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## Darla Letourneau and Dan Moser: Legislature should act on alarming pedestrian, bicyclist deaths

*Darla Letourneau and Dan Moser - Guest Opinion*  
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Next week is the start of the Florida legislative session, and elected officials are faced with many tough decisions given the state's economic situation. However, not all actions to improve our state require new funds. For example, the Legislature, in conjunction with the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), could take bold actions with current resources to make Florida's roadways less dangerous for pedestrians and bicyclists. They could also improve the safety of all road users by enacting legislation to prevent texting while driving.

Why is this so important? Florida is the most dangerous state in the nation when it comes to pedestrians and bicyclists fatalities. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration says Florida has ranked No. 1 in pedestrian fatality rates for the past two years, and No. 1 in bicycle fatality rates for the past six years. No other state comes close to matching this — and not only has Gov. Crist failed to take action to address the epidemic of preventable deaths, FDOT has routinely transferred federal funds intended to make our streets safer for walkers and cyclists to instead be used for road projects.

The following are some of the budget-neutral proposals we would like to see adopted:

- Urge FDOT to aggressively promote “complete streets” as a statewide approach for design and operations of roadways. Streets that are designed, built, operated and maintained for safe and convenient travel for all users (including pedestrians and bicyclists) are safer for everyone.
- Require FDOT to allocate all its federal safety funds for safety improvement projects, and then ensure that pedestrian/bicycle safety improvement projects receive a “fair share” of those funds, using the share of all traffic fatalities that are pedestrians and bicyclists (21 percent).
- Enact the strongest legislation possible to prohibit texting while driving.
- Urge FDOT to issue the long-overdue updated road design standards to reflect the latest guidelines for accommodating bicyclists, pedestrians and transit users.
- Reinststate a state-level Bicycle/Pedestrian Advisory Board that would make recommendations to elected officials and FDOT.
- Encourage another Florida Safety Summit to develop Florida's next five-year plan with goals to reduce traffic pedestrian/bicyclist fatalities by at least 50 percent to bring Florida in line with the national average.

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 the county to be successful it needs support and leadership from the governor and state agencies, since policies for building roadways are directed by the state and many

roadways in our county are state roads.

In these difficult times, Florida must continuously reinvent itself to be economically viable and attractive to future generations. It makes sense that fostering walkable, bikeable, and livable communities is good for our economy, our safety, our environment, and our health. We pay dearly, both in human lives and in lost economic opportunities, for our auto-centric approach to transportation, growth and development.

There is no better time than now to make this paradigm shift. We urge the Lee Legislative Delegation to be leaders in moving Florida in this direction.

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