



May 29, 2015

Lee County Board of Commissioners
2120 SW Main Street
Fort Myers, FL 33901

Dear Commissioners:

BikeWalkLee, a coalition working to complete Lee County's streets, works for a balanced multi-modal transportation system that values transportation choice, connectivity, economic opportunity, livable communities, community character, safety, and quality growth.

On June 2, you will be considering staff's "growth increment funding" proposal, and BikeWalkLee would like to communicate its views in advance of your deliberations. Those views are:

- If the Board plans to use some of next year's general fund budget for transportation, a significant portion of these funds should be dedicated to bike/ped retrofit projects and transit funding.
- All road projects in the CIP should be designed with a complete streets approach in an effort to improve the safety for all road users.
- Finally, we recommend that you act now to restore impact fees to the 100% rate.

The Board is being asked to provide policy direction for development of this year's draft continuation budget. The staff's "growth increment funding" proposal is simply a methodology for arriving at a dollar amount to earmark in the budget process from general fund (which comes from property taxes) for infrastructure projects. In reality, this proposal is simply filling the hole created by the loss of impact fee revenues. The proposal shows \$7.9 million being earmarked for that purpose next year -- filling the estimated \$7 million/year hole created by your 55% reduction in road and park impact fees collection rates.

As we stated throughout the impact fee debate, we supported the county's 25-year policy that growth should pay for growth and warned that if developers were not charged the full cost of the infrastructure necessitated by that development, the taxpayers would be picking up the tab. Your proposal makes that scenario a reality-- the shortfall in impact fee revenues would now be paid for with property taxes.

BikeWalkLee agrees that additional funds are needed to implement multi-modal transportation projects and retrofit dangerous conditions for users. We also believe that, in some instances, the general fund is appropriate for these purposes. For example, a \$2 million/year allocation would allow the Board to fully fund the recent BPAC request for stand-alone bike/ped retrofit projects to attack the extensive backlog of 85 approved and prioritized projects (totaling \$68 million). Lee County ranks as one of the most

dangerous areas in the country for pedestrians and cyclists and it's important that our elected officials take actions to make our roads safer.

For the past four years, we have been highlighting the new fiscal realities in the transportation world--the transportation funding of the past has been reduced at all level of government and isn't coming back. Given this new reality, local governments must figure out how to maximize their local revenues for transportation and best invest these dollars to maximize the benefits.

Unfortunately, during the impact fee debates over the past two years, the Board ignored this fiscal reality and drastically cut impact fees. Impact fees are one of the three main sources for transportation funding in Lee County--the other two (almost equal) sources are tolls and gas taxes. When we pointed out that the out-year costs of the Board's approved 5-year transportation CIP was significantly underfunded, the response was that "the CIP is balanced" so these road impact fee dollars were not needed. It's regrettable that the truth about the transportation funding needs was not part of the impact fee debate so that the consequences of forgoing these revenues could have been considered before the decision was made to continue a significant reduction in collection of the full costs of public infrastructure investments necessitated by new development. For road impact fees alone, the 5-year loss due to the Board's policy decisions is an estimated \$33 million.

The "growth increment funding" proposal does nothing to address the larger transportation funding deficit, which staff estimates to be \$400 million. The only reasonable next step to address this shortfall would be to restore the impact fees to the 100% collection rate. While these two steps (the incremental growth proposal and restoring impact fees to 100%) will clearly not fully fund the transportation deficit, it would put the county on a path to a longer term solution. The reality is there are no additional federal or state funds that are going to come bail us out, as Commissioner Kiker suggested at the March 19th BoCC workshop. The federal Highway Trust Fund is broken and Congress has clearly demonstrated it is not capable of addressing our nation's infrastructure funding crisis. Likewise, Gov. Scott has made it clear that he's not planning to raise revenues to deal with the state's transportation funding needs, as some other states have done. So, that leaves it up to each community to find ways to address this problem -- by astutely maintaining available local revenues and by spending those revenues as smartly and cost-effectively as possible. The only fiscally responsible approach is to equitably maximize the revenue sources available to the county.

A missing piece in this discussion is the other important part of the transportation system--transit. To increase the economic competitiveness of Lee County, reduce overall transportation costs, and increase our quality of life, we need a healthy transit system. Research shows that you can't build your way out of congestion, i.e. more road lanes brings induced demand, putting more cars on the road. A multi-modal system is the only viable option to save money in infrastructure costs and manage congestion in a crowded future.

As the Board considers spending some general funds for infrastructure needs, it should also be increasing general fund expenditures for LeeTran operations. The county should be proactively preparing to meet the future demand of a population projected to grow to over 1 million by 2040. LeeTran services were cut back in 2013-14 and, while funds were restored in last year's budget, damage was done to the system's viability. As a result of these cutbacks, transit became a less reliable means of travel to work or other essential destinations. Investments in public transportation are the fiscally responsible way to meet the transportation needs of a growing area such as Lee County.

In summary, if the Board plans to use some of next year's general fund budget for transportation, a significant portion of these funds should be dedicated to bike/ped retrofit projects and transit funding. Further, all road projects in the CIP should be designed with a complete streets approach in an effort to improve the safety for all road users. Finally, we recommend that you act now to restore impact fees to the 100% rate.

Thank you for considering our views.

Sincerely,
/s/

Darla Letourneau
on behalf of BikeWalkLee