

## Transportation

South Florida Sun-Sentinel Editorial Board

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ISSUE: Group unveils long-range plan.

When people have a chance to directly shape their own future, they should seize it with both hands. If county leaders are wise, Broward County voters will have such an opportunity this November.

What's at stake is nothing less than the county's future mobility and standard of living. Without a serious investment in a better transportation system, the economy will stagnate, affordable housing will become more scarce, and daylong traffic gridlock will become a nightmarish reality.

Seeking to avoid that kind of future, a group of citizens has produced a comprehensive, highly specific and detailed plan to enhance mobility in the years to come. People for Progress deserves the support of all county residents and public officials.

The plan is nonpartisan and apolitical, as it should be. The goal is to have a comprehensive and reliable transportation system by the year 2030, when the county's population is expected to be 50 percent larger than it is now. Unsustainable gridlock is inevitable if steps are not taken now to avert it.

And so, the group is proposing a 1-cent increase in the local sales tax so the county and its cities can fund their transportation needs. The emphasis is on mass transit, but roadway improvements also are included. The Broward County Metropolitan Planning Organization has signed off on the plan. If the County Commission agrees, as it should, the issue will be on the ballot for voters to decide in November.

### **Tax would leverage `matching' funds**

The sales tax is expected to raise \$260 million in the first year and more in future years. More importantly, that sum could be used to leverage state and federal "matching" funds that would significantly increase the amount of money available for transportation improvements in the county. But matching funds are not provided to communities that do not have a local dedicated funding source. The sales tax would be that source.

Of the \$260 million, 10 percent, or \$26 million, would go directly to Broward's cities, which would receive extensive and specific benefits, including a doubling of funding for community bus service. Another 10 percent would be used for improvements that would directly and immediately benefit everyone, such as countywide synchronization of traffic signals and improvements to bus stops and passenger amenities.

Eventually the system would comprise heavy rail, light rail, express buses, bus rapid transit and improved local bus service. There would be east-west routes to provide crucial linkages to major north-south corridors, linkages that do not exist now.

The mobility advantages of the plan are obvious. Less obvious, but equally important, are the economic, environmental and national security benefits.

<http://www.sun-sentinel.com/news/opinion/editorial/sfl-editttransitmay18,0,5373429,print.story?coll=sf...> 5/23/2006



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The increase in the sales tax would cost the average county resident an estimated \$45 a year -- less than the increase in the price of gasoline for most people and a pittance compared with the benefits, including saving the average resident \$450 a year, the estimated current cost of gridlock. The group's analysis also shows that for every \$1 invested in better transportation, \$6 is returned to the community. For every billion dollars, 47,000 jobs are created. And this is a \$12.6 billion plan.

### **Benefits to environment as well**

The environmental benefits also would be enormous. The group says that for every passenger mile traveled, mass transit emits only 5 percent as much carbon monoxide as automobiles and less than half as much of the carbon dioxide and nitrogen oxides that contribute to global warming.

Mile for mile, mass transit uses half the fuel that cars do. If Americans used transit for only 10 percent of their travel needs, the nation could reduce its dependence on foreign oil by more than 40 percent, a major national security benefit.

If you're concerned the sales tax money would be squandered or used for other purposes, don't be. Revenue collected would go into a separate Transit and Transportation Trust Account overseen and managed by an Independent Citizens' Oversight Committee. Annual audits would be conducted.

There are two reasons it's crucial this proposal be on the ballot in November. First, the next federal transportation funding cycle is to begin in 2010, with applications due before 2008. Failure to submit projects for funding now would force the county to wait until the next cycle begins in 2016.

Second, efforts are under way to increase zoning densities along the county's major transportation corridors, such as State Road 7 and the Florida East Coast rail corridor, which officials hope to acquire for passenger service. Higher densities will increase the available stock of affordable housing, but will be counterproductive in terms of mobility if they are not accompanied by easy access to mass transit. Proximity to mass transit also increases property values.

South Florida's transportation problem is not limited to Broward County. A comprehensive, seamless regional transit system is needed. Adoption of this plan would put Broward on the path to fully participating in such a system.

People for Progress has not operated in a vacuum. It has had substantial input from the community and experts in the field of transportation. Its plan is well conceived and highly doable if the money is there. All that's needed is a recognition by public officials and the public at large that the county cannot hope to have a prosperous future without investing in a vastly improved transportation system.

**BOTTOM LINE:** The plan is essential to the county's future mobility and prosperity.

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