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BikeWalkLee background paper on mobility fees

In 2009, the Florida Department of Community Affairs published the Florida Mobility Fee Study giving a comprehensive overview of various user fee options and developing the framework for mobility fee scenarios. Concluding that all new impacts from development need to be fully mitigated, the study identified issues to be addressed in any viable transportation funding scenario:

- Adequate overall transportation network funding;
- Reliable funding for transit, including operations;
- Disincentivizing single occupancy vehicle use;
- The need for a balanced revenue plan; and
- Aligning the relationship between transportation and land use planning.

State legislation now allows local governments to choose to do away with concurrency requirements and modify Level of Service (LOS) requirements. The Lee County Comprehensive Plan amendments currently being developed by county staff will propose doing away with transportation concurrency and modifying LOS to be a multi-modal approach. The next step in the process is to change the funding strategy to be consistent with this new approach.

Currently Lee County has a road impact fee that requires new developments to pay a proportionate share of the road infrastructure costs they impose on the community. As the county implements a balanced multi-modal transportation system, consistent with its 2035 New Horizons Plan, the county needs to change its transportation financing system to reflect this new reality. The most effective way to do this is for Lee County to replace its road impact fee with a mobility fee. A mobility fee approach is also consistent with the county's complete streets policy and program; which supports streets that are safe and accessible for all users, and an effective multi-modal transportation system.

A mobility fee is a charge on all new development to provide mitigation for its impact on the transportation system. These fees could fund multi-modal transportation improvements for roadways, transit, bikeway, and pedestrian walkways. This includes capital projects, system efficiency and congestion management improvements /strategies, and transit capital and operating costs.

Mobility fees can serve as an economic driver and growth management tool. This would enhance the ability of the county as expressed in the Lee Plan to protect rural, environmentally sensitive, and agricultural lands. This approach would also encourage infill, redevelopment, and the growth of compact communities.

Pasco and Alachua counties, and Jacksonville, and Destin are implementing Mobility Plans and the accompanying fee strategies. Plans are at different stages of development in the cities of Kissimmee, Orlando, and Sarasota, as well as in Hillsborough and Collier counties. It is to Lee County's benefit that each of these systems implemented or underway differs somewhat in their cost-basis rationale and implementation structures.

As expectations in transportation and community development have changed to reflect economic, social and environmental realities, the development of comprehensive mobility plans along with revised fee and funding structures are critical. Transportation planning and funding systems must address the following:

Equity — All development should pay the full costs of its impacts on the transportation network. New suburban and rural developments consume more in services than they generated in tax revenues. While costs per lane mile of outlying areas may be lower than those in urban areas, distances and disconnections require many more roadway miles and associated long-term maintenance obligations, create an auto-dependent society, and undercut the viability of alternative transportation modes.

Revenue Flexibility — Unlike traditional impact fees, mobility fees offer greater flexibility in supporting multi modal transportation network choices. Mobility fees can provide revenues, both capital and operational, for all modes of transportation--transit, bicycle, pedestrian and automobiles. This is consistent with and supportive of the desired growth and transportation patterns identified in the recent Evaluation Appraisal Report (EAR) and now being incorporated in the Lee Plan update.

Relationship between Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) and Growth Management — Exurban sprawl has led to far more VMT and more lane miles of roadway, while reducing the effective viability of alternative modes of transport. More densely developed areas, by capturing internal trips, generate fewer VMT, creating less congestion. Location, distance and density become variables in a tiered fee system, funding transportation and redirecting growth.

Growth management patterns as delineated in the EAR and incorporated into the Lee Plan, when expressed through mobility fee structures, will encourage development of compact mixed-use centers, infill and redevelopment. The mobility plan and its implementation and fee model should arise from, be reflected in, and support the Lee Plan and the land development codes in a system of comprehensively integrated land-use, economic, and transportation planning.

Transitioning to a mobility fee represents a significant change in transportation funding: A change to funding mobility – increasing accessibility for all citizens – and a move away from the "roads only" funding of the past. In redirecting fund sources to the support of the entire transportation system, Lee County can develop a potent tool in creating the sustainable, livable, economically robust future envisioned in the EAR.

Getting there from here is a several year process involving the various stakeholders. One way to begin the process would be the development of a county-wide mobility plan, the development of a cost basis rationale and fee system, and an implementation plan and schedule to transition from an impact fee to a mobility fee approach. The commitment to move in this direction and the process for moving forward should be incorporated into the appropriate elements of the Lee Plan amendments.