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BikeWalkLee

MPO actions could make Lee streets a little more complete

By DARLA LETOURNEAU and DAN MOSER

You have a chance to help make Lee County a better place for bicyclists, walkers and people using the bus (or for those who would if it were more convenient).

At its June 19 meeting, the Metropolitan Planning Organization — the intergovernmental planning agency that sets the direction of the county's transportation infrastructure — will be considering two items:

One sets the scope of work for the countywide bike/pedestrian master plan, to ensure a more integrated network throughout the county. Congratulations to the MPO for recognizing the need for this plan.

The other item is a policy statement that local and state road projects must include bike/pedestrian/transit accommodation in design plans, rather than asking the public to pay for expensive retrofits later.

Actually, the MPO will ponder two versions of this resolution: One that supports a new and clear design-first policy; another that argues for the status quo (meaning doing the minimum required). We urge the MPO to listen to its citizen advisors and support the resolution that makes it clear we expect new road projects to be built to include every user -- not just the ones in cars.

Here's why:

It completes our streets. By including walkers, bikers and bus riders up front in the design of road projects, it ensures there is room for everyone on Lee County roads. The design phase is the time to get this done, when simple changes and routine accommodations can make a huge difference for users — but very little difference in the final budget.

It saves taxpayers money. When these elements are designed in, they cost very little. When they have to be added later, they cost a lot -- and we have to foot the bill.

It's sustainable. We need more transportation alternatives, not less. We need ways to get around that don't rely on cars alone. We need to encourage the healthy lifestyles choices that include biking and walking. We need to recognize that we live in an area whose growth rate makes better mass transit essential, not just a luxury.

It's the law. State and federal rules require ways to accommodate cyclists, walkers and transit users, but it's easy to leave that out of road designs...and once elected officials and citizens find out, it's too late to do anything. That's why a clear policy will send an equally clear message: Follow the law, no excuses.

It just makes sense. Who wouldn't want all users to be included up front, so their needs can be integrated from the start? Who wouldn't want a countywide plan for a better network of sidewalks, bike lanes, bike paths, bus stops and more? That's smart planning that benefits everyone — including drivers.

BikeWalkLee is a coalition of local groups and individuals working to complete the streets in Lee County. On behalf anyone who walks, bikes or rides the bus, we urge you to tell the MPO to support complete streets by supporting the citizens' committee resolution and the countywide bike/pedestrian plan.

You can find out how to contact MPO members (to tell them you support complete streets), how to attend the June 19 meeting (to show your support in person), and about the MPO online at <http://www.mpo-swfl.org/>.

Help Lee County take a big step to make its streets more complete. Share your support with the MPO today.

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Darla Letourneau and Dan Moser serves on the steering committee for BikeWalkLee. BikeWalkLee representatives are available to provide background and quotes for any media outlet. Contact Dan Moser at 239.334.6417 or dan@floridabicycle.org to arrange interviews. Please visit the organization's Web site at www.BikeWalkLee.org for more information, statistics and background.