

March 10, 2006

## Righteous road rage

### Costs soar while County Commission dithers on funding plan for traffic woes

Traffic-weary Rockledge resident Marguerita Engel says she's "outraged that Barnes Boulevard has gotten out of hand."

She has every right to be -- and so do other Brevard County drivers stuck in traffic on dozens of roads no longer able to accommodate the area's explosive growth.

How did it happen?

Irresponsible local government has failed for decades to demand development slow down until road funding catches up.

That needs to change right now, with the first step a vote by the County Commission to raise transportation impact fees on new construction to the full \$4,353 consultants have recommend.

That would generate about \$20 million a year, and lay at least some of the burden on those who are causing traffic to soar.

And while it would make only a dent in the \$360 million tab for local road needs, it would help show voters the commission majority -- Ron Pritchard, Helen Voltz and Jackie Colon -- are finally serious about finding a solution.

There's been little evidence of that so far, a dereliction that came to a head last fall as Wickham Road neared its 43,200 daily trip capacity, forcing the commission to pass a six-month moratorium on new construction.

Last month, the moratorium had to be stretched out 90 more days, while the county scurries to find traffic-management stopgaps.

That won't fix the mess, but might put off lawsuits likely to be brought by landowners who want to build and now are blocked.

Dozens of other Brevard roads are just as congested, including the 1.3 miles of Barnes Boulevard that has Engel and her neighbors in a fury.

Once 920 housing units already OK'd by Rockledge officials go up, that stretch will be crammed with almost 27,000 daily trips.

That's just short of the maximum the law allows, which is why the Rockledge City Council on Wednesday

finally shut off building permits there.

The same action is likely to be seen in other areas, as county and local governments are forced to face up to the reality of mindless development.

In case they've missed it, citizens are reaching the end of their patience.

There's no better example than Save Brevard, a grass-roots group proposing county-charter amendments to make developers pay their fair share of growth costs, or they get no building permits.

Beyond impact fees, other road-funding options the County Commission can consider are raising the gas tax 6 cents a gallon to get an additional \$13.7 million a year for roads.

Or adding 1 cent to the current 6-cent sales tax, to raise \$350 million over five years.

The Melbourne, Rockledge and Cocoa city councils have endorsed the 1-cent hike proposal. Other cities are discussing it, and the county must decide by July whether to put a referendum on the Nov. 7 ballot.

While that issue remains in question, two things are certain:

Road costs are rising by the day, and unless the impact fee is increased to its maximum first, voters are unlikely to OK other taxes for road needs caused by over-development.

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