

## The answer to traffic isn't more roads



By Jim Croteau  
MY VIEW

TallahasseeVoices recently surveyed the community regarding concerns about quality of life. At the top of the list were issues related to traffic, the bane of anyone who lives, works or goes to school in Leon County.

The 21st Century Council Quality of Life Report has data that support the concerns from the TallahasseeVoices survey. Road congestion, drive time, lack of use of public transportation, traffic accidents - all are persistent problems

A "State of the Community" focus group discussion a few weeks ago, sponsored by Kerr & Downs Research, the 21st Century Council and the Slevin Group, highlighted the frustrations that ordinary citizens feel. The group discussed the many problems and possible solutions, including better public transportation, stricter traffic enforcement and improved signal timing. One of the biggest concerns that they and others in the community have is that they are not sure anyone in city and county government shares the same sense of urgency.

It appears that many elected officials have put most of their eggs in the Blueprint 2000 basket, intent on building our way out of the problem with greater road capacity. No doubt better roads, such as a real Capital Circle, are needed. Regretfully, experience has shown that ballooning costs and inevitable delays make new roads difficult to build and often result in more, not fewer, car trips.

Other communities have faced the same issues. Perhaps we can encourage our local officials to look at some solutions they have identified. One such place, Victoria, B.C., is not much bigger than we are and had these strategies in its transportation master plan:

Support employers who allow significant flex time to shift employee travel away from peak hours.

Encourage employers to permit telecommuting at least one day a week or schedule some staff on a work week of four 10-hour days.

Improve transit and rideshare programs along corridors with traffic congestion. People want direct lines from neighborhoods to work, rather than spokes and transfer hubs, and they want rides that are frequent, fast, comfortable, convenient and affordable.

Develop parking management and pricing strategies that discourage single-person cars and peak-time parking.

Carefully use traffic calming (not speed bumps!), roundabouts, and enforced speed-limit reductions. These have actually increased traffic flow and reduced congestion.

Establish car-free or vehicle-restricted zones, especially during peak hours.

Make key intersection improvements which, when coupled with signal synchronization, can reduce delays more quickly and cheaply than by adding road capacity.

Use video surveillance and other traffic communication devices for incident detection and management to bring signal adjustments, accident responders and traffic controllers to the scene.

Increase motorist information systems that use a variety of real-time media options.

Require developments to use smart-growth strategies such as increased density, greater street connectivity, more pedestrian- and bike-friendly features, shorter access to services and public transit facilitation (turnarounds, loading zones, shared parking).

We recognize that city and county transportation and planning staff are attempting to work with several of these strategies. However, unless our decision-makers change from a capacity expansion to a demand management approach, we will never reach a cost-effective solution to Tallahassee's traffic congestion in the foreseeable future.

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