

Transportation future and facing fiscal realities in Lee County & beyond

At the joint Collier/ Lee County MPO meeting held Friday, Oct. 19, Howard Glassman, executive director of the Florida MPO Advisory Council, presented the Transportation Revenue Study. The study focused upon the development of legislative approaches to address future transportation funding needs for the citizens of Florida and the creation of innovative means of further generating needed funding.

Federal highway trust funding is and will continue to decline. The state transportation funds are regularly diverted to other sectors and cars are becoming ever more fuel-efficient, all result in less money for transportation. Glassman puts that shortfall at \$74.3 billion.

While much of the conversation that ensued among commissioners centered on how we might get back more of what we pay to the federal government in gasoline tax, and how we might convince the state legislature to stop diverting transportation funds, there was some discussion of the new ideas presented in the report for revenue generation.

Ann Pierce, representing BikeWalkLee presented the other half of this equation -- how we might reduce expenditures, getting more out of existing or improved transportation infrastructure to meet future needs. First, she expressed BikeWalkLee's support of the recommendations proposed in the Transportation Revenue Study, including the full exploration of all possible new funding sources including VMT's - based upon data sources other than personal vehicle tracking.

More importantly, she urged that equal efforts be put into the other side of this fundamental equation... **significantly reducing capital and long-term expenses for all roadway projects**

- Transportation funding has changed *forever*
- It is not a matter of rattling cages to demand more state or federal revenues
- The challenge is to face the reality that we will no longer have the funds for new projects that we once had
- Waiting in the wings, according to the American Society of Civil Engineers, is the needed long-term expenditure of nearly \$6 trillion dollars *just* for maintenance of road systems already in place.... some 2 trillion of which they estimate is needed within the next five years.

Some states and localities across the country have already realized, that there will be *no* "getting back to normal" and they are releasing themselves from their current established **Needs and Cost Feasibility Plans** that were derived from outdated models of projection using only volume and peak capacities.

Only communities willing to employ new, bold and innovative thinking will rise with this opportunity to forge a new way- to set the pattern for the 'new normal':

- Duvall County DOT and the citizens of Jacksonville have unequivocally stated, "No more one-way streets, and while you're at it undo the ones we have."

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- The head of Massachusetts DOT, Richard Davey says, "No more superhighways -- we can't afford them and it's time for people to get out of their cars and onto trains, buses, bicycles and their own two feet." He has set the state on a "**Mode Shift Campaign**", with the goal of tripling the share of those multimodal trips while cutting costs and increasing safety.
- Tennessee DOT Commissioner John Schroer, is taking a stand on a "No more bypasses," pushing "Right Sizing" of all projects, while canceling big-ticket road widenings and implementing **Context-Sensitive Solutions** in a recognition that the "wider-faster" approach of the past will not solve congestion problems. The sprawl generated by new roads creates an endless demand for which there will never be enough money. In pulling back from new road development, Tennessee DOT intends to no longer support sprawl, but focus instead on enhancing the roads they have to both increase capacity and serve multiple modes and purposes, specifically improving local economies.
- The New Jersey DOT "FIT" program as part of its "Healthy Community Design" is saying "No more flyovers," re-evaluating those proposed for elimination and downsizing to sets of alternative solutions.

BikeWalkLee has suggested five specific recommendations by which to assess all roadway projects, drawn from these and other examples of best practices, including the current efforts of the Lee County MPO and LeeDOT.

1. First, develop a new model continuing with a unified transportation/ land use scenario, adding rigorous, broad measures of performance, capturing the full range of community needs and objectives, to include:
 - Increase safety for all roadway users
 - Supportive platform for economic and *local* business growth (45 mph always disproportionately favors easily recognizable national franchises)
 - Enhanced community character and quality of life
 - Improvements in public health
 - Environmental protection
 - Job creation (Each 1 million spent on roadways, creates seven jobs. Same 1 million spent on pedestrian projects and bike lanes/paths created nearly twice that number - 11.3 and 14.4 respectively)
 - Capital and long-term maintenance cost reductions
2. Second, policy changes: Elimination of Concurrency and re-evaluation or elimination of current Levels of Service standards (LOS). Moving from road impact fees to a mobility fee that supports alternative transportation choices, specifically transit operations.
3. A detailed auditing of all existing items currently in work programs to:
 - Eliminate projects

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- “Right size” projects and lower speeds through road diets
 - Leverage all possible multimodal opportunities for mode shifting connections
 - Conduct value-to-price ratios, Return on Investment and lifecycle cost analyses with metrics that address:
 - 1) cost/existing trip; 2) cost/new trip; 3) cost/mode shift option; and 4) long-term maintenance costs
4. The fourth recommendation is to approach all projects with a series of questions, such as:
- What is the role of this roadway in the project area?
 - Who does this roadway serve with exactly what benefits and deficiencies and...
 - Who is to be served by the proposed roadway improvements and at what impacts on the community?
 - What are all the possible alternatives, including infrastructure, grid and network enhancements for existing roads?
 - How much traffic could be shifted to other modes?
5. Finally, plan and design projects utilizing a multi-disciplinary team applying Context-Sensitive Solution approaches, *consistently* throughout the project’s entirety. Creating roadways that affordably support all aspects of community life.

When Nashville/Davidson Co MPO recently reanalyzed their entire long-range transportation work program, they were able to cut overall costs by 40%.

Our own LeeDOT and MPO in their initial efforts at better analysis were able to reduce costs of five of the long-range transportation plan projects by an average of 43% by dropping from 4-lanes designs to 2-lane with center median and turns.

Mayor Ryback of Minneapolis MN, designated last year as America’s #1 Bike City (the number of city bicyclists increased 174% between 2003 and 2008), and a premier “Walkable City” says, as he extolls the virtues of Road Diets – implemented at no extra cost as part of routine road repairs “We simply need to get more uses from all the streets we already have.”

The take away: Slower, cheaper, narrower is replacing wider, faster, anddecidedly more expensive.

Lee County MPO Director, Don Scott stated, “this is why we want to utilize the land-use scenarios, to be able to balance the reductions in future funding resources with widening needs.”. Lee County Commissioner Frank Mann, saying while he “hated to be the cynic, the funding we had experienced in the past was not coming back and that we needed to learn to do much more with less.”

-- Report by Ann Pierce