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Transportation Decision-Making Bodies in Lee County, Florida

By Dan Moser

For a variety of interests – including supporters of better bicycle and pedestrian accommodations, opportunities to influence policy, funding, and priorities related to our transportation system here in Lee County are many. They range from our formal decision making, multi-jurisdictional Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), which includes elected officials from every government that manages roads (state, county, and municipal), to the Community Traffic Safety Team, an informal forum where front-line staff from those same governments, as well as many other interested and involved parties, attempt to work together to resolve specific problems on our roadways.

In almost every instance, the public has an opportunity to provide input and become part of the decision making process, at least in theory. Transportation projects are big-ticket items having far-reaching implications that can last for a very long time so there are many interests seeking decisions that would benefit them or those they represent. Based on the type of system that's resulted nationally, the power wielded by the trucking industry, American Automobile Association and similar entities that focus on motor vehicles, and professional organizations like the Institute of Transportation Engineers, has had significant influence, leaving other modes such as pedestrian (including those with mobility limitations), and bicycle, as a relatively low priority.

With your help and participation, this long-standing trend can be reversed.

Following is a list of forums where transportation decisions are made with a brief description of each. Please consider it a resource to help you become involved in the process.

Name: Lee County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)

Tasks: Elected officials from Lee County and each municipality make decisions about our transportation system, including almost all those of importance. FDOT, the entity that most funds at least pass through, are non-voting but vital members at the table.

Meetings: Monthly, usually the third Friday, beginning at 9am in the Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council conference room at 1926 Victoria Ave, just south of downtown Fort Myers. See agenda packages on website.

Comments: MPO staff members are very understanding of bike/ped/transit issues and needs, as are most board members. A very good forum at which to voice your opinion.

Name: Lee MPO Bicycle/Pedestrian Coordinating Committee (BPCC)

Reports To: Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)

Tasks: Reps. from Lee County, all its municipalities, Lee Tran, Lee Parks & Rec, FDOT, Lee School District, and the Injury Prevention Coalition (IPC), along with MPO staff, focus on ensuring that bike/ped projects, priorities, policies, and resources (such as maps) are compatible and coordinated. \$500,000 - \$1.5 mil/yr. is available to spend on State road retrofit needs; BPCC advises MPO on which retrofit project(s) to approve, among other duties.

Meetings: Every other month at Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council offices, 1926 Victoria Ave, near downtown Fort Myers.

Comments: Membership is restricted to the above named entity reps. but the public is welcome to attend. See agenda packages on website.

Name: Lee County Board of County Commissioners (BoCC)

Tasks: Makes decisions on all matters related to county government.

Meetings: Every Tuesday beginning at 9:30am at Old Courthouse Commission Chambers, downtown Fort Myers.

Comments: Transportation and community development matters are frequently on the agenda. See agenda package on website.

Name: Lee County Bicycle/Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC)

Reports To: Lee County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC)

Tasks: Recommends bike/ped retrofit projects for County roads. Any other bike/ped issue or recommendation can be considered.

Meetings: Bi-Monthly (third Wed of Jan, Mar,..., 6pm) at Lee County Public Works Bldg.

Comments: Commissioners each appoint a citizen rep. from their district and any Commissioner may appoint the one at-large citizen rep. and the bicycle industry/group rep. Also appointed by Commissioners are reps. from Co. Parks & Rec. District School Board and Sheriff's Office each designate a rep. from their organization, who is then appointed by a commissioner. BPAC makes recommendations on retrofit project funding (dedicated funds from gas taxes and impact fees) and any other bike/ped-related matters. County DOT provides staff support. See website for agenda package.

Other Forums

Each municipal government addresses its own transportation and land use issues on a routine basis. It's important that bike/ped/transit be made a high priority, something that can be done if the public attends and speaks to these matters. Here is a list of them:

Name: Bonita Springs City Council

Meetings: Meetings held on the first and third Wednesday, beginning at 9am, at City Hall, 9101 Bonita Beach Rd. See website.

Name: Cape Coral City Council

Meetings: Meetings held weekly on Monday, beginning at 4:30pm, at City Hall, 1015 Cultural Park Boulevard. See website.

Name: Fort Myers City Council

Meetings: Meetings held on the first and third Mondays, beginning at 4:30pm, at City Hall, 2200 Second St. See website.

Name: Fort Myers Beach Town Council

Meetings: Meetings usually held on the first and third Monday, beginning at 6:30pm at Town Hall, 2523 Estero Blvd. See website.

Name: Sanibel City Council

Meetings: Meetings held on the first and third Tuesday, beginning at 9am, at City Hall, 800 Dunlop Rd. See website.

More opportunities to address bike/ped/transit matters:

Lee MPO Citizen's Advisory Committee advises the MPO on transportation planning and priorities. (reps. are citizens who are appointed by MPO members). CAC meets monthly a week or so before MPO meeting. See website.

Lee MPO Technical Advisory Committee advises the MPO on overall transportation planning and priorities (reps. are employees of various governments and departments that are affiliated with MPO). TAC meets monthly a week or so before MPO meeting. See website.

Community Traffic Safety Team is a Florida Dept. of Transportation initiative that is intended to bring together any organization or agency that in some way deals with traffic safety and find solutions to traffic-related problems and concerns (from big-picture issues like red light running and DUI to problems that are specific to certain roadways or intersections). Anyone may participate. CTST meets on the fourth Wednesday of the month from 10am – 12pm at FHP HQ in old Page Field terminal building. Contact Steve Jansen for more info. JANSENSJ@leegov.com.

Injury Prevention Coalition is similar to CTST but broader in scope. Traffic-related issues are, however, a major aspect of IPC's focus. Anyone may join or participate. IPC meets on the third Wednesday of the month from 10am – 12pm at United Way of Lee County, 7275 Concourse Dr, Ft Myers (Harlem Heights neighborhood). See website.

Cape Coral Transportation Advisory Commission is a body that meets the Wednesday prior to MPO meetings and is made up of City Council members exclusively – no citizen members. Based on

conversation with the City Clerk's office, public input is usually taken, although the agenda and minutes do not reflect any formal opportunity for doing so. See website

This is only a partial listing of forums. Many other opportunities to bring up bike/ped issues exist. Public safety organizations, government agencies, neighborhood and community groups, and even Chambers of Commerce often address such issues, either formally through standing committees or informally on an ad hoc basis. Call around and inquire – you might be surprised by your findings.