

Gridlock Alert



Will Local Politicians Allow Congestion?

Aggravated by traffic congestion?

Of course you are.

Traffic congestion pollutes the air and bay, harms commerce and tourism, increases accidents and road rage, creates stress, wastes expensive gas, delays ambulances, reduces family time, diverts traffic through neighborhoods and degrades our quality of life.

Well then, see if you're aggravated by this.

The Sarasota County Commission is about to repeal all limits and controls on traffic by developers. They say we should embrace traffic congestion, and rely on buses (which get caught

in traffic too) and on walking and bicycles to get anywhere we need to go.

This insanity started with a 2009 law pushed through by then State Senator Mike Bennett of Bradenton, himself a developer. That legislation repealed the state growth management law which prohibited developers from overcrowding our roads and now leaves it up to City and County Commissioners whether to allow developers to create intolerable traffic congestion.

The law at issue is called "concurrency". It stated that a developer cannot add more traffic than a road can handle "concurrent" with, that is at the same time as, the development's traffic impact. Concurrency has been called the "linchpin" of the state's growth management laws — you pull out a linchpin and the whole thing falls apart.

At a June 16, 2009 forum on his repeal of mandatory concurrency, Senator Bennett was blunt in stating that his concern was for his fellow developers, not for citizens who are stuck in traffic congestion when developers are allowed to overcrowd the roads. "I don't like the term 'growth management'", he said, "because it suggests that we have a problem, let's deal with it. I prefer the term growth planning." He

complained about “overregulation” of developers and said, “I just have a difficult time telling a developer or builder what he can do with his land.”

Then, Bennett followed up by even limiting the concurrency local governments can have by allowing them to make a developer pay only for its “proportionate” share of a road improvement required by the development rather than the full cost, and restricting the ability to impose concurrency on a road that is already overcrowded.

Amazingly, the Sarasota County Commission is about to repeal what is left of concurrency and embrace traffic congestion, as Bennett’s law encourages.

No longer would developers be required to produce reports of the traffic their developments would generate.

No longer would developers be required to pay their proportionate share of the cost of road improvements identified in such reports as needed to handle the development’s traffic.

Instead, all the developers would have to do is pay a “Mobility Fee” for buses, sidewalks, bike trails and roads. And here’s the real kicker: the Mobility Fee would be far lower than the impact fee the County adopted before it slashed it 50%, at least west and north of the Interstate. Charges to developers need to be kept low, County Commissioner Caragiulo has said, in order to “incentivize” development.

County staff said, in a February, 2015 report, that under its scheme, “mobility will be provided through a multi-modal transportation network .. focused on bicycle, pedestrian and transit [bus] mobility ...”.

This irresponsible illusion that vehicular mobility can be abandoned because we can somehow walk and bike wherever we need to go

and can all get there in buses — ignoring the fact that buses get caught in traffic too — is nothing more than an outrageous excuse to let the developers who bankroll the Commissioners overcrowd our roads.

One of the first Sarasota County leaders to take up this call for traffic congestion was then County Administrator Jim Ley, who was recruited here by development interests when he was the deputy administrator of the fastest growing county in the country, in Las Vegas.

At a meeting of the Tiger Bay Club, when he was asked by the moderator how he responds to citizens upset by traffic congestion and taxpayer subsidies of developers, Ley responded, “Traffic and subsidies are selfish words that have no place in the planning for our future.” At another Tiger Bay meeting, he stated that traffic congestion is not caused by local officials who fail to put adequate limits on developers but instead by citizens who drive too much in cars rather than taking the bus.



Current County Commissioner Charles Hines likes that theme too, regularly asking audiences how many people came to the meeting by bus or by walking, as if to shame them if they did not. He once privately stated that traffic congestion is good because it will encourage people to take the bus.

One of the slogans that the pro-congestion crazies like is, to quote former County Commissioner Joe Barbetta, “We need to create places for people not cars.” As if people don’t drive cars. And as if walking and biking is a real substitute for driving on most trips and as if

buses don't get caught in traffic too.



And sometimes County officials suggest making roads bus-only, as was once proposed for two lanes of Bee Ridge Road. This of course makes no sense, as it is impossible to run buses frequently enough to make up for the capacity lost by barring other vehicles, and it makes their congestion even worse. The City Council of New Delhi, India tried that but people became outraged when they looked over at almost-empty bus lanes (as shown in the photo below) while caught in gridlock for miles. Some County officials argue that we need to lift limits on development east and north of the Interstate, and accept the consequent traffic



gridlock, in order to discourage urban sprawl. The emptiness of that message became evident, however, when those same officials encouraged urban sprawl by gutting the Sarasota 2050 Plan.

And we don't need to further lift limits on development anywhere in Sarasota County because current plans allow for enough develop-

ment to accommodate decades of projected growth without making any further changes, such as weakening limits on traffic congestion.

The fact is the developers and their politicians want overgrowth everywhere. And we need not tolerate it anywhere.

The threat of repealing concurrency has also been raised in the City of Sarasota, where it has been pushed for years by City staff. Fortunately, present City Commissioners seem to have better judgment than to do that. There is still a City web site, though, promoting the so-called Mobility Plan, with their slogan, "Let's Get Moving", with speed lines racing off the words. Speed lines. Even though they propose to slow traffic down. The attempt to deceive the public into somehow thinking that allowing developers to destroy mobility will instead enhance mobility is an offense perhaps even greater than the irresponsible policy proposal itself. It is the New Speak of George Orwell's "1984": "war is peace, freedom is slavery". And they are telling us, gridlock is speed.

Traffic congestion is a serious threat to our quality of life and can kill the goose that lays the golden eggs. We all need to be involved and speak up against this crazy scheme.

STAND UP
SPEAK OUT

CONTROL
GROWTH
NOW