



October 20, 2011

Honorable Ray LaHood
United States Secretary of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, D.C. 20590

RE: Grants for Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recover (TIGER III)
Docket # DOT-OST-2011-0107 (TIGER ID: LeeCountyMPO58257)

Secretary LaHood,

BikeWalkLee is a citizen based community coalition that works to raise public awareness and advocate for complete streets and is dedicated to improving the quality of life and mobility in Lee County. We wholeheartedly endorse the Lee County Metropolitan Planning Organization's (MPO) application for the TIGER III grant to complete an integrated alternative transportation mode network; consistent with the MPO's recently adopted comprehensive bicycle pedestrian master plan.

The proposed project will allow the county to fill gaps in a regional network and link three demonstration projects for which local jurisdictions have committed funds. This project would create a regional connected corridor of biking, walking, and transit facilities that stretch from downtown Fort Myers, through Florida Gulf Coast University, and link to Collier County by transit.

For the past three years, BikeWalkLee has facilitated a broad-based community coalition that has been energized by the work of the MPO, Lee and Collier County Commissioners, and their local jurisdictions. Our local leaders have adopted complete streets polices, required accommodation of bike/ped/transit in all road projects, incorporated complete streets and sustainability into land use planning, and adopted a comprehensive bicycle pedestrian master plan. This has put our county on a new trajectory aimed at promoting livable/sustainable communities. County officials also leveraged their ARRA fund as well as the annual Florida Department of Transportation work plan to increase investments in alternative transportation modes. These efforts have received national, state, and regional recognition and awards. The county has demonstrated its commitment to a balanced multi-modal transportation system and is committed to using a TIGER III grant to accelerate the process of connecting the existing facilities and making them into a world-class bike/pedestrian network.

This integrated alternative transportation network, connecting our geographically large county (1,212 square miles), will serve several critical needs for the region:

- Safety—Florida is the most dangerous state in the country for both pedestrians and cyclists and Lee County's safety record is below the State average. Connecting our bike/ped network will make it safer for walkers and cyclists. Improving safety will also encourage more people to bike and walk.
- Health—in Lee County 64% of adults and 32% of children are overweight or obese. A connected system will promote a more active lifestyle that combats obesity.
- Mobility for seniors—over 22% of Lee County's population is age 65 and over. Providing a connected and safe alternative transportation system will increase the independence of seniors, saving government long-term care costs.
- Family economics—with one of the highest unemployment and foreclosure rates in the nation, Lee County families have been hard hit. These families need to be able to make safe and accessible transportation choices, such as bicycling, walking, and transit that can help them live within their means. In Fort Myers, 18% of households don't own cars, so walking, biking and transit are a necessity.
- Local economic benefits—one of Lee County's biggest industries is tourism. Having a safe and connected bike/ped network will allow us to develop an eco-tourism focus, bringing much needed revenues to small businesses and the tourism industry. One of the Master Plan demonstration projects, the Lakes Park Loop, is aimed at promoting tourism, especially for families.
- Job creation—investments in bike/ped projects generate twice as many jobs per construction dollar as roadway construction; thus, this \$10 million investment would provide cost-effective investments in job creation that can lower Lee County's high unemployment rate.
- Leverage higher education—investments and partnerships with higher education can reinforce a student and faculty culture of environmental, economic, and social sustainability that will be vital to our national success.

BikeWalkLee urges you approve this request for the reasons stated above. Our community has adopted the policy framework to transform our community and move it into a sustainable future. We have the plan—we need financial assistance from our federal partners to create a visible change quickly that can showcase the benefits of an integrated alternative transportation network. This project has the potential to be a game-changer for our region and serve as a model throughout Florida.

Sincerely,



Darla Letourneau

Of behalf of BikeWalkLee