



November 12, 2013

Members of Lee County Legislative Delegation:

BikeWalkLee, a coalition working to complete Lee County's streets, is active in policy change that enhances the safety and usability of our roadways. The purpose of this letter is to highlight important priorities that we hope the delegation will support in the upcoming legislative session: 1) focused strategies that enhance economic development through bike tourism, 2) state level support for a robust public transit system, and 3) SB 322 that would strengthen enforcement of the texting ban enacted last year.

First, BikeWalkLee wishes to thank the Lee Legislative Delegation for its support in championing the Lee MPO complete streets initiative TIGER grant application. One of the keys to the county's success in winning this \$10.4 million federal grant was the community's broad-based support for this project, as evidenced by the 55 letters of support for the grant application from a wide variety of agencies, organizations, and businesses, including letters from almost all of the Lee Legislative delegation. Winning this grant demonstrates the success and rewards that can come from doing business in a new way--collaboration and teamwork across jurisdictions, agencies, organizations, disciplines, private-public sector partnerships, addressing problems in a holistic way, and truly engaging citizens in shaping their communities.

This grant puts us on the national stage and creates the potential for further transforming our community and making it economically strong. The key challenge is to use this success to leverage future action to increase economic development and improve the safety of our roadways for pedestrians and cyclists.

The TIGER grant sets the stage for enhanced economic benefits from bike tourism, which is big business both nationally and globally. States and communities across the country are racing to gain a competitive advantage to capture a share of this growing lucrative niche market. With Florida's temperate winters and flat terrain, the potential for destination bike tourism is an economic development strategy for Florida with an enormous potential for high returns on our investment. For example, the Outer Banks of North Carolina realizes a \$60-70 million economic benefits each year from a one-time investment of \$6.7 million in a 100 mile-long system of bike trails. Similar returns on investments have been documented in states such as Wisconsin, Maine, and Minnesota.

Having a safe and connected countywide biking and walking network will allow Lee County to promote bike tourism, bringing much needed revenues to small businesses and the tourism industry. Biking is increasingly popular among our visitors, with 18% reporting that they biked while they were here in 2012 (up from 12% in 2011).

Specifically, the Lee delegation can support such legislation as last year's \$50 million for the "Coast to Coast Connector" trail, to complete a 275-mile trail from Cape Canaveral National Seashore to St. Petersburg. Although the bill was vetoed by the Governor, this project will be back to the Florida Legislature again this year. We urge you to support these efforts to grow Florida's economy through a focused strategy on bike tourism, especially attractive for international travelers and a younger demographic. This is the wave of the future and the economic benefits for Florida are enormous.

Second, the TIGER grant provides unique opportunities to leverage further investments in a multi-modal transportation system. LeeTran's success is a vital part of this area's growing reputation as one that is on a clear path to a more sustainable, livable, high-quality of life. However, lack of adequate operating funds for transit services is putting SWFL at great risk of being left behind economically. Investments in transit are not just about mobility connections for residents and workers--they're about the larger economic impact. Companies and their workers want to locate in places with a vibrant public transportation system and regions without them will be left behind. We need our leaders at both the state and local levels to focus now on how to not only maintain the transit system we have, but how to grow it into a more robust system.

Finally, the TIGER grant is an investment in making our community safer for biking and walking. Lee County's traffic safety record for bicyclists and pedestrians is one of the worst in the state, and is twice the national average. The county, working with FDOT and all the local partners, is committed to reducing these numbers. Florida is consistently ranked the most dangerous state in the country for pedestrians and cyclists; therefore, it is critical that Governor Scott and the Florida Legislature make roadway safety the top transportation priority, with a goal of greatly reducing bike/ped fatalities.

Consistent with an emphasis on safety, BikeWalkLee would like to thank the Lee delegation for supporting last year's successful efforts to ban texting while driving. This legislation was only a first step and needs to be strengthened. We urge you to support SB 322, which would remove provisions that limit enforcement of the texting ban and make it a primary offense.

We look forward to continuing to work with you on these issues.

/s/

Darla Letourneau
on behalf of BikeWalkLee

cc: County Commissioners