural redesign (Option 2) as a model for other intersections

with pedestrian safety issues that don't meet MUTCD warrant requirements for full traffic signals?

7. In Option 2, is the proposed location of the midblock crossing too close to the intersection for safe flow of traffic at the intersection? You may wish to ask staff for an explanation of this placement.
8. For midblock pedestrian crossing signals to be most effective, we believe they must have the following elements:
 - a. For pedestrians to use this self-activated pedestrian signal, it is critical that there be very minimal wait time for the pedestrian initiating the call. According to staff, the signal will cycle immediately once the button is pressed.
 - b. It is critical that the pedestrian signal used has a full red stop for vehicles while the pedestrian is crossing, and that it flashes yellow for vehicles at all other times.
9. If Option 2 is chosen, advance education will be needed in the community, including possible flyers (in English and Spanish) to the houses around the area, explaining how to use the pedestrian signal.
10. Given speeds traveled on this road and to ensure future pedestrian safety, for both options it may be necessary to add some upstream warnings such as activated caution lights alerting drivers to the signal ahead. It would also be helpful to get law enforcement out there to lower speeds when the signal is first installed.

If you are inclined to support a full traffic light (Option 1), it is critical that LeeDOT determine what additional pedestrian safety features need to be installed along with the traffic light to ensure that the intended benefits to pedestrian safety can be realized. These costs should be included in the development agreement with RaceTrac to address its funding commitment. Either option will be a great improvement over the current situation, and we hope that whichever option you choose, that it will be implemented quickly. It has been two years since Ryan Santos' tragic death and the community should not have to wait much longer for a solution.

We look forward to continuing to work with you to improve the safety, mobility, and quality of life for all residents of Lee County.

Sincerely,

/s/

Darla Letourneau
On behalf of
BikeWalkLee

Cc: Cape Coral City Council Members
David Loveland, LeeDOT Director