



Sarasota/Manatee Metropolitan Planning Organization

7632 15th Street East
Sarasota, Florida 34243-3248

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen of the Board:

Re: June 25th MPO Board meeting agenda item VII 1. LRTP Amendment

According to the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)'s Long Range Transportation Plan, a considerable emphasis is placed on *“achieving and sustaining a safe and effective multimodal transportation network that strengthens the economy, improves long-term community livability, reduces energy demand and its effect on climate change, and supports wise land-use decisions and redevelopment in appropriate areas.”* Based on that vision, we are concerned with the proposal to transfer funds designated for multimodal improvements to the US 41 corridor for widening Venice Bypass—a project that does little to achieve the visionary goal of a safe and effective multimodal transportation network. MPO Board members should not approve the transfer of funds unless all of the transferred funds are used only for significant multimodal treatments. This includes using the proposed third lane for bus pullouts and establishing designated right turns rather than a thru lane.

The southern segment of the Bypass is about 1.5 miles in length. It has no bus pullouts or crossings, and there are no calls for such included in the project design. The current design for the Bypass could easily include real multimodal amenities by simply using the proposed third lane for bus pull outs and designated right turns instead of as a thru lane where buses will be forced to make stops within an active traffic lane. Safety crossings could be easily included in the design as well, which currently makes no improvement over existing conditions for pedestrians and bus riders who must cross this road every day. There are two major residential neighborhoods along this stretch and a significant number of bus riders that will suffer from the increased likelihood of crashes and fatalities as a result of adding a third lane. The design also needs to include low maintenance shade trees in the medians and along sidewalks to help lower the heat index, encourage people to walk, and calm traffic.

Safety is a primary concern for transportation planning and this should always include taking into consideration those who do not travel by automobile. Time and again Florida is ranked the

most dangerous place to walk or ride a bike, and more than half of pedestrian fatalities occur in multilane roads that are designed to accommodate a high volume of traffic. These troubling facts fall heavily on the decisions made by local transportation planners. However, by following multimodal principles in the planning process, the MPO Board has a real opportunity to contribute to the safety and overall quality of life for residents of Southwest Florida.

In addition to safety considerations, the Board must also recognize the impact of induced traffic that often occurs with widening existing roads. Unless the volume of traffic on our roads is significantly reduced, we will continue to exacerbate air pollution that plagues our community. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, Sarasota County suffers from unhealthy levels of ground-level ozone for several days per year. This ground-level ozone is caused by tail-pipe emissions and has been made worse by our congested roads and poor transportation infrastructure.

Every effort should be made on behalf of the Manatee/Sarasota MPO to adhere to the strategic vision adopted in the Long Range Transportation Plan that represents our region's desire to grow safer, healthier, and more economically competitive. Diverting funds designated for the multimodal improvements of the US 41 corridor to widening projects is contradictory to this vision—unless those funds are specifically utilized for balancing the competing needs of all users.

On behalf of our members and supporters, we urge the board to support the development of safe and efficient transportation alternatives, and to use designated multimodal funds purposefully.

Respectfully,

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