



Guest opinion: Transportation plan already obsolete

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Written by

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Gov. Rick Scott and state Transportation Secretary Anath Prasad recently announced their Florida transportation plan for "the 21st century." Their plan promises greater choices and a more efficient transportation system. It delivers on neither.

They propose to develop more access for automobiles with high speed / high capacity, tolled corridors - the only choice being offered to Floridians is what we will pay to use our roads. Their plan lacks meaningful alternatives to encourage other modes of travel and is out of touch with Florida's reality. Florida is the most dangerous state in the nation for walking and biking and its cities dominate the top-ten list where residents cannot access work through public transportation - and they want only to build bigger, faster roads.

This approach is directly counter to the FDOT 2060 Florida Transportation Plan, a broad and engaged effort that created an accessible, integrated and sustainable vision for transportation.

One of the goals of the 2060 Plan is that "Florida should provide residents, visitors, and businesses with more choices among transportation modes." The 2060 Plan promotes increased capacity for urban public transit systems, improved connectivity of rail and increased access to convenient, safe and affordable transportation choices. The 2060 Plan advocates strategic investments in an integrated and connected multimodal transportation network that will generate jobs, economic competitiveness and greater livability.

Ultimately, Gov. Scott's plan is a big-government, top-down approach that would take choice and control away from local communities. Promoted as an engine of economic revival, it is anything but. Scott's plan will encourage sprawl and serve special interests, at taxpayer expense. Ultimately, it is the same failed approach that has caused Florida's housing and economic downturn.

Lee County has made significant strides in promoting a more livable future consistent with the 2060 Plan through policies that integrate sustainability, efficient land use and accessible transportation options. Lee County's focus on multimodal transportation and complete streets recognizes that it is a better use of our tax dollars to invest in existing infrastructure. It also recognizes that funding transit, walking and biking facilities offers cheaper and more efficient solutions to congestion than simply building more and more roads.

As part of the 2035 Transportation Plan, elected officials of the Lee County Metropolitan Planning Organization adopted Resolution 2010-12 that would "maximize the use of existing transportation facilities and explore opportunities for improved connectivity before adding new facilities." The MPO also moved the multimodal transportation conversation forward by approving funding for a study of the long-term feasibility of commuter and freight rail options in the Seminole Gulf Railway Corridor - one of the ways to meet the area's growing transportation needs. The success of these local or regional plans requires cooperation from the governor and FDOT - whose own plan runs counter to our local smarter growth initiatives.

Gov. Scott has simply resurrected an old plan and dressed it up with toll roads - an outdated plan based on poor assumptions and failed models that ignore the consensus built in the 2060 Florida Transportation Plan process. Floridians want a comprehensive and integrated transportation system that will really move us into the 21st century, not 20th-century retreads.

We want and expect choices in where we live and how we get to where we need to go. We want the enhanced quality of life that comes from living and working in safe, walkable communities. We need state and federal policies that support visionary transportation and land use plans developed at the local level. Finally, we expect real leadership from the governor and staff to implement the 2060 Transportation Plan - a 21st century vision to enhance long-term sustainability, livability and economic growth through smarter transportation.

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