



August 2, 2009

Commission Chairman Ray Judah
District Three, Lee County Board of County Commissioners
P. O. Box 398
Fort Myers, FL 33902-0398

Re. Endorsement of Rail Focus for TIGER Application by MPO

Dear Commissioner Judah:

Reconnecting Lee County (RLC) is an informal association that provides a forum for community leaders from many backgrounds to think creatively about new approaches to land use and transportation that stimulate economic development, protect the environment and broaden the quality of life.

RLC endorses the Lee MPO submission of a TIGER grant application that focuses on the acquisition and immediate improvements to future public rail corridor. This project includes immediate rail infrastructure improvements to commence upon public acquisition by purchase from CSX Transportation, Inc. (formerly the Seaboard Coast Line Railroad Company) of the rail corridor which it currently leases to Seminole Gulf Railway Limited Partnership.

The CSX rail corridor runs north-south, effectively bisecting Lee County. Its route through the urban core of Lee County conveniently connects downtown Ft. Myers to Bonita Springs and all points between. These include, among other properties, a major hospital facility, major commercial and employment centers, and Florida Gulf Coast University. Public acquisition of the CSX corridor will serve several critical purposes:

- Keep the rail corridor available for freight service (now very limited and restricted to 10 mph due to poor track condition.)
- Enable a light rail corridor that would be the backbone for a new multimodal public transit service to serve Cape Coral, Lehigh, Ft. Myers, Bonita and all of Lee County.
- Allow future passenger service between Southwest Florida and the rest of the nation.
- Minimize recurring, costly conflicts with state and local transportation agencies where roads cross the tracks.
- Enable a focal point for economic development in key nodes near this right-of-way in order to develop an option of walkable, mixed use, and more urban communities.

TIGER is a 100% federally funded innovative competitive transportation grant program awarded directly by the U.S. Secretary of Transportation's office in Washington D.C. Its objective is to foster development of transportation infrastructure for long-term economic recovery. Grants are to be directed toward areas most affected by the current economic downturn. Criteria for award include projects that reduce the carbon footprint and reduce reliance on foreign oil. Criteria also encourage the kind of government collaboration that the Lee MPO provides. It encourages

projects that link land use and transportation through emphasis on complete streets and “livable” communities. These funds are separate from the usual road and transit funding processes. We are one of the metropolitan areas in the U.S. most severely affected by the economic downturn, and an area with a very high carbon footprint.

This can be a first step for protecting our quality of life as Lee County adds a projected 600,000 more people. Imagine roads with that many more cars, the increase in taxes, impact fees, tolls and the cost of doing business just to pay for all those roads. Imagine the destruction that so many new roads will cause to the natural environment. Imagine a quality of life harmed each day by excess pollution and traffic congestion. *Reconnecting Lee County* encourages this focus for a collaborative Lee MPO TIGER application.

Sincerely,

MerriBeth Farnham

On behalf of: Reconnecting Lee County