



FOR RELEASE
MONDAY, Dec. 14, 2009

CONTACT:
Darla Letourneau
(239) 850-3219 ■ dletourneau@bikewalklee.org

BikeWalkLee calls on Lee Legislative Delegation to take actions to address preventable pedestrian and cyclist deaths

FORT MYERS, FL — BikeWalkLee, a community coalition advocating for complete streets in Lee County, has issued a challenge to both Governor Crist and the Lee County Legislative Delegation for specific actions to address the epidemic of preventable pedestrian and cyclist deaths in Florida.

Last month, a national report ranked Florida as the most dangerous state in the country for pedestrians, with a danger index three times the national average. Lee County's danger index is even higher than Florida's statewide average and ranks 23rd worst out of the 360 metro areas in the nation— putting us in the top 5% most dangerous areas in the country. Every week we see this danger made graphically real as another pedestrian is killed on our roads, such as the Dec. 8 death of a pedestrian while trying to cross U.S. 41 at Victoria Avenue in Fort Myers.

On Nov. 20, BikeWalkLee sent a letter to Gov. Crist and state legislative leaders, asking them for a plan of action to reverse this long-standing stain of being the most dangerous state for pedestrians and cyclists. To date, our letter has been met with deafening silence, similar to the silence over the past 15 years as these startling pedestrian fatality numbers are reported annually. Not only have our state leaders not taken action to address this epidemic of preventable deaths, they have returned unspent funds to Washington that were intended to make our streets safer for walkers and cyclists.

As a follow-up, BikeWalkLee sent a letter to the Lee County Legislative Delegation on Dec. 1 asking them to take specific actions this legislative session (which convenes March 2). NONE of these requested items require additional funding—they can be accomplished through oversight, policy and legislative direction to the state government, and a re-prioritization of existing transportation funds. On Dec. 15, BikeWalkLee will present its request to the delegation at its annual meeting.

We call upon the governor and our elected representatives to take the following actions:

- Establish a statewide goal of reducing the share of all traffic deaths that are pedestrians and cyclists by 50 percent (which would bring Florida in line with the national average), and develop a plan for achieving this goal within 10 years, with quantifiable measures to track results.

- Require the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) to prioritize allocation of its Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) funds as well as State and Community Highway Safety Grant Program funds to reflect the share of all traffic deaths of that mode. Given that 22% of all traffic deaths in Florida are pedestrians and cyclists, 22% of the safety funds should be targeted to make the roads safer for these users.
- Require FDOT to reprioritize its budget for FY 2010-2011 and beyond to double (at least) the share of its transportation dollars going to pedestrian/bike infrastructure. Currently, only 1.5% of Florida transportation dollars are allocated to provide safe and accessible facilities for pedestrians and cyclists. But approximately 30% of all Floridians, including many senior citizens, do not have access to their own motor vehicle for transportation; many more citizens walk, run or cycle for recreation and exercise.
- Implement laws that are already on the books that would make Florida communities safer for pedestrians and cyclists.
 - Florida was one of the first states to adopt a complete streets policy in 1987 (F.S. 335.065), yet this statute and its intent have never been implemented in any meaningful way. A good place to start is to aggressively promote a complete streets approach to the design, construction, operation and maintenance of our roadways. FDOT should issue guidance and accountability measures to ensure these provisions are being implemented. Complete streets are safer streets and save lives of pedestrians, cyclists and motorists, as well as to help promote healthy lifestyles.
 - The Legislature enacted a Conserve by Bicycle Program (F.S. 335.067) in 2005 to promote energy savings and healthy transportation alternatives, yet no actions have been taken to establish this program. These goals are even more important today than they were five years ago, and FDOT should be required to implement this program as intended.
- For too long, the state's outdated "Green Book," the minimum standards for designing roadways, has been used by many counties and municipalities as the excuse for not accommodating bicyclists, pedestrians and transit users. Other national, state, and professional guidelines require higher standards of accommodations for bike/pedestrian/transit users, and it is past time for the Florida Green Book to be updated to reflect these improvements.
- The governor's office as well as FDOT should expand its "Recovery.gov" website transparency approach to all transportation projects, activities, plans and outcomes. The public should know where its transportation dollars are going, what percentage is being spent on safety of non-motorists, the progress the state is making in meeting goals of reducing the share of all traffic deaths that are bike/pedestrian, etc.

A new day is dawning in Florida transportation. Last week, the Legislature, at the urging of Gov. Crist, passed landmark legislation that establishes a policy framework for rail in our state. As Gov. Crist said, this legislation is a "historic step to transform Florida's future—not only as it relates to transportation in our state, but also for the employment and economic opportunity of our people." 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, bicycle lanes, and transit facilities in the initial planning so that there are intermodal links for the envisioned rail system.

We are pleased that Lee County, through adoption of complete streets resolutions this year by both the Metropolitan Planning Organization and by the Board of County Commissioners, has embarked on a path to safer streets for everyone. For the county to be successful, it needs support and leadership from the governor and state agencies, especially 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.

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.

###

The referenced letters and reports can be found online:

- [Letter to Lee County Legislative Delegation: Requested Actions to address Pedestrian Safety "Dangerous by Design" report](http://bikewalklee.blogspot.com/2009/11/letter-to-lee-county-legislative.html) - Nov. 30, 2009:
<http://bikewalklee.blogspot.com/2009/11/letter-to-lee-county-legislative.html>
- [BikeWalkLee's letter to Governor Crist requesting action on "Dangerous by Design" report](http://bikewalklee.blogspot.com/2009/11/bikewalklees-letter-to-governor-crist_20.html) - , Nov. 20, 2009:
http://bikewalklee.blogspot.com/2009/11/bikewalklees-letter-to-governor-crist_20.html
- BikeWalkLee's local report: "How safe are Lee County Streets for pedestrians?" Nov. 9, 2009: www.BikeWalkLee.org
- "Dangerous by Design" (national report):
<http://t4america.org/resources/dangerousbydesign/>, Nov. 9, 2009

###

About BikeWalkLee:

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. Information, statistics and background online at www.BikeWalkLee.org