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Plan shows future gap between transportation needs, revenue

If Charlotte County hopes to adequately meet its transportation needs in 2030, it will require 42 separate road projects costing more than \$1.1 billion, according to a report by the Charlotte County-Punta Gorda Metropolitan Planning Organization.

However, the county will only be able to afford to pay for 20 of those projects because anticipated revenues for that purpose will only add up to \$603 million by then, the report says.

Members of the Charlotte County Planning and Zoning Board were offered a peek at a summary version of the county's 2030 Long Range Transportation Plan at their meeting Monday.

The final 200-page version of the plan, which includes projects for improving bicycle and pedestrian traffic as well as the automotive variety and other transit systems, won't be available for another two weeks.

After the meeting, Gary Harrell, the MPO's principal planner, said the goal of the plan is to serve as a guide in planning and anticipating future needs.

"It's like your family budget," he said. "It's a guide. You can't anticipate a lot of things, but you can anticipate quite a bit. So you have a plan, because it's better to have one than not have one. You need to stop what you're doing and look at the big picture sometimes, and that's what this helps us do. It's a tool."

The long-range plan, which is mandated by the state, was assembled with the assistance of staff from several county departments and the city of Punta Gorda, he said.

It looks at the years 2011 to 2030 -- "Over the horizon, past the county's five-year plan," said Harrell -- and it includes several projects located just across the border from Charlotte in Sarasota County.

"That's new," said Harrell. "For the first time, the state is requiring we take a regional approach, and that we include projects that impact us regionally. It makes sense if you're serious about planning to include that."

Sarasota County planners were consulted in the inclusion of those projects, he said.

In addition to county and city staff, the plan has received broad input in a series of public workshops and hearings, and will be the topic of still more public hearings in the coming months.

The estimated costs and projected revenues in the plan are based on current dollar values, the report says, and certain fiscal assumptions about the future.

Among those, the report anticipates that the county's one-cent sales tax will be extended, and that the county's transportation impact fee rates will be increased by 75 percent in 2011, by 50 percent in 2016, by 25 percent in 2021 and by 25 percent in 2026.

A consultant hired by the county is currently working on a study to determine if impact fees should be raised and, if so, by how much.


Harrell said the size and frequency of the increases in the county's impact fee rates were based on information provided by the county budget department.

"I was told those numbers came straight from the consultant," said Harrell.

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By BARRY MILLMAN

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