



WRITTEN STATEMENT OF
Darla Letourneau, on behalf of BikeWalkLee
FOR THE
Field Hearing of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
In Maitland, FL
March 27, 2011

Chairman Mica, Ranking Member Rahall, Rep. Brown and other members of the Committee.

Thank you for coming to Maitland on March 14th for your field hearing on the surface transportation reauthorization. Our organization -- a community coalition in Lee County, Florida, raising public awareness and advocating for complete streets and a more balanced transportation system -- believes that the next federal surface transportation bill needs to reflect a vision of a balanced multi-modal transportation system. A balanced multi-modal system includes safe, well-maintained, and efficient highway, rail, public transportation, bicycling, and pedestrian systems. Over the past 20 years, federal transportation legislation has moved incrementally in the direction of a more balanced system. It is essential that this year's reauthorization move boldly forward in the direction of transforming our national transportation system to meet the challenges of America in the 21st century. The nation is truly at a crossroads. We can either continue building a costly, outdated, and, oil-dependent transportation system, or we can move forward.

We applaud the remarks made by the Honorable Frank Bruno, Volusia County Council Chair, in his written statement. Chairman Bruno spoke about how carefully the county analyzed every expenditure and project for savings, while also moving forward on critical infrastructure projects. Chairman Bruno identified one reason for the county's success as investing in pedestrian and bicycle facilities to ensure that all residents are able to safely get around. He also recognized that providing individuals with broader transportation choices reduces demand and expensive maintenance on highways and roads.

We also wish to respond to the remarks made by Assistant Secretary Prasad of the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), who questioned investing in sidewalks and bike infrastructure. As Chairman Bruno reinforced, investing in bicycling and walking makes good economic sense given the low cost of these projects relative to their ability to reduce traffic congestion and positively influence safety and health. On behalf of all the people who bicycle and walk in Florida, we urge you to recognize the national importance of accommodating safe bicycling and walking by including these programs in the surface transportation reauthorization.

BikeWalkLee supports a bold vision for a 21st century transportation system at the national, state and local level—a balanced, multi-modal system that invests in public transportation, safe places to walk and bicycle, and land use policies that reduce travel demand by locating more affordable housing near jobs and services. Public transit, pedestrian, and bicycling facilities are at the core of providing transportation access and choice. These transportation modes are not “frills” or somehow not federal responsibilities. They are all part of one integrated national transportation system that provides safe mobility and connectivity to get people where they want to go. Bicycling and walking are transportation solutions and are directly linked to successful transit programs, since every transit trip begins on foot. Bicycling and walking are popular, practical, and money-saving ways for Americans to complete short trips.

The safety of all transportation users has been and should continue to be a major responsibility of the national transportation system. Nationally, 13% of all roadway fatalities are pedestrians and cyclists, while in FL, that percentage is 22%. Clearly, the national transportation system must establish programs to address these safety issues and should establish performance targets to hold state and local transportation agencies accountable for reducing these roadway fatalities. According to the 2009 national report, "Dangerous by Design," (a joint effort of the Surface Transportation Policy Partnership and Transportation for America), there is an epidemic of preventable pedestrian deaths (76,000 Americans in 15 years). An overwhelming proportion have occurred along roadways that were dangerous by design—streets that were engineered for speeding cars and made little or no provision for people on foot, in wheelchairs or on a bicycle. Addressing these safety concerns must be a high priority of the next transportation bill. For much of a decade, Florida has been the most dangerous state in the country for both pedestrians and cyclists and it is critical that the next legislation provide the tools (and the accountability) to ensure that Florida and other states do something to eliminate these preventable deaths on our roads.

BikeWalkLee's vision of a balanced multi-modal transportation system is not just an abstract wish; we have been busy working with our elected officials and other community partners to put our county on the path of realizing this vision. We are especially proud of our Lee County elected officials, both at the Lee Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and the Lee County Board of County Commissioners (BoCC). Both organizations have shown strong support for complete streets and a more balanced multi-modal transportation system by requiring bike/ped/transit accommodations in all road projects. County officials also have provided funding for stand-alone bike/ped projects as part of the ARRA funds and the annual FDOT work plan. As a result, our county has been recognized at the national and statewide level for its leadership and accomplishments in making Lee County a more bike/pedestrian/transit-friendly community. Just this week, Lee County commissioners were named the "Elected Officials of the Year" by the Florida Bicycle Association. Singled out in the FBA honor was the county's recently adopted Evaluation and Appraisal Report, an exhaustive review of the county's land use policies. It is a visionary plan with a focus on sustainability and a blueprint for changes in land use that will promote walkable/bikeable and transit-accessible neighborhoods, with complete streets concepts integrated into every component of this plan.

It is important that the federal transportation legislation provide our local elected officials with the tools and support they need to continue on the path to a balanced multi-modal transportation system that is vital to the sustainability and economic viability of our community and this country. Lee County's MPO recent long range transportation plan identified the need to establish a comprehensive transit system to meet the projected transportation needs in our community. Transit infrastructure is necessary not only to our county's future, but to the economic vitality of Florida. Federal financial assistance will be essential to our ability to move in this direction. In addition, continued federal funding for bicycling and walking facilities can assist the county in offering cost-effective options to help mitigate national problems such as transportation dependence on oil, and help hard-pressed county families lower their transportation costs, stay healthy and active, and at the same time serve those that do not bike or walk by lowering congestion.

Like Chairman Bruno, our elected officials understand the importance to the economic viability of our community of investing in pedestrian and bicycle facilities as part of a transportation system that provides people choices. Research shows that people want to live and work in walkable communities, where people of all ages, abilities or mode of transportation feel safe and welcome on the roadways. One study in Lake Worth, Florida, found that people were willing to pay \$20,000 more for homes in pedestrian-friendly communities. As we try to attract businesses to our area or retain the ones we have, it is important to provide this quality of life feature.

I would like to focus my specific remarks on two federal programs that are critical to our local effort-- Transportation Enhancements and the Safe Routes to School programs—and demonstrate the economic value of these investments.

Transportation Enhancements

Nationally, the federal investment in bicycling and walking infrastructure and programs is minimal—only about 1.5 percent of federal transportation spending. This small investment supports 12 percent of transportation trips made by bicycling and walking. The federal transportation dollars that support these activities boost our economy, help families and government agencies save money, and address many of the concerns our transportation system is struggling with now, including congestion and safety.

Economic Benefits:

Investments in bicycle & pedestrian facilities boost the state and local economy.

Investing in bicycling and walking infrastructure is first and foremost an economic development investment. One of Florida's primary economic engines is tourism, and bicycling and walking by tourists or by seasonal residents can bring great economic return to Florida with minimal investment. For example, in North Carolina the state got a 9:1 return on its investment in biking facilities in the Outer Banks that attracted thousands of new vacationers to enjoy these biking facilities.

As part of its upcoming countywide bike/ped master plan, Lee County sees great economic potential in promoting bicycling as part of an eco-tourism focus, which would boost our local, state and federal tax revenues and help struggling business owners. Two important trail projects -- the 10-Mile John Yarborough Linear Trail's much needed extension to the north; and the last link of the Winkler Canal shared use path that will create a complete streets loop in the City of Fort Myers -- are top priorities on the MPO's just approved Regional Transportation Enhancement priority list. Both of these crucial projects would be in jeopardy if the TE program were to be discontinued.

A study by the Outdoor Industry Association shows that the bicycling industry nationally supports 1.1 million jobs and brings in nearly \$18 billion in federal, state and local taxes each year. In Florida alone, there are more than 1,000 bicycle retailers and dealers, employing almost 5,000 Floridians, with gross revenues approaching \$400 million annually... and all these numbers are growing!

Bicycling and walking are increasing and investments in infrastructure are cost-effective.

In these times of fiscal constraint, we can only afford to fund programs that address multiple concerns. Bicycling and walking programs do just that. Currently, one of every 8 trips is taken by foot or by bike, and the use of these modes of transportation in America is on the rise, increasing 25 percent since 2001. Nationally, Americans will make more than 4 billion bike trips and 42 billion walking trips this year alone. More bicycles are sold annually than cars and trucks combined. Half of all trips Americans make are 3 miles or shorter, and one-quarter are less than a mile—easy distances for walking or bicycling, but only if conditions are safe. The Census reports that nationally, bike commuting increased over 40 percent between 2001 and 2008. In Lee County, there has been a steady increase in bike commuting. In 2009, bike commuting held steady at the national level, while it increased 18% in Florida and 20% in Lee County. Thus, the demand for this infrastructure is growing and will continue to grow in the future.

A recent study in Baltimore, MD, showed that pedestrian and bicycle construction projects generated nearly twice as many jobs per construction dollar as roadway construction. Given the high unemployment rates in Florida, this is an important consideration in cost-effective investments in job creation.

Investments in bicycling and walking facilities help reduce government spending on roads.

People who bicycle or walk instead of driving save money on every trip, reduce road congestion, and inflict minimal wear and tear on roads and bridges. Every trip made by bicycling or walking instead of using motor vehicle helps reduce government spending on road and parking infrastructure and maintenance.

Freedom of Choice:

Investments in bicycling and walking facilities help families in hard economic times.

Just as governments at all levels must balance their budgets, families must find ways to live within their means. As Floridians struggle to survive on limited incomes, they are choosing walking, bicycling, and transit as a transportation mode choice. The average American family spends 18 percent of its annual income on transportation. According to the AAA's latest annual report (2010) on the cost of owning a car, it costs \$9,519 a year to operate a mid-size car, and that number is rising as the cost of a gallon of gas increases daily. With a Lee County median household income of \$50,863(2008), that's almost 19% of a family's income tasked to transportation if it's a one-car family and 38% in a two-car family. Lee County families need to have transportation choices (such as bicycling, walking, transit) so that they can lower their car operating costs to live within their means. Investing in bicycling and walking is a low-cost way to provide transportation alternatives for these families, either directly through federal projects or indirectly by supporting state and local efforts to develop viable transportation alternatives.

For many Americans, walking and bicycling is a necessity, as one-third of Americans don't own cars -- including children, the elderly, people with disabilities and low-income individuals. For example, in the City of Fort Myers, approximately 18% of households don't own cars. For them, transit, walking and bicycling options are a necessity.

Sidewalks provide mobility & independence for seniors.

Mobility for seniors is an important and growing concern in Florida, which has more than its share of retirees. Over 22% of Lee County's population is age 65 or over, and an estimated 30% of them do not drive. A 2008 AARP survey of its members showed that two-thirds of respondents were limiting their daily driving in order to save money, with 15 percent bicycling more. A majority of AARP members would bike, walk and use transit more if their neighborhoods were more accommodating. A recent survey of Florida residents found only 25 percent felt it was safe to walk along or to cross their nearest federal or state road, which tend to be the high-use, high-risk transit corridors in any community. Low-cost investments in walking and biking infrastructure can keep Florida seniors in their homes longer, giving them independence and saving government long-term care costs.

Health:

Investments in bicycling and walking facilities are investments in more active lifestyles to combat obesity.

Research shows that sedentary lifestyles are the primary factor in up to 200,000 deaths annually; with 64% of all Americans overweight and 1 in 3 are considered obese. In Lee County, 64% of adults and 32% of children are overweight or obese. An earlier estimate (Surgeon General, 2000) put the cost of obesity epidemic at \$117 billion in health-related expenses nationwide, with Florida's share estimated to be \$3.9 billion. A contributing factor to our increasing sedentary lifestyles is the auto-dependent community design which has contributed to this costly national problem. Investments in bicycling and walking facilities can bring the transportation system (and, perhaps, our waistlines) back into a healthier balance.

Safety:

These investments save lives!

Investments to improve the bicycling and walking infrastructure are especially important in Florida because our state ranks as the most dangerous state in the country for both pedestrians and cyclists (in terms of per capita fatalities). Pedestrians and bicyclists account for 13 percent of traffic fatalities nationwide, yet only 1 percent of federal safety funding is dedicated to prevent the 5,000 pedestrian and bicyclist fatalities that occur on our roadways every year. In Florida the statistics are much worse: 22 percent of all traffic fatalities are bike/ped (766 pedestrian and bicyclist fatalities), yet Florida invests very little of its safety funds to prevent these deaths. [See BWL report #2 below.] Improving the safety of our roadways for all users is important to providing transportation choices for our citizens, which will result in economic benefits and savings in terms of lives as well as reducing public health care costs.

In Lee County alone, the comprehensive cost (including both the economic costs and costs associated with the loss of quality of life) of the county's pedestrian and bicyclist fatalities and injuries is \$205 million. Clearly, the money saved by preventing these injuries and fatalities would more than offset any costs of improving the county's walking and biking infrastructure—which often can be done for a minimal cost if the needs of all users are included as part of the initial planning. [See BWL report #1 below.]

The Safe Routes to School Program

The federal Safe Routes to School program is improving safety and increasing opportunities for children to safely walk and bicycle to schools, which reduces traffic congestion. Between FY2005 and FY2010, FDOT received just \$39 million total for Safe Routes to School. This is a tiny fraction of FDOT's overall transportation spending. Nationally, Safe Routes to School represents just 0.2 percent of the federal transportation budget.

Demand in Florida for this funding is so high that FDOT has programmed funding through FY2015, assuming that federal funding will continue. A total of 282 applicants are benefiting from approximately \$53 million—improving safety at more than 1,000 schools across the state. In Lee County, this program has provided funds for needed sidewalks in both the cities of Cape Coral and Fort Myers.

The Safe Routes to School program serves a unique purpose—improving safety around schools. Approximately one-third of children's traffic deaths occur when children are walking and bicycling and are struck by cars. Safe Routes to School is the only program focused on addressing this tragic reality. For example, simply adding a sidewalk reduces by half the risk that a pedestrian will be struck by a car. For each collision avoided, communities save money and tragedies are avoided. Last year, teenager Cameron Ford was killed while biking near Challenger Middle School in Cape Coral, which lacked sidewalks along the nearby road. Since this tragic death, the city has installed sidewalks near the school.

Safe Routes to School is also a smart use of federal dollars. Making a one-time, low-cost investment like adding a sidewalk can reduce long-term school busing costs by making it safer for kids to walk and bicycle to school, and ease financial burdens on schools struggling to absorb the rising price of gasoline into their budgets.

Finally, Safe Routes to School can help school systems create opportunities for children to be physically active. A lack of physical activity among children has fueled the childhood obesity epidemic, which has huge economic costs to America as more children develop diseases like Type II diabetes. Safe Routes to School infrastructure gets children moving, creating an opportunity for daily physical activity and improved health through self responsibility.

If the Safe Routes to School program were eliminated, communities across Florida would lose access to an important funding stream to address children's safety.

Recommendations:

All of these benefits are only possible if the federal transportation bill invests in making bicycling and walking safe. The Transportation Enhancements and Safe Routes to School programs are a critical source of funding for bicycling and walking. Without these federal programs, it is unlikely that the FDOT would invest in the sidewalks, bike lanes, multi-use paths and other biking and walking infrastructure supported by these important programs thanks to the state's own economic difficulties and a long-term "cars first" culture emanating from Tallahassee.

Nationally, the total federal investment in bicycling and walking infrastructure and programs is minimal—only about 1.5 percent of federal transportation spending. This small investment is supporting 12 percent of transportation trips made by bicycling and walking. We ask that Congress continue this critical but modest investment in bicycling and walking and protect the structure of the Transportation Enhancements program, and retain the dedicated funding for the federal Safe Routes to School program.

We also urge Congress to incorporate the complete streets approach into the transportation bill. Complete streets policies simply require that the safety, interests, and convenience of all users be considered in the design and construction of transportation projects. Lee County's complete streets efforts have convinced us of the value of this approach and a federal complete streets policy would result in better state and local projects, and better use of the billions of dollars invested every year in road infrastructure. Recent USDOT policies in support of complete streets have greatly assisted our local efforts and they should be incorporated into the underlying transportation statutes.

Finally, as Congress works to improve and reform our nation's surface transportation programs, it is important that it find ways to improve the efficiency of implementation, push more decision-making down to the local level where the needs are best known, strip away the layers of bureaucratic red tape that have added unnecessary costs to transportation projects-- road projects and bike/ped facilities alike--and slowed the delivery of much-needed improvements.

Thank you again for this opportunity to submit testimony as you and your committee prepare to write the transportation authorization bill of 2011. We urge the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee continue dedicated funding for Safe Routes to School and Transportation Enhancements in the next surface transportation bill authorization. These programs improve safety, create more jobs, and help create a thriving economy for America and a more sustainable future for its families and citizens.

References to BikeWalkLee Reports:

1. "Dangerous by Design: How safe are Lee County streets for pedestrians?" November 9, 2009:
http://www.bikewalklee.org/BWL/BWL_PDFs/BWL_facts/BWLPed%20report%20FINAL.pdf
2. "Analysis of Florida's Highway Safety Programs, Pedestrian/Bicycle Safety Improvements and Recommendations for Action" February 22, 2010:
http://www.bikewalklee.org/BWL/BWL_PDFs/BWL_facts/BWLSafetyfundingFINAL100222.pdf

For more information, see www.BikeWalkLee.org.