

Editorial: Reconnecting Lee encourages us to dream

EDITORIAL • SEPTEMBER 5, 2009

This recession, as painful as it is, provides our community an opportunity to create a new vision for how we grow and prosper. The boom years added to sprawl. The post-boom years must be a time for smarter thinking and, yes, smarter growth.

The way we travel needs to change - fewer cars on the road and more emphasis on public transportation. More buses and even light rail should be on our agenda over the next 20 years as we grow from a county of 600,000 residents to one of possibly 1.2 million.

Imagine being able to go to the beach, the airport, the mall or the movies without having to drive or having to depend on someone to drive you. This vision is shared by a group of local volunteers, including elected officials and planners, who have started Reconnecting Lee County.

The purpose is to encourage the debate of a paradigm shift to a more walkable and connected community.

Ideas include creating a rail system that would connect this county like never before. The Metropolitan Planning Organization of Lee County has agreed unanimously to apply for a federal stimulus grant for a rail project.

County Commissioner Brian Bigelow, a group founder, said that among the issues he had run on in 2006 was smarter growth management. "We have an opportunity to do something differently," he said. "The goal is to start the public debate and to steer us away from becoming the east coast."

These efforts should be lauded and supported, and we should debate the pros and cons and the costs, too.