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Friday, May 20, 2011

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BikeWalkLee applauds adoption of countywide bicycle pedestrian master plan

Fort Myers, FL (May 20, 2011) –Today, the Lee County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) unanimously adopted the county’s first ever comprehensive countywide plan for a network of bicycling and pedestrian facilities and a blueprint to transform the county into a more bicycle-and pedestrian-friendly community.

“This is a major milestone for Lee County and one more element in the constellation of policies that the MPO and the county commissioners have put in place in the last two years to promote sustainable/livable communities and complete streets,” said Darla Letourneau, a BikeWalkLee leader. “All of these policies working together are moving the county in a new direction on transportation, land use planning and sustainability.”

The vision of this master plan is a comprehensive and connected bicycle and pedestrian network that enhances economic development, livability, safety and social equity for all Lee County citizens and visitors. While Lee County has numerous bicycle and pedestrian facilities in place, they lack continuity and connectivity. This plan works to close those gaps and have a comprehensive network across the various county jurisdictions.

Community support for the plan was evident in the public comments made at this morning’s meeting. More than a dozen speakers from a broad spectrum of groups — health, tourism, environmental, planning, sustainable growth, real estate, community associations, safety, and bicycle and pedestrian advocates — all spoke about how the implementation of this plan will add value to the community in a whole host of ways. “It was gratifying to see such a groundswell of community support today and a commitment to the plan’s implementation,” said Letourneau. “The board’s adoption of the plan creates a positive legacy for Lee County and its citizens.”

To kick-off the implementation process, the plan calls for three demonstration projects that will provide quick improvements that will demonstrate how “top notch” bicycle and pedestrian facilities could function.

1. **Lee Tour de Parks Route:** This project provides a continuous route connecting Lakes Park, the Calusa Nature Center, Yarbrough Park, North Colonial Linear Park, Six Mile Cypress Slough Preserve, Lee County Sports Complex and the new Red Sox facility off Daniels Parkway.
1. **The University Loop:** This project takes cyclist on roads with bike lanes and side paths in the vicinity of Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU), to encourage students, faculty and residents to bike for their daily commutes to school, shopping and entertainment. BikeWalkLee looks forward to working with FGCU to connect their campus with this Loop.

2. **The Winkler/Jefferson Complete Streets Project:** The project will utilize publicly owned right-of-way on the south side of the Winkler Canal, turning it into a greenway trail to connect the two “complete streets” that don’t currently connect.

The MPO board made clear that continued federal funding of the current federal bicycle and pedestrian programs — Transportation Enhancements, Safe Routes to Schools and Recreational Trails Program — is critical to the county’s ability to implement this bicycle pedestrian master plan. In light of the debate in Congress about potential elimination of these programs, the MPO board adopted a policy statement in support of continuing the current bicycle and pedestrian programs in the upcoming federal transportation reauthorization legislation, and requested this position be communicated to the county’s Congressional delegation.

“It makes no sense to shift federal funding away from pedestrian and bicycle facilities when Florida is No. 1 in the nation for pedestrian and bicyclist fatality rates,” said Lee County Commissioner Ray Judah, sponsor of today’s motion. “Federal funding for these important programs should be increased, not decreased.”

“Implementation of the master plan is just the beginning of a long process—it will take continued commitment and funding from the MPO, local jurisdictions, state and federal agencies; and involvement and commitment from other organizations, agencies, community groups, and citizens; to become a reality,” said Letourneau. “The county is off to a great start, and BikeWalkLee is committed to working with all parties to make this vision a reality.”

The following are online links to documents about the master plan:

1. [The Plan's Executive Summary](http://www.bikewalklee.org/BWL/BWL_PDFs/MPO/PlanExecutive%20Summary.pdf)
(http://www.bikewalklee.org/BWL/BWL_PDFs/MPO/PlanExecutive%20Summary.pdf)
2. [BikeWalkLee's fact sheet on the plan](http://www.bikewalklee.org/BWL/BWL_PDFs/MPO/BWLMPfactsheet110430.pdf)
(http://www.bikewalklee.org/BWL/BWL_PDFs/MPO/BWLMPfactsheet110430.pdf)
3. [BikeWalkLee's: What the plan means for stakeholder groups](http://www.bikewalklee.org/BWL/BWL_PDFs/MPO/BWLMPbystakeholders110430.pdf)
(http://www.bikewalklee.org/BWL/BWL_PDFs/MPO/BWLMPbystakeholders110430.pdf)
4. [BikeWalkLee's summary matrix of the plan recommendations](http://www.bikewalklee.org/BWL/BWL_PDFs/MPO/MPrecommatrix110412.pdf)
(http://www.bikewalklee.org/BWL/BWL_PDFs/MPO/MPrecommatrix110412.pdf)
5. [Link to the full Master Plan](http://www.mposwfl.org/content/Agendas/2011/04April/BPCC/BPCC01.Bicycle%20Pedestrian%20Master%20Plan.pdf))
(<http://www.mposwfl.org/content/Agendas/2011/04April/BPCC/BPCC01.Bicycle%20Pedestrian%20Master%20Plan.pdf>.)

BikeWalkLee is a community coalition raising public awareness and advocating for complete streets in Lee County—streets that are designed, built, operated and maintained for safe and convenient travel for all users: pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit riders of all ages and abilities. For more information, visit www.BikeWalkLee.org, the BikeWalkLee blog at <http://bikewalklee.blogspot.com/>, or find us on Facebook and Twitter.