

Transportation Element

GOALS - OBJECTIVES - POLICIES

Based on the analysis of transportation issues in this element, the following goals, objectives, and policies are adopted into the Fort Myers Beach Comprehensive Plan:

GOAL 7: To improve peak-season mobility without reducing the permeability of Estero Boulevard to foot traffic or damaging the small-town character of Fort Myers Beach. The town seeks to reduce speeding, improve evacuation capabilities, and improve mobility through balanced transportation improvements such as a continuous system of sidewalks and bikeways, a network of trolleys and water taxis linked to off-island systems, and parking options matched to road capacity.

OBJECTIVE 7-A DEFINING THE PROBLEMS — Through this plan, the Town of Fort Myers Beach will address its three major transportation problems: congestion (by supporting public transit and pedestrian improvements), parking (by improving public parking near Times Square), and speeding (through passive traffic calming on Estero Boulevard).

POLICY 7-A-1 CONGESTION: Every winter, Estero Boulevard becomes so crowded that traffic backs up, sometimes for miles in both directions. Much of this congestion is caused by visitors, who will continue to frequent the beaches regardless of development levels on Estero Island. Despite the road congestion, the town welcomes visitors and intends to provide mobility alternatives as described in this plan.

POLICY 7-A-2 PARKING: Even though existing parking lots are not used to capacity, parking is not abundant at Fort Myers Beach. The welcome rebirth of commercial activity near Times Square will increase the demand for

parking. The Town of Fort Myers Beach will address parking shortages through the methods outlined in this plan.

POLICY 7-A-3 SPEEDING: Despite the virtual crawl of traffic on parts of Estero Boulevard, speeding is also a problem. If motorists didn't speed on Estero Boulevard, many more people would get out of their own cars. The town will protect the pedestrian environment along Estero Boulevard and will not widen travel lanes or discourage safe pedestrian movement across the boulevard.

OBJECTIVE 7-B CONVENTIONAL SOLUTIONS — The usual response to traffic congestion is widening roads or building alternate routes. Estero Island's long narrow shape, frequent navigable canals, sensitive environmental, and highly urbanized character preclude these solutions. Congestion management at Fort Myers Beach must aim to *reduce delay* and *improve safety*, not just for motorists but for pedestrians and bicyclists as well.

POLICY 7-B-1 DELAY AND SAFETY: The town recognizes that many efforts to reduce delay and improve safety for motorists have the opposite effect on pedestrians. Creative solutions will be required to address both concerns.

POLICY 7-B-2 WIDENING: Under no circumstances shall conventional four-laning of Estero Boulevard be considered as a desirable means of improving traffic circulation on Estero Island.

POLICY 7-B-3 IMPROVEMENTS TO ESTERO BOULEVARD: The Town of Fort Myers Beach shall initiate additional pedestrian and streetscape improvements along Estero Boulevard beginning in 1999, and shall negotiate with Lee County for the turnover of responsibility for its maintenance if necessary to carry out these improvements or to further other town policies.

OBJECTIVE 7-C EVACUATION ROUTE — Estero Boulevard's critical function as the sole evacuation route for Fort Myers Beach shall be considered in all planning and development activities.

POLICY 7-C-1 EVACUATION CAPACITY: Evacuation routes do not need to be designed as high-speed roadways. The critical factor is the total number of cars that can evacuate in a given period of time. The town shall evaluate all efforts by Lee County or by the town to reduce speeding on Estero Boulevard during the design phase to ensure that these efforts will not hinder an effective evacuation.

POLICY 7-C-2 FLOODING: The town shall analyze actual flooding of evacuation routes that occurs due to tropical storms or hurricanes, and shall initiate physical improvements that can avoid future flooding at those locations.

OBJECTIVE 7-D VARIETY OF TRAVEL MODES — The Town of Fort Myers Beach shall make efforts every year to improve mobility for its residents and visitors, striving for a balanced transportation system that allows safe movement even during peak periods of traffic congestion. These efforts may include further subsidies to improve the trolley system, the use of impact fees to improve sidewalks, and creation of critical links on the hidden-path system.

POLICY 7-D-1 ARRIVE WITHOUT A CAR: Fewer vehicles would be driven to Fort Myers Beach if scheduled airport shuttle service were available. The town shall encourage this service and the designation of a central drop-off point that could include a trolley stop and taxi stand.

POLICY 7-D-2 IMPROVE TROLLEY SERVICE: Trolley ridership increases when service is more frequent and when fares are low or free, yet no long-term funding or operational plan has been developed for providing higher service levels. Practical measures to improve trolley usage include:

1. Recurring subsidies from tourism sources so that service can be enhanced and congestion minimized during heavy seasonal traffic;
2. Pull-offs at important stops along Estero Boulevard so that passengers can safely board and traffic is not blocked excessively; these pull-offs could be built during other improvements to Estero Boulevard or required by the Land Development Code during the redevelopment process.
3. Clear signs at every stop with full route and fare information;
4. Bus shelters at key locations, with roofs, benches, and transparent sides;
5. Replacement of the existing trolley buses with clean-fuel vehicles so that businesses won't object to having trolleys stop at their front doors; and
6. Accommodation of the special needs of the transportation disadvantaged.

POLICY 7-D-3 ALTERNATE TRAVEL MODES: The town shall support alternatives to car travel to free up road capacity for trips that do require a car. Public funding sources shall include county/state gasoline taxes and road impact fees. The town shall modify its road impact fee ordinance by 1999 to allow these fees to be spent (within legal limits) on capital

improvements that relieve road congestion, such as better sidewalks, trolley improvements, and off-island parking areas. The town seeks to at least double the usage of the trolley system by the year 2001 (from its 1996 total ridership level of 238,754).

POLICY 7-D-4 ENCOURAGE WATER TAXIS: Fort Myers Beach has great potential for water transportation, with its canals, natural waterways, and high levels of tourism. To encourage the private sector to provide this service, the town shall ease regulations that require a water taxi to provide dedicated parking spaces at every stop and shall encourage restaurants, motels, and marinas to provide dockage for water taxis. Where possible, water taxi drop-off sites should avoid areas of high manatee concentration, or use protective measure such as propeller guards, jet propulsion, or electric motors.

POLICY 7-D-5 HIDDEN-PATH SYSTEM: The town shall support the creation of a quiet network of "hidden paths" running on the Bay side parallel to Estero Boulevard. This network would provide an alternative to walking and cycling along Estero Boulevard (as described further in the Community Design Element). Initial land acquisition shall begin in 1999.

OBJECTIVE 7-E UPGRADE ESTERO BOULEVARD — As part of its congestion avoidance strategy, the town shall methodically upgrade Estero Boulevard to reduce speeding and encourage walking, as higher traffic speeds and car-oriented businesses are antithetical to its pedestrian character. (If a suitable partnership to this end cannot be achieved with Lee County, the town shall consider taking on maintenance responsibility for Estero Boulevard.)

POLICY 7-E-1 TIMES SQUARE STREETScape: The town shall begin work by 1999 toward extending southward the curbs, colorful sidewalks, and street trees installed by the Estero Island CRA in 1996. Similar sidewalks should

be placed on both sides of Estero Boulevard as far south as the public library, including drainage, lighting, and trolley improvements. Unspent funds from the Estero Island CRA should be sought from Lee County toward this end. Generous urban sidewalks should also be built in the future around the Villa Santini Plaza as part of its redevelopment (as described in the Community Design Element).

POLICY 7-E-2 TRAFFIC CALMING: The town shall support two types of traffic calming to reduce speeding, which endangers lives and diminishes the quality of the pedestrian environment of Fort Myers Beach:

1. The first is "active" or traditional traffic calming along residential streets, using physical techniques such as speed humps, narrowed lanes, landscaping, traffic diverters, jogs, or traffic circles at intersections.
2. The second is "passive" traffic calming along Estero Boulevard, to control speeding without reducing the number of vehicles that can use the road. Techniques include full curbs and sidewalks separated by street trees; buildings nearer the road; interesting vistas for drivers; and avoidance of overly wide travel lanes or intersections.

POLICY 7-E-3 BUILDINGS CLOSE TO THE STREET: Where pedestrian levels are high, buildings should adjoin the sidewalk rather than be separated by parking spaces. Front walls of stores, offices, and restaurants should have large windows rather than blank walls, preferably shaded by awnings or canopies. Access to parking areas shall be off side streets wherever possible. The town's Land Development Code shall implement these concepts beginning in 1999.

POLICY 7-E-4 SIDEWALKS AND BIKEWAYS: The town shall work toward major expansion of sidewalks and bikeways. In addition to the next phase of Estero Boulevard sidewalks (see Policy 7-E-1 above), the town shall support the following projects:

1. Support Lee County's imminent plans to fill the gaps from Buccaneer to Estrellita Drive and from the Villa Santini Plaza to Bay Beach Lane using federal funds;
2. Initiate extensive improvements by 1999 to Old San Carlos and Crescent Street in conjunction with parking improvements (see Policy 7-F-2);
3. Initiate engineering studies by 1999 for bikeways and additional sidewalks on the second side of Estero Boulevard and improved pedestrian crossings, including consideration of a pedestrian overpass at Times Square.

OBJECTIVE 7-F OPTIMIZE THE PARKING SUPPLY — Off-island parking facilities served by convenient public transportation should be provided to meet peak-season demands. For year-around demand, the town shall provide additional on-island public parking spaces, based in part on a new peak-season occupancy survey of existing public parking spaces.

POLICY 7-F-1 ENCOURAGE SHARED PARKING LOTS: Parking lots serving a variety of land uses require much less space than separate on-site lots for each business. Shared lots waste less land and encourage walking because businesses aren't separated by large parking lots. The town shall encourage shared parking lots when businesses are relatively small, are clustered together, and have different busy periods.

POLICY 7-F-2 SHARED PARKING NEAR TIMES SQUARE: The Estero Island CRA recommended a reservoir of shared parking behind businesses along Old

San Carlos and adding 165 on-street parking spaces near Times Square (although some of these spaces would merely replace spaces lost to new recreational facilities at Lynn Hall Park). The town shall investigate the feasibility of this concept in 1998-1999 and proceed toward implementation, or create an alternate plan that may include a parking garages near Times Square.

POLICY 7-F-3 BETTER PARKING LOTS: Large parking lots or garages are usually more cost-efficient to build and maintain, but may not be the best solution for Fort Myers Beach. Disadvantages of large lots include high capital costs; the possibility of providing more parking than is needed or can be handled by the road system; and the unsightliness of most large parking lots and garages.

POLICY 7-F-4 DIRECT VISITORS TO AVAILABLE PARKING: Many visitors are unaware of existing parking lots; others would be dissuaded from driving if they were aware of the shortage of parking. Variable message signs can aid both situations. The town should encourage Lee County and FDOT to install these signs with information about all major parking areas, including the state park at Lovers Key.

OBJECTIVE 7-G THE FUTURE OF THE BRIDGES — Match bridge capacity to Estero Island with the capacity of Estero Boulevard.

POLICY 7-G-1 ADEQUACY OF THE SKY BRIDGE: There is little evidence that traffic congestion at Fort Myers Beach is caused by any inadequacy of the Matanzas Pass Sky Bridge, which unlike Estero Boulevard has no interference from intersecting streets, parking spaces, or pedestrians crossing the street.

POLICY 7-G-2 CHANGES TO THE SKY BRIDGE: If parking lots at Bowditch Point or Times Square greatly increase demand for northbound turns at the foot of the bridge, striping a third lane on the existing bridge might be considered, as might a reversible third lane during the peak season.

POLICY 7-G-3 RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE SKY BRIDGE: FDOT may be willing to turn over responsibility for the Sky Bridge to the Town of Fort Myers Beach. This would be advantageous to the town only if part of a congestion management system with peak-period tolls, off-island parking lots, and improved mass transit.

POLICY 7-G-4 ADDITIONAL BRIDGE CAPACITY: Additional bridge capacity should not be directed to Times Square (except for the potential restriping in Policy 7-D-2). New lanes to Old San Carlos or Crescent Street would also be undesirable, as most congestion is caused by conditions on Estero Boulevard south of Times Square. Previously proposed bridges from Winkler Road or Coconut Road are infeasible from environmental and financial standpoints and need not be considered further.

OBJECTIVE 7-H EXPERIMENT WIDELY — The town shall constantly search for innovative solutions to long-standing traffic problems and to new problems as they develop, and shall coordinate its efforts with those of the Lee County Metropolitan Planning Organization. The town shall serve as a catalyst for traffic engineering experiments that would evaluate minor improvements that might improve traffic flow at Fort Myers Beach. Some potential improvements are described in the following policies.

POLICY 7-H-1 PEDESTRIAN OVERPASSES: Although pedestrian overpasses are often ignored by pedestrians, an overpass providing a panoramic view of the Gulf might be attractive enough to reduce at-grade crossings at Times Square without discouraging foot traffic in this highly congested area. Even

without an overpass, the pedestrian-actuated stop light may be replaceable with a flashing caution light to minimize effects of the crossing on traffic flow.

POLICY 7-H-2 SAN CARLOS BOULEVARD: The five-laning of San Carlos Boulevard has created severe problems near the approach to the Sky Bridge. Creative experiments are needed to discourage drivers from using the right-hand lane, or side streets on San Carlos Island, to bypass the line of cars waiting to enter the bridge.

POLICY 7-H-3 LEFT-TURNS AT TIMES SQUARE: Northbound traffic headed for Lynn Hall Park now turns left just past Times Square. These turns could interfere with traffic flow on Estero Boulevard; if so, alternatives using Crescent Street should be considered.

POLICY 7-H-4 VARIABLE MESSAGE SIGNS: These signs could advise motorists of congestion delays as well as available parking. The town should urge the detailed study of this concept by Lee County, FDOT, and the Metropolitan Planning Organization.

POLICY 7-H-5 ORIGIN/DESTINATION DATA: Better data is needed on the origins and destinations of motorists during the peak season, and the town supports the MPO's efforts to obtain this data.

POLICY 7-H-6 TRANSPORTATION DEMAND MANAGEMENT: This part of a congestion avoidance strategy reduces the number of single-occupant vehicles during peak traffic periods, either by eliminating some trips completely, or by accommodating existing trips in fewer vehicles, or by moving some trips before or after the most congested periods. This strategy may alleviate peak-season traffic congestion if implemented aggressively in cooperation with area businesses.

POLICY 7-H-7 DELIVERY VEHICLES: To avoid interference with traffic and pedestrian flow, the town shall develop a strategy to limit commercial deliveries during peak traffic periods.

POLICY 7-H-8 FLOODING: During periods of minor flooding, the town shall monitor the performance of roadside drainage systems on and off Estero Island to identify areas where an evacuation could be prematurely halted.

POLICY 7-H-9 PROFESSIONAL ASSISTANCE: The town may wish to retain a creative traffic engineer to provide advice on these experiments on a continuing basis.

POLICY 7-H-10 CONNECTIONS TO ESTERO BOULEVARD: An excessive number of streets and driveways have direct access to Estero Boulevard, reducing its ability to handle peak-season traffic. The town shall take advantage of any suitable opportunities to consolidate street connections into fewer access points onto Estero Boulevard.

OBJECTIVE 7-I LEVEL-OF-SERVICE STANDARD — Maintain minimum acceptable levels of service for the transportation system.

POLICY 7-I-1 Traffic congestion is a serious problem at Fort Myers Beach, caused by a combination of high tourism demand for its beaches and past over-building relative to road capacity. Neither factor is within the control of the Town of Fort Myers Beach, although its residents must tolerate congestion every winter. This comprehensive plan seeks to manage congestion levels and encourage alternate means of mobility including walking, bicycling, and trolleys.

POLICY 7-I-2 The peak capacity of Estero Boulevard's congested segments is 1,300 vehicles per hour. The minimum acceptable level-of-service standard for Estero Boulevard shall be that average monthly traffic flows from 10:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. during each month do not exceed that level for more than four calendar months in any continuous twelve-month period. Measurements from the permanent count station at Donora Boulevard shall be used for this standard.

POLICY 7-I-3 Figure 18 of this element is hereby adopted as the future transportation map of the Town of Fort Myers Beach.

OBJECTIVE 7-J PROTECTING PUBLIC ACCESS — Although no future right-of-way needs have been identified, some existing town and county rights-of-way are substandard and few are wider than needed. The town shall not vacate or acquiesce in the vacation of existing rights-of-way except where no public purpose would be served by retaining the right-of-way.

POLICY 7-J-1 RIGHTS-OF-WAY: Town and county rights-of-way are needed for the undergrounding of utilities; for the expansion of sidewalks and bike paths; for water accesses; for on-street parking; for public transit and road improvements; and for other public purposes. The town shall strictly limit vacations of rights-of-way and easements to preserve future access for these purposes.

POLICY 7-J-2 TRAFFIC IMPACT ANALYSES: A thorough traffic impact analysis is currently required only for major rezonings and very large development orders. The town shall amend its Land Development Code during 1999 to:

1. decrease the thresholds for requiring traffic impact analyses;
2. require them to study the cumulative impacts of potential development; and

3. use the results in assessing whether impacts are acceptable, and whether an improved design could offset some of the impacts.