

T R A N S F O R M I N G   L O C A L  
G O V E R N M E N T

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## THE ALACHUA COUNTY MOBILITY PLAN



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# The Alachua County Mobility Plan

## Executive Summary

On January 26th, 2010 The Alachua County Board of County Commissioners formally adopted a number of revisions to the County's Comprehensive Plan which had become known as "The Alachua County Mobility Plan". This action was the culmination of 3 years of planning by Alachua County Staff that included meetings with citizens, numerous community groups, the private development community and partnering state agencies. This process brought together the community's vision for linking land use and transportation in ways that hadn't been previously realized. This innovative plan provided a mechanism whereby developments that met the community's vision for a denser, mixed-use, transit supportive land use pattern could proceed quickly through the development review process, with much more certainty and significantly lower transportation mitigation requirements than what had been provided for under the previous incarnations of the County's Comprehensive Plan and land development regulations. Further, the Mobility Plan provided a long range transportation and funding plan for rapid transit on dedicated lanes linking compact, mixed-use developments, known as Transit Oriented Developments (TODs) and Traditional Neighborhood Developments (TNDs) with regional employment, education and entertainment destinations. In this way the County's land use decisions and capital infrastructure investments could be more effectively linked to promote a sustainable, fiscally responsible community focused on maintaining a high quality of life.



Tioga Town Center: A Local TND



Bus Rapid Transit: Eugene, OR



A mockup of the likely TND design based on The Mobility Plan

## Community Background

Alachua County is an inland County with a population of approximately 250,000 located in North Central Florida. The County seat is Gainesville which is home to the University of Florida, the State's land grant university with over 50,000 students. The Alachua County Board of

County Commissioners is responsible for the land use, zoning and transportation planning in the unincorporated area outside of the City of Gainesville and the other eight smaller municipalities. The portion of the unincorporated area which surrounds the Gainesville Urban Area is termed the “Urban Cluster”. This area is delineated by an urban growth boundary which has been in effect since 1991. This area has developed over the last 25 years in the typical suburban pattern of single family subdivisions isolated from auto-oriented shopping centers.

As this development pattern has proliferated the County has been in a position familiar to suburban communities throughout the country. Separated low density single use developments in the rings surrounding the major activity and employment center of the community has led to increased traffic congestion and the fiscal demands associated the continued need for additional transportation infrastructure.

### **The Concurrency Conundrum**

The State of Florida enacted landmark legislation for state oversight of growth management in 1985. The hallmark of that legislation was the provision requiring that adequate public facilities be in place concurrent with impacts of new development. This provision became known as “concurrency” and has had its most consequential impacts on the planning and funding of transportation infrastructure. Unfortunately, the land use pattern that has developed due to this policy has been detrimental ecologically, socially and fiscally in many communities. As roadway capacity became scarce due to new growth; development continued to move farther from central cities where roadway capacity was available. Additionally, concurrency was traditionally only focussed on roadways and the auto mode of transportation. The cycle that developed over time was traffic produced by new growth would lead to local governments widening a roadway; the wider roadway would allow for more development to be approved, and the traffic would once again fill the roadway. This pattern has effectively meant that traditional concurrency had exacerbated the very urban sprawl that the original growth management legislation was designed to prevent.

Alachua County found itself dealing with this issue in early 2006 as some of the major roadways leading through the County into the City of Gainesville started to fail due to increases in traffic and reserved traffic capacity from approved development. Adhering to the existing state law, the County was then not able to approve any new development along those corridors. One wrinkle in the concurrency statutes was the allowance for new development to be approved if the developer paid a “proportionate fair-share” of the costs to improve the transportation system. Since under the status quo these payments were primarily based on the cost of 6 laning



many existing constrained 4 lane corridors, the cost was extremely high and simply made many new development projects financially infeasible. The County Commission tasked staff with developing a transportation plan that would help to mitigate these issues. Although concurrency requires a local government to stop approving new development, there is a finite amount of time the local government has to address the infrastructure backlog before property owners with appropriate zoning in place begin to claim that the local government's inability to deal with the issue their private property rights.



Bicycle and Pedestrian Infrastructure is key to the Mobility Plan



TOD: Fruitvale, CA



Transit Riders: Eugene, OR

## The Mobility Plan

After having numerous additional community and commission meetings on the subject, staff quickly realized that while originally tasked with an updated transportation plan, what was really being called for was a major update of the County's Comprehensive Plan and land development regulations. This update would impact everything from zoning to capital improvements funding. Staff developed an innovative plan that coordinated a new multimodal transportation system including a novel bus rapid transit system with changes to land use regulations that it made it much simpler for developer's to receive approval for compact, mixed-use transit supportive developments.

## How to get "Smart" about Growth: Traditional Neighborhood Developments (TND) and Transit Oriented Developments (TOD)

The Mobility Plan consists of several very important aspects related to promoting TND and TOD types of development (otherwise known as "Smart Growth" or "New Urbanism"). These types of development are very much in line with the environmental conservation policies that were already in the comprehensive plan. Higher density development allows for the same amount of development to be spread over a much smaller land area so that more environmentally sensitive areas may be set aside without as much impact to the property owner's bottom

line. Additionally, it is these type developments that have a higher gross dwelling unit density and are designed to be walkable and bikeable and are supportive of the public transit components that are a hallmark of the Mobility Plan.

In addition to the environmental benefits of the plan, the plan created several incentives for TNDs and TODs that confirmed their status as the preferred future development type within the County. The largest of these incentives was removing the concurrency test from developments that were within the County's urban growth boundary. Concurrency would instead be met by paying a one time "multimodal transportation mitigation" payment and the payment would be reduced for TND and TOD projects over their single use counterparts due to their reduced impact on the transportation system. Additionally, allowing additional office, civic, and retail development in areas where non-residential development had been previously excluded as an element of a mixed-use project was a huge incentive to potential developers. Another innovative approach that was included as an incentive in the Plan, was to not require special approvals including future land use amendments and rezoning if a project was proposed as a TND or TOD. This essentially cut up to two years from the County's development review process and was seen as a major incentive to promoting these types of projects. The creative approach to provide incentives for these types of developments, which benefit the environment, reduce fiscal impacts to the County, increase physical and social activity for their residents, was an innovative way to encourage various segments of the community, from home builders to environmentalists, to support the plan.

### **"Like Rail Transit": Getting the community behind a new transportation mode**

A common theme that was expressed during the community meetings that led to the development of the Mobility Plan was that everyone dislikes being stuck in traffic and few people thought a roadway only transportation plan was the answer to the County's transportation challenges. Staff reviewed multiple alternatives for mixes of transportation infrastructure and arrived at a plan that would provide parallel roadway capacity to congested corridors, multi-use bicycle and pedestrian paths, in-street bicycle lanes and a system of dedicated transit corridors as the backbone of a bus rapid transit system. Bus Rapid Transit has many of the advantages of a light rail system such as dedicated lanes, significant stations, off-board fare collection and signal priority amongst others. These amenities provide significant advantages over a traditional bus system to the point that many advocates label the systems, "Like Rail Transit". Including this transit component was both crucial to get the buy-in from the local community and the state oversight department who would have to eventually approve the plan. The transit component is also key in making the more dense TND and TOD types of development project

marketable to retiring baby-boomers looking for urban amenities, Generation X looking to raise their kids in an urban environment, and the Millennials who are now entering the workforce and looking to purchase their first residence.

### **Funding: Where the rubber hits the road**

As mentioned previously, the main identified funding source for the Mobility Plan is the Multimodal Transportation Mitigation (MMTM) program. This program replaces transportation impact fees and proportionate fair share for projects that have yet to be approved by the County or granted a concurrency certificate. This is an extremely innovative program that offers a one time payment to mitigate a new development's transportation impact. While never entirely excited about new fees, the development community has supported the approach due to the fact that this program replaces the highly unpredictable proportionate fair share program,. Subsequent to the adoption of the Mobility Plan staff has also introduced the County Commission to the idea of using a portion of new general tax revenue from new TODs, which produce extremely high ad valorem revenue per acre over stand alone projects, to guarantee frequent transit service into the future.

### **Innovate or get left behind**

Adoption of The Mobility Plan by Alachua County was an extremely innovative step that involved the utmost cooperation between the public and private sectors. This cooperation was born from the understanding that without moving in a proactive and progressive manner, that the County was going to be left behind other like sized communities that are striving to provide a high quality of life in a fiscally constrained climate. The land use changes approved by the Board have already begun to take fruit in the one year since they've been adopted. Alachua County have now approved Preliminary Development Plans for one TOD and four other large projects have been working with Staff to develop their TOD plans and should be submitting in the very near future. Several of these developments had been previously contemplated as stand alone, suburban projects but due to the push from the County and the emerging market segments for more walkable urban living, they are going to be willing partners in creating the multimodal and mixed-use community that will position the County to be an attractive place to live, work and play for many years to come.