



November 20, 2009

Governor Charlie Crist
State of Florida
The Capitol
400 S. Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0001

Dear Governor Crist,

Once again, Florida is in the national spotlight —this time, as the most dangerous state in the country for pedestrians. A national report, “Dangerous by Design,” jointly produced by the Surface Transportation Policy Partnership and Transportation for America, found Florida to have a danger index for pedestrians that is three times the national average. There is substantial evidence that pedestrians and bicyclists are being put at risk across the state and we call upon you, as the leader of our state, to present a plan of action to the citizens of Florida.

The "Dangerous by Design" report highlights the top 10 most dangerous large metro areas in the country, the top four being in Florida: Orlando-Kissimmee, Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater, Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach, and Jacksonville. Even more alarming is the additional number of Florida metro areas (under 1 million residents) that are more dangerous than these large metro areas (listed in order of danger):

- Punta Gorda/Charlotte County (2nd highest in the country, and only by a fraction of a percent)
- Sebastian-Vero Beach
- Panama City-Lynn Haven
- Lakeland-Winter Haven
- Ocala
- Palm Beach Bay-Melbourne-Titusville
- Cape Coral-Fort Myers *(in between the top 4)
- Palm Coast* (in between the top 4)

In total, 14 million Florida residents—over three-quarters of Florida’s total population — live in these 12 metro deemed the most dangerous for pedestrians.

Put in terms of human lives, in 2007-2008, 1,047 pedestrians were killed on Florida roads, along with another 239 cyclists (1,286 in total), with many of these being preventable deaths. In addition, over 24,000 pedestrians and cyclists were injured during the same period. These roads are “dangerous by design” because they fail to provide safe conditions for pedestrians and cyclists. In Florida, 22% of all traffic deaths are pedestrians and cyclists, greatly disproportionate to their use of the roadways, and almost double the national rate of 13.6%.

Yet, Florida is not spending its transportation dollars to protect the users most at risk on our roadways. Florida only spends 1.5% of its federal transportation dollars to improve the safety of walking and bicycling, or \$1.41 per person. This is an enormous disconnect — 22% of all traffic deaths are pedestrians and cyclists, yet only 1.5% of transportation dollars are spent to improve their safety. Clearly, Florida’s focus is almost exclusively on making the roads safer for drivers, not the non-motorists sharing the roadways who are disproportionately at risk of being killed.

Florida has experienced the fatality equivalent of two jumbo jet crashes each year for the past 15 years, yet no inquiry has been undertaken nor measures taken to ensure this never happens again. What has been done by state leaders in response to these thousands of preventable deaths of pedestrians and cyclists? The answer has been silence. Actually, it's worse than silence. Just as these alarming statistics are being reported in the national media, our state leaders are returning unspent funds to Washington that were intended to make our streets safer for walkers and cyclists!

A report by the League of American Bicyclists found that FDOT had over \$108 million of unobligated funds at the end of 2008—45% of all the funds allocated to it since 2006 — in the program designed to address highway safety concerns. The Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) was enacted in 2006 to reduce the number of traffic fatalities and serious injuries through infrastructure improvements, education, and enforcement. Bike and pedestrian projects are eligible for HSIP; however, there is no evidence that FDOT targets these funds to improve safety for walkers and cyclists, and we've seen no data showing that any of these funds have been used in Florida for this purpose.

Another case in point: Florida receives over \$48 million a year for Transportation Enhancements (TE), primarily for pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure projects. According to a report by the Alliance for Biking and Walking, in October FDOT chose (as part of a federally mandated rescission) to take the bulk of the cut from two programs, Transportation Enhancements and the Recreational Trails program — the programs that fund projects to make our roadways safer for walkers and cyclists. Almost \$25 million was taken out of the TE program—double of “fair share” amount recommended by US DOT. The Recreational Trails program was cut \$1.6 million—triple the “fair share” amount.

This rescission is a reflection of the state's view of walkers and cyclists as second-class citizens when it comes to our roadways. These federal programs are not viewed as FDOT's priority, and thus, are often put on the back burner. As a result, funds in these two programs haven't been spent, resulting in unobligated balances which became a target for the rescission. On the other hand, FDOT over-obligated on road projects, and then used the “unobligated” funds from the bicycle/pedestrian programs to bail them out. This should never happen again.

Every community in Florida has a long list of bicycle/pedestrian projects awaiting funding. In Lee County alone, more than \$50 million in projects have been identified. If FDOT can't give this program the priority it deserves as intended by Congress, then the TE funds should be directly allocated to the MPOs that can be counted on to expeditiously use these funds for urgently needed bicycle/pedestrian infrastructure projects in their counties.

As residents of Lee County, the findings of the “Dangerous by Design” report come as no surprise to us. Lee County ranks 23rd in the nation as the most dangerous metro area for pedestrians, and ninth in Florida. Over the past two years, 32 Lee County residents have died (and another 422 were injured) while crossing the street, walking to school, going to a bus stop, or strolling to the grocery store. Another 10 were killed while bicycling (190 injured). BikeWalkLee, a community coalition working to complete Lee County's streets, issued its own report in conjunction with the national report to take a closer look at what's happening in Lee County, and what actions are needed to address this crisis. (The report is available at www.bikewalklee.org.)

Our coalition has been working with Lee County officials over the past year to promote a "complete streets" approach and investments to make our roadways safer for all users, and our elected officials have begun to act. One of the key recommendations of the “Dangerous by Design” report is the adoption of complete streets policies, since complete streets are safer streets and save lives of pedestrians, cyclists and motorists, as well as to help promote healthy lifestyles. In August, the Lee County MPO adopted a resolution which requests FDOT and local agencies to accommodate all users in the design, construction, and operation of all roadway projects. On Nov. 10, Lee County commissioners adopted just such a complete streets policy resolution, the first step in implementing a complete streets program in our community.

As Lee County embarks on this path to safer streets for everyone, it will need support and leadership from FDOT, since many of the policies and approaches for building our roadways are directed by the state and many of the roadways in our county are actually state roads.

Making Florida roadways safe and accessible for all users makes sense on many levels, not just to improve safety. Complete streets reduce energy use and carbon emissions, they foster strong communities, and they play an important role in livable communities. They also save taxpayers money.

You have called a special session of the state legislature to fund two commuter railroads (Tri-Rail and SunRail). It is important to remember that for a commuter rail system to work, it must be connected to places where people live, work, and play. Now is the time to incorporate sidewalks, shared use paths, and bicycle lanes in the initial planning so that there are intermodal links.

Other agencies within your administration are beginning to plan for change. Last month, the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) issued draft regulations for implementing the Florida Energy and Climate Act of 2008. These regulations will require counties to incorporate complete streets policies and strategies in the Comprehensive Plan evaluation process where land use, transportation, energy, climate, and conservation will be required. These envision a multi-modal transportation system that places emphasis on public transportation and the expansion of alternative transportation modes, such as public transit, bicycle, walking, and rail. Other departments need to coordinate their planning and funding to be consistent with this new approach, including FDOT.

Governor Crist, we call upon you and your administration to develop an action plan in the near future to address this crisis. Aggressively promoting a complete streets approach to the design, construction, operation, and maintenance of our roadways is a good place to start. In 1987, Florida was one of the first states to adopt a complete streets policy (Section 335.065), yet this Florida statute and its intent have never been implemented in any meaningful way.

In these difficult economic times, Florida must reinvent itself if it wants to continue to be economically viable and attractive to future generations. It makes good economic sense, as well as safety sense, to become a state that fosters walkable, bikeable and livable communities. We are paying dearly, both in human lives and in lost economic opportunities, for our auto-centric approach to transportation and growth and development. There is no better time than now to make this paradigm shift.

We urge you to respond to this call to action with a bold and specific plan. We also urge you to provide better reporting and transparency on what Florida is doing to address the needs of all users of the roadways. The approach established for the Recovery.gov website should serve as a model for reporting and tracking all transportation program funding and outcomes, not just ARRA funds. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

/s/

Darla Letourneau

On behalf of

BikeWalkLee –a coalition working to complete Lee County’s streets

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