Growth Management and Transportation: The Florida Experience

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Over five years have passed since Florida enacted its landmark growth management law. In that time, Florida planners and public officials have gained some hard-earned experience in the practical aspects of implementing a statewide growth management program. As expected, transportation issues have been at the forefront of the growth policy debates during this "shakedown" period.

One of the primary motivating factors that led Florida to pursue its ambitious growth management program in the first place was a general public dissatisfaction with the traffic and highway congestion that accompanied the state's surging growth during the 1970s and 1980s. It now appears that some of these issues may not be easily resolved as state and local governments wrestle with the complex and competing needs and demands of this booming Sunbelt state. However, Floridians are gaining a better understanding of the nature of the transportation challenge and, as a result, are beginning to rethink some of their original assumptions about growth and mobility.

Florida Population Trends

In 1950, Florida was a quiet rural state with a population of only 2.8 million, about as many people as lived in Iowa at that time on about the same land area. Thirty years later, in 1980, the state's population had more than tripled to 9.7 million.

During the 1980s, Florida's population grew by about 900 people daily. Annually, the state was adding 350,000 (net) new residents, roughly equivalent to adding a new city the size of Tampa every year. By 1990, Miami had become the financial capital of the Caribbean, Orlando had become the tourist capital of North America, and over 13 million people resided in what had become the nation's fourth largest state.

Forecasters predict 16 million people will call Florida home by the end of the century. The conservative projection for 2010 is 18 million, which will make the Sunshine State the nation's third largest, after California and Texas.

More important, however, than the amount of population growth has been the pattern of new development occurring over the past thirty years. Most of the population has settled in the state's urban counties, where 80 percent of Floridians now live. These counties are generally located in the state's coastal areas. In fact, of the six Florida "second tier" cities (urban area population over one million), only Orlando is located in the interior.

While development has occurred along the coast in urban counties, most of the growth—both in population and in employment—has been suburban in nature. Four out of five new jobs created in Florida during the 1980s was in a suburban location. From 1980 to 1990, the population of Florida's unincorporated areas grew by nearly twice the rate that the population of incorporated areas grew. As a result, the gross density of the state's urban counties has declined steadily and only one CBD in Florida has reached 100,000 employment (Miami).

Florida Transportation Trends

Obviously, this rapid population growth has placed tremendous demands on Florida's transportation system. Attempting to keep up with these demands has strained the
financial resources and institutional arrangements of state and local government. Although this could be said about many kinds of public infrastructure--drainage, potable water, solid waste disposal, schools, etc.--it has been the transportation issues that have tended to frame the growth management debate in Florida.

Highways

As rapid as Florida's population growth has been, it has been exceeded by the growth in highway traffic. The increasing population combined with increasing automobile ownership have led to annual new auto registrations equivalent to a 1,300-mile, bumper-to-bumper line of cars entering the state each year.

It is important to recognize that the traffic growth on Florida's highways is not entirely attributable to population growth. Florida's population grew by 34 percent between 1980 and 1990, but total highway travel in the state increased by over 50 percent during that same period. Travel on some sections of the state's interstate highway system has more than doubled during the past decade, a trend that cannot be entirely explained by population increases.

What are the factors contributing to traffic growth, other than population? A partial list would include (with 1980 to 1990 trends):

- Number of licensed drivers (up 41 percent)
- Per capita automobile ownership (up 9 percent)
- Total employment (up 35 percent)
- Number of households (up 37 percent)

Other more difficult to measure "travel behavior" trends also are influencing the traffic growth in Florida's cities. More people are driving, people are making more auto trips each day, they are making more of these trips alone in their cars, and they are driving farther on the average trip. An economist might say Floridians are consuming more transportation (how much they travel), and they are doing it less efficiently (how they travel), than ever before.

Over the past thirty years, Florida has responded to its traffic growth with an aggressive road-building program. The 1,400-mile interstate highway system is nearly completed. The Florida Turnpike--"Florida's Main Street"--which runs down the spine of the state to Miami, has been extended around the west side of Miami to Homestead, providing a direct gateway to the Keys.

Several of Florida's major cities have turned to toll roads as a means of providing multi-lane capacity. The state has actively encouraged this by establishing expressway authorities with broad authority to act as virtually independent state agencies. Jacksonville built many of its river crossings and developed an extensive expressway system with toll financing in the 1960s and 1970s. Tampa, Miami, Ft. Lauderdale and Orlando all have many miles of high-capacity toll expressways. During the 1970s the state of Florida was adding over 300 lane miles of new state highways each year.

However, in spite of the road-building efforts of local and state government, Florida has not been able to keep up with traffic growth. By 1985, the pace of new state highway construction had slowed to about 100 lane miles each year. During the latter part of the decade, the Florida Department of Transportation pursued an objective of building at least one lane mile of new highway capacity for every three lane miles of estimated new traffic demand. While this may seem a modest objective, the DOT estimated that, due to funding constraints, it was actually adding only about one lane for every five lane miles of new traffic demand. The DOT now estimates that over 50 percent of the lane miles of state highways are "congested," with the percentage in some urban counties even higher.

Public Transit

Florida's public transit systems have not grown with the state. Annual ridership on public transit in 1980 was 147 million passengers. By 1990, this had dropped to 143 million. Many of the state's cities have relatively underdeveloped transit systems. Orlando, for example, with an urban area population of over 1.2 million, has a fleet of only 100 buses. High capacity guideway transit systems have been developed in Miami and Jacksonville, but have not moved past conceptual planning stages in other Florida cities.

The state's only commuter rail system, Tri-Rail in Dade, Broward and Palm Beach Counties has disappointed its sponsors with ridership of fewer than 5,000 weekday passengers. A state-sponsored intercity rail experiment, the Silver Palm, which provided daily Amtrak service between Tampa, Orlando and Miami in the mid-1980s was discontinued in 1986 when it failed to achieve the statutorily-mandated 60 percent farebox return. The Florida High Speed Rail Project, which was originally planned to provide service between Tampa, Orlando and Miami by 1995, has been scaled back and may be postponed indefinitely.

Aviation

Florida's airports have benefited directly from the twin boom in tourism and population. Orlando, in particular, has thrived, as the Disney complex and other Central Florida tourist attractions have achieved a steady record of double-digit annual growth in visitors. Orlando International Airport saw 18 million passengers in 1990, an increase of 280 percent over 1980.

While the major airports have managed to achieve capacity expansions in response to increasing demand, the ground access to these airports has not kept pace. Most of the state's large airports are now actively pursuing some sort of high-capacity transit service as a means of meeting this need. In Orlando, for example, a number of major ground access systems are in planning stages. These include the Magnetic Levitation Demonstration Project, the Florida High Speed
Rail Project (now in question) and a proposed rail link with Port Canaveral on the east coast. Ft. Lauderdale, Tampa and Miami are also planning fixed guideway airport access systems.

The Early Growth Management Legislation

Florida began its growth management efforts early, with sweeping legislation passed in 1972. That year the state embarked on a program of state comprehensive planning, began identifying areas of critical state concern, and adopted a far-reaching Water Resources Act. Three years later, in 1975, the state imposed mandatory local growth management planning on its cities and counties. ²

Of the several bills adopted in 1972, the one with the most lasting impact on transportation planning was the Environmental Land and Water Management Act (Chapter 380, Florida Statutes) which established a process for evaluating "developments of regional impact" (DRI). The DRI law established an extensive development approval process involving regional and state review of projects that would impact citizens of more than one county. Basically, this imposed a more-than-local evaluation on large proposed developments including shopping malls, office parks and subdivisions.

Under Chapter 380, development review of DRI projects is provided through regional planning councils and state oversight is provided by the state's land planning agency, the Department of Community Affairs. A system of impact thresholds is used to determine what constitutes DRI projects. Developers prepare written responses to a series of thirty-two questions designed to compare their proposed projects against these thresholds. Projects which qualify as DRIs must then be subjected to the extensive review and approval process.

Although Chapter 380 requires a thorough review of a wide range of impacts, highway traffic (question 31) has been the principal issue for most DRI projects, with environmental impacts (water habitat, wetlands) a close second. The DRI statute has had several positive effects on transportation planning since the mid-1970s. First, it has exposed the traffic impacts of proposed large projects to intensive review by local planners, thereby providing the information needed to impose impact fees, site-specific exactions and project design requirements and conditions. It could be argued that the widespread use of impact fees by Florida local governments (not only on DRI projects, but on all types of new development) has been facilitated in part by the amount and quality of data made available through the detailed analysis of large DRI projects. Second, it has built a high level of private-sector expertise in conducting traffic counts, evaluating traffic data, running traffic models, and performing a wide range of professional transportation analyses. Finally, it helped create the statewide transportation expertise and knowledge needed to refine some of the concepts that eventually appeared in the 1985 Growth Management Act.

Over the years, increasingly sophisticated forms of DRIs have evolved. Of particular interest are "areawide DRIs" which provide for planning and review of master plans for large tracts of land with multiple land owners. Another important type of DRI which is beginning to see frequent application is the "downtown DRI."

For example, the city of Orlando wrote and obtained approval of a 20-year master plan for downtown Orlando. The result, an approved DRI, vests the entire land area of downtown Orlando with a specific amount of growth between now and 2010. As part of the development order, the city has committed to specific infrastructure improvements, to certain regulatory actions (e.g., controlling the amount of downtown employee parking), and to ongoing monitoring activities. In return, the city will be able to grant development approvals for large projects within downtown for years to come without incurring the time and cost (both to developers and to reviewing agencies) that would be associated with individual DRIs. In addition to encouraging good planning, this use of the areawide DRI tool also supports efforts to focus development in existing urban centers rather than in suburban or exurban areas.

The 1985 Growth Management Act

After several years of debate, the Florida Legislature took an ambitious step forward with a series of bills now collectively known as the 1985 Growth Management Act. This legislation, and minor subsequent revisions, created or modified the three principal state statutes governing planning and growth management in Florida. These are Chapter 186 (State and Regional Comprehensive Planning Process), Chapter 187 (State Comprehensive Plan) and Chapter 163 (Local Government Comprehensive Planning Process).

State Comprehensive Planning Process

This statute requires the preparation of three statewide "policy plans"—the state water plan, the state land plan, and the state transportation plan. Chapter 186 also requires the development of "agency functional plans" which are to guide and control the state's budgetary process, ensuring that state expenditures support fulfillment of the goals and objectives of the State Comprehensive Plan.

Most observers would agree that the state has not successfully implemented the state planning provisions of Chapter 186. The state water, land and transportation plans have been published, although with little impact. The Governor's Office of Planning and Budgeting did attempt for several years to lead state agencies through the agency functional planning process. This effort was largely unsuccessful for two reasons. First, the process itself was so cumbersome that it collapsed under its own weight. For example, the first agency functional plan completed by the Florida Department of Transportation took the form of a document 1,100 pages thick. It contained hundreds of tables and matrices with budget numbers.
arrayed against the state's transportation goals and objectives, none of which had much impact on appropriations or policy. Second, the Legislature itself has shown little interest in actually conforming annual appropriations to the elaborate objectives-driven process envisioned in Chapter 186.

In recent years, the agency functional planning process has languished unattended, a lingering shadow of the original intent which has neither been implemented nor eliminated from statute.

State Comprehensive Plan

The State Comprehensive Plan was an unusual piece of legislation which placed in Florida Statutes a list of 26 state goals and supporting policies. These tended to be statements that the major interest groups involved in passage of the bill could agree with. The result, Chapter 187, has a "motherhood and apple pie" flavor and avoids some of the fundamental choices entailed in practical growth management. For example, while a good part of the state's growth management efforts have addressed the "urban sprawl" problem, this term does not appear anywhere in Chapter 187.

The statute also lacks clear direction for the state's transportation programs. The single transportation goal reads: "Florida shall direct future transportation improvements to aid in the management of growth and shall have a state transportation system that integrates highway, air, mass transit, and other transportation modes." The "policies" that accompany this goal in the statute provide little guidance for the difficult but important tradeoffs that must be made if the state's transportation programs are to do more than drift in the direction of least resistance.

Local Government Comprehensive Planning

This is the portion of the 1985 Act that has generated the most activity and the most controversy. The revised language in Chapter 163 requires cities and counties to submit growth management plans on a schedule that stagger the due dates over a three-year period that began in 1988 and ends in 1991 (coastal counties and cities first, rural interior areas last). These local comprehensive growth management plans are to be followed within one year by adoption of land development regulations that implement the plans. The Department of Community Affairs has developed a detailed administrative rule, Rule 9J-5, implementing these provisions of Chapter 163. In 1986, the Legislature strengthened the legal stature of Rule 9J-5, incorporating it by reference into Chapter 163.

The statute mandates certain elements that are to be contained in the local plans. These are listed in Figure 1. In addition to the mandatory elements there are elements that are required only for certain local governments and elements that are entirely optional.

Under Chapter 163, the local comprehensive plans are submitted for regional and state review for minimum compliance with regional policy plans and with state statutes. The state review is performed by affected state agencies and coordinated by the Department of Community Affairs, which has final administrative approval authority.

Local governments must have their plans approved by DCA within the timeframe established by statute or face sanctions for non-compliance. The chief sanctions threatened in statute are the withholding of state funding for local projects and having the appropriate regional planning council write the local plan. In practice, the more important sanctions may be the potential for a de facto development moratorium resulting from the uncertainty surrounding a contested plan, and the threat of protracted litigation with its attendant costs.

Early in the plan submittal process, as the coastal counties and cities were filing their plans, many of the local plans were found in non-compliance, often for reasons related to transportation issues. Although some of these local governments did challenge the state's authority, the state has been able to prevail in most of these cases. However, out of this early difficulty with the review and approval of local plans has come a negotiated compliance agreement process, which the Department of Community Affairs initiated to provide local governments with more breathing room to work out their differences with the state. Under the terms of a compliance agreement, a city or county might agree to correct a deficiency in their plan within a certain amount of time and then obtain a conditional approval of their plan. This administrative settlement device may, in fact, have significantly lowered the temperature of the plan review process.

An important feature of the 1985 Act was the granting of generous citizen standing to intervene in the local plan adoption and re-
view processes. Under the statute, “affected citizens” may challenge local plans. Neighboring local governments may also intervene if they feel they are adversely affected by some feature of a proposed local plan.

On a statewide level, an advocacy group, the “1000 Friends of Florida” has served as citizen watchdogs and advocates for the full implementation of the Growth Management Act. This group has been active in reviewing local plans prior to approval by DCA and has been influential in the evolution and maturation of the local plan development and review process over the past several years.

The Concurrency Doctrine

A central theme in Florida’s approach to growth management has been the concept of assuring adequate public facilities. For better or worse, the term adopted to describe this concept has been concurrency, a word which has its roots in a single obscure section of Chapter 163: “It is the intent of the Legislature that public facilities and services needed to support development shall be available concurrent with the impacts of such development . . . .”

Level of Service Standards

The principal means of implementing the concurrency doctrine has been the requirement that local comprehensive plans must set level of service (LOS) standards for a wide range of public facilities and services. For each of the categories in Figure 2, local governments must specify what the local LOS standards will be and must compare forecast conditions with those standards. A plan that identifies standards which cannot actually be met (funded) will not pass muster in the state’s review process.

The LOS device is adapted from highway engineering where it has historically been used to set design criteria for highway construction projects. In recent years, highway and transportation planners have increasingly used the LOS concept to describe actual observed operational characteristics of roads and streets. This approach has broad appeal and has now been broadened in Florida to apply to a wider range of public facilities and services.

Another important feature of the concurrency doctrine is the requirement for a five-year capital improvements element in each local plan. The capital improvements element must be fully funded (it cannot be predicated on hoped-for future referenda or public actions) and must put infrastructure in place at the time it is needed. The practical effect of this approach to concurrency management is to impose what might be called “truth in planning” on local governments. It should be possible for any citizen or elected official to determine from the traffic circulation element whether this condition conforms to the LOS standard for that street classification and how it compares to conditions on other streets.

Although the concurrency doctrine applies to several categories of public infrastructure, it has been the highway capacity issue that has attracted most of the attention in Florida since 1985. This may be in part a result of the fact that highway LOS appears to be easily measured and understood. The A-B-C-D-E-F formulation is appealingly simple (or at least appears to be). Also, the highway congestion problem may be the most readily visible manifestation of population growth impacts. Nearly everyone observes the effects personally, on a daily basis. Compare this with stormwater drainage, which tends to be “out of sight.” Similarly it is difficult for the average citizen to actually “see” a shortage of potable water. Highway traffic congestion, on the other hand, is visible, tangible and frustrating.

Level of Service and State Highways

Shortly after passage of the 1985 Act, the Florida Department of Transportation began work on the state transportation plan required by Chapter 186. Published in September 1986, the Florida Transportation Plan contained an item which ultimately became a major focal point for the growth management debate in Florida: a table entitled “Minimum Acceptable Operating Level of Service Standards for State Highway System.”

The Florida DOT’s initial reaction to the Growth Management Act was a concern for the state highway system. The department’s planners believed local governments would respond to the statute’s rigorous concurrency requirements

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**Figure 2**

Public Facilities -- Required Level of Service Standards

- Roads
- Sanitary Sewer
- Drainage
- Potable Water
- Solid Waste
- Parks and Recreation
- Public Transit*

*large cities and counties only
local LOS standards, the state was generally willing to allow local conditions to get as bad as local politics would allow. However, the state highway system became an exception where the state would allow conditions to get only as bad as the state standards allowed.

Over the years since the original Florida Transportation Plan was published, the department's LOS table has evolved and become more complex. Figure 3 shows the table in its current form. The familiar letter grades specify the lowest acceptable forecast operational level of service for state highways, measured at the 30th highest annual hour over a twenty-year horizon. The roadway types correspond to the state’s functional classification system for roads and streets.\(^7\)

The application of this approach to concurrency for state highways has given rise to statewide policy debates surrounding two subjects central to any growth management program: highway funding and urban sprawl.

**Concurrency and Highway Funding**

Developing a workable system of LOS standards for state highways has been complicated by the chronic underfunding of the state highway program. Since at least the mid-1970s the funding available for capacity enhancements to the state highway system has been much less than would be required to keep pace with Florida's traffic growth. As a result, a considerable backlog of needs (already congested highways) has built up, with little funding available for the future capacity expansions needed to support the growth most local areas in Florida would like to see continued.

**The Magnitude of the Highway Funding Shortfall**

Early in 1987, after eighteen months of work, the State Comprehensive Plan Committee, a blue-ribbon panel of state leaders, concluded that the state needed to increase its ten-year transportation program by $16 billion. A year later, the Florida Department of Transportation released its Strategic Transportation Plan which estimated that the shortfall was closer to $25 billion over ten years.\(^8\) Of the $40 billion the department recommended the state should spend between 1989 and 1998 ($15 billion of which was funded), over $20 billion was for capacity expansion of state highways. Regardless of what estimates are used, it has been clear to most that

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**Figure 3**

**Florida's Level of Service Standards--State Highway System**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic Standards</th>
<th>Existing Urbanized Areas</th>
<th>Other Existing Cities</th>
<th>Transitioning Urbanized or Incorporated Areas</th>
<th>Rural Areas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freeways</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Arterials</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Arterials &amp; Other</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Special Considerations</th>
<th>Special Transportation Areas</th>
<th>Parallel to Exclusive Transit Facility</th>
<th>Constrained Facility</th>
<th>Backlogged Facility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freeways</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Maintain</td>
<td>Maintain &amp; Improve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Arterials</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Maintain</td>
<td>Maintain &amp; Improve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Arterials &amp; Other</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Maintain</td>
<td>Maintain &amp; Improve</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

by under-funding local roads and streets, while at the same time permitting a rapid pace of development. This would have the effect of shifting "local" traffic onto state highways.

Most heavily-travelled, multi-lane highways are state highways and these are usually the most direct routes between activity centers. Because of the discontinuity of many local streets, and because, even when congested, state highways generally offer better end-to-end travel times, it would theoretically be possible to continue shifting local traffic to state highways even as they become increasingly congested. The department believed that by setting minimum standards for these roads, the state would force local governments to properly fund local roads and streets, thereby preserving the state highway system for what the department felt was its intended purpose: "... moving people between cities, not between shopping centers ... ."\(^6\)

Following the process laid out in the 1985 Act, the state's Regional Planning Councils (RPCs) considered the state highway LOS issue as they wrote their regional policy plans. Ultimately all of the state's RPCs adopted the DOT's standards, thereby giving the LOS table the status of statewide policy to be followed in the preparation of all local growth management plans.

It is important to note that the state highway LOS standards represent a departure from a central philosophy of the 1985 Act with respect to local self-determination. Basically, the Growth Management Act created a mandatory planning process and imposed the concurrency requirement on local governments, but otherwise let each city and county set its own course. As long as future infrastructure requirements were identified and funded to the level necessary to meet the
the state’s level of highway funding is on a collision course with its concurrency doctrine.

In 1990, the state of Florida raised the state gas tax by four cents and increased other user fees dedicated to transportation. The increased revenue from these actions has allowed the Florida DOT to increase its work program by over $600 million annually, some of which will be invested in state highway construction. However, this funding level is still substantially short of what would be required to build the projects that state and local planners have identified as needed.

At the same time, state and local officials are finding the tollway concept, which had built so many miles of limited access urban highways in the 1970s and 1980s, to be increasingly out of favor with the public. In 1988, voters in Jacksonville approved a plan that would replace the expressway and bridge tolls with a local sales tax and refinance the outstanding construction bonds. Similarly, a recent increase in tolls on Orlando’s expressway system, needed to fund expansion of the system, has generated a public grumbling that is not quickly going away.

The state highway funding picture, combined with a strict interpretation of the concurrency doctrine, has given local governments a difficult choice: slow the rate of development significantly, or come up with local funds to add capacity to the state highway system. Obviously, neither of these has been warmly received by local leaders.

Access Management

If it has been clear that the state highway system is insufficiently funded, it has been equally clear that much of the existing capacity is being squandered by inadequate control of access. Traffic engineers know that unregulated driveways and entrances can rob an arterial roadway of much of its potential capacity by introducing excessive turning movements and impeding the flow of traffic. Strip commercial development, which is the primary source of this problem, also tends to be built in a manner that virtually prohibits pedestrian or transit movements between commercial enterprises. This has the insidious effect of increasing highway traffic without really increasing travel.

However, it has been difficult or impossible for state or local governments to control this problem. Efforts to preserve highway capacity by denying driveway permits would lead quickly into court where the property owners would argue that denial of access deprived them of full use of their property. Failure to grant access, then, became a “taking” which had to be compensated. The courts allowed state and local agencies to deny access permits for safety reasons based on engineering standards, but greatly discouraged the denial of access based on other policy objectives.

In an attempt to address this problem, the Florida Legislature passed the State Highway System Access Management Act in 1988. This law recognizes the right to “reasonable access” to property but establishes that this is not the same thing as the right to any particular means of access. The statute and the Florida DOT implementing rules have created a system of classifying highways and types of access. Ultimately, the program will be jointly administered by the state and local governments through agreements that, in effect, delegate the DOT’s permitting authority for state highway access to local agencies.

Improved management of access to state highways should help to preserve some of the capacity which has been purchased at great cost to the taxpayers. However, it cannot retrieve the capacity already lost over the years.

Concurrency, Highways and Urban Sprawl

During the past five years in Florida, there has been a growing concern about the tendency for new development to seek out suburban and exurban locations. To understand why this is such a problem, and such a sensitive issue, it may be helpful to briefly review the structure of local government in Florida.

Local Government and Urban Boundaries

As a “home rule” state, Florida, through its constitution, gives wide latitude to cities and a small number of charter counties to exercise local governance. There are also two metro-consolidations in Florida, Metro-Dade (Miami and Dade County) and Jacksonville (with Duval County) which have tremendous local authority and autonomy.

Originally, the sixty or so non-charter counties were little more than administrative arms of the state, providing courts, law enforcement, voter registration and tax collection services. However, over the past several decades, counties have increasingly moved into the business of providing urban services. Land owners have traditionally resisted being absorbed by incorporated jurisdictions and, under Florida law, annexation is difficult to accomplish. At the same time, counties, with the collaboration of the Legislature, have been able to employ such mechanisms as special districts and special utility corporations to provide urban services (roads, water, sewer) in unincorporated areas.

This lack of a definable urban boundary combined with the inescapable arithmetic of lower rural land costs has led to predictable results: the suburbanization of Florida. In most areas of the state the population of unincorporated areas is growing significantly faster than the population of the cities. There are now several large (over 100,000 population) unincorporated subdivisions in Florida and many of the state’s largest commercial projects are planned for what are currently rural areas.

Governor’s Task Force on Urban Growth Patterns

The renewed interest in “urban sprawl” in the late 1980s marked a turning point for the state’s growth management program. Although the 1985 Act made frequent reference to locating new development where the infrastructure and serv-
ices were available or could be efficiently provided, the term "urban sprawl" did not appear. Nor did "urban containment," "concentrated development," "high-density development," "compact urban form," or any of the other terms typical of the sprawl-related vocabulary.

In May 1988, Governor Bob Martinez announced the formation of a statewide task force of planners, elected leaders and business representatives to study the sprawl issue. The Governor's Task Force on Urban Growth Patterns was charged with the responsibility of recommending programs that state and local governments could use to promote more efficient, compact urban development patterns. The task force was also to identify the costs of sprawl and the savings that could be realized from reducing and slowing sprawl.

Following a year of spirited debate and statewide hearings the task force, in June 1989, issued a final report which concluded that Florida was facing "... tremendous urban sprawl--a development pattern characterized by scattered, unplanned, low-density development that is not functionally related to adjacent land uses." The report went on to assert that "the proliferation of urban sprawl is creating urban growth patterns which are degrading the overall quality of life in Florida and increasing fiscal pressures on our state and local governments." 10

Many of the task force's findings and recommendations were important and far-reaching, including the proposal that local governments should be required to establish urban service areas and urban expansion areas as a means of controlling where and when development would occur. The final report also contained a transportation chapter covering a range of subjects including public transit, parking policy, transportation demand management and interchange location.

Highway LOS Standards and Urban Development Patterns

One of the most divisive issues the task force wrestled with was the relationship between state highway LOS standards and the urban sprawl problem. In the end, the task force concluded that "... locationally insensitive level of service standards have the potential to encourage sprawling, inefficient land development patterns in our state." 11

What the task force had discovered was the effect that strict enforcement of state highway LOS standards could eventually have on development patterns. If development could only be permitted where adequate highway capacity was available, that, almost by definition, would rule out existing urban centers where highway congestion is invariably the most severe. This could have the effect of sending developers out into suburban and rural areas "shopping for highway capacity"--the opposite of the concentrated urban form the task force believed Florida needed to encourage.

Emerging Issues--1991 and Beyond

After nearly six years of constant debate and discussion, Floridians are not yet tired of the growth management subject. There is a tremendous interest across the state in the technical details of growth management, and in improving the process. In 1991, with a new governor and new players in many of the key state agency positions, the time may be right to begin addressing some of the deficiencies of the original 1985 Act.

Amending Growth Management Plans

As the 450-plus local comprehensive plans are completed this year and the initial implementation phase of the statewide growth management process winds down, state growth management leaders are beginning to focus their attention on the process by which local plans will be amended. Even the best plan can be quickly compromised by a few well-placed land use map changes accomplished through the political process. Although both Chapter 163 and Administrative Rule 9J-5 address the subject of local plan amendments, this issue has not received the attention that it will eventually require. Most analysts expect further rule-making on this subject, perhaps as soon as mid-1991.

Intergovernmental Coordination

The need for coordination and consistency between the comprehensive plans of neighboring local governments has been a continuing issue from the early days of growth management in Florida. During the passage and implementation of the 1985 Act this issue was downplayed to protect the basic process from a destructive statewide battle over local autonomy. However, Florida will not be able to effectively deal with the urban sprawl issue until the intergovernmental coordination problem is resolved. Most of the state's major urban areas are made up of several counties and cities, all competing for development and tax base. Counties that today are rural in character are experiencing development pressures fueled by lower land costs and the attractiveness of Florida's natural (rural) environment. While planners may decry the loss of rural land to low-density suburban sprawl, local officials often see this development pressure as their opportunity to finally "cash in" on the boom.
The Governor's Task Force on Urban Growth Patterns recommended better county-wide planning in urban counties, and a strengthening of the requirements of the intergovernmental coordination element in local comprehensive plans. It is possible that these proposals will eventually receive consideration by the Legislature.

Compliance Agreements

The adoption of compliance agreements by the Department of Community Affairs as a way to work out inadequacies in local comprehensive plans and avoid protracted, expensive legal conflicts was a bold step. It has been argued that the availability of this option may have saved the growth management process from premature revision by the Legislature. However, the negotiation of compliance agreements between staff of local governments and the Department of Community Affairs can result in a local plan that is considerably different from what was presented to the public and to elected officials in local public hearings. The state will need to examine how it can preserve the compliance agreement tool yet safeguard the public participation and citizen standing features of the local comprehensive planning process.

State Budgetary Process

From the early days of Florida's growth management effort, it has been recognized that a land use-based approach to infrastructure planning could not easily co-exist with a politically based, project-specific state appropriation process. The Legislature has been unwilling to yield the all-important power to target spending on favorite projects in home districts. Now, however, the state is in a serious budget crunch brought on by the combined effects of a recession and an over-reliance on the sales tax as a revenue source. This has encouraged a renewed interest in the state budgetary process and particularly in the state budget-planning language in Chapter 186. There has even been some discussion this year of a "lump sum," non-project-specific appropriations process for certain infrastructure programs.

Transportation Concurrency Management Areas

As an outgrowth of the state highway LOS standards issue, the Department of Community Affairs has recently proposed an amendment to Rule 9J-5 that would allow local governments to establish "Transportation Concurrency Management Areas." The intent would be to give cities and counties the authority to adopt a different approach to roadway LOS standards within specific areas. This approach would entail monitoring and controlling conditions on an area-wide basis.

The "zonal" approach has been advocated by a number of local governments but has not been formally accepted by the state. Florida DOT wants state highway LOS standards applied and enforced at the "link" level—in other words, to each section between signalized intersections. However, local transportation planners have argued that this can lead to illogical results, such as adding capacity to roadways that should not be enlarged, shutting down development in areas where it should be encouraged (urban centers), and pushing development into areas where it is not desirable (sprawl).

An example of the zonal approach can be found in the city of Orlando comprehensive plan.12 The Orlando traffic circulation element establishes fifteen traffic performance districts. Conditions in these districts will be evaluated using a "report card" that measures performance for each category of roadway (limited access, arterials and collectors) in each direction (north-south and east-west). While traffic conditions will be measured and evaluated at the link level, traffic performance will be reported as the percentage of street mileage in each category within each district that meets the minimum LOS standard for that type of road.

DCA's proposed rule amendment was put on hold in January, 1991, to allow the newly-appointed department secretary an opportunity to become familiar with the issue. The rule-making process will be reactivated later in 1991.

Conclusions: Transportation and Growth Management

Transportation issues, principally those relating to highway congestion, have dominated Florida's growth management policy debates locally and in Tallahassee for much of the past six years. What initially seemed to be an infrastructure timing and funding problem now appears substantially more complex and the "solutions" are proving to be elusive. However, there are a few conclusions to be drawn from Florida's experience so far.

Highway Capacity: Is More Better?

It is becoming apparent that Florida's infrastructure-based approach to growth management—defining the transportation problem in terms of highway capacity—may be leading in the wrong direction. Clearly there are environmental and physical limits to the amount of highway construction it is practical to pursue. Just as clearly, it is not possible to build highways at a rate matching the rate of traffic growth. The money is not, and will not be, available.

The original logic behind defining growth management in infrastructure terms was the desire to prevent a declining quality of life for Florida residents. Yet, little enhancement of quality of life results from the roadway capacity improvements needed to fully accommodate higher traffic flows. Freeways are tense, stressful, dangerous places. Will building more of them really improve quality of life? Local highway "improvements" that remove on-street parking in commercial areas, convert residential streets to one-way operation, or widen streets into sidewalk areas and front yards may inflect as much loss of quality of life as the congestion they are intended to correct.

Of course, not all capacity improvements are undesirable. Most are badly needed and should be built. However, it may
be useful to re-define the transportation objectives of growth management in terms of quality of life, rather than purely in terms of rate of flow. In so doing, a decision might be made to slow traffic down on certain streets (lowering the level of service) to enhance the pedestrian circulation and commercial vitality of a neighborhood. A decision might be made to concentrate density in a downtown area, even though state highways in the vicinity are crowded. A crowded downtown (low level of service) is a healthy downtown and a lot more fun to walk around than a 40-acre suburban mall parking lot.

**Highway Funding: Whose Responsibility Is It?**

Concurrency management breaks down in the absence of a clear delineation of financial responsibility for highway construction. In any city, most daily traffic, and virtually all peak hour traffic, is "local." To define the state's responsibility as being limited to "through" traffic is equivalent to limiting the state role to funding rural segments of intercity highways.

Few elected officials--state, local or federal--want to raise taxes to pay for infrastructure that can be avoided. If concurrency management systems are to avoid becoming finger-pointing exercises where the principal issue is whose fault the problem is, some fundamental agreements must be reached up front about which jurisdictions have which responsibilities. In Florida this will require additional legislation.

**Public Transit: Making it Through the Ugly Years**

Florida's cities are not deploying public transit as a major growth management strategy. Yet most transportation planners would agree that extensive, well-patronized public transit systems are essential to the future of the state's major cities. What has become clear after dozens of studies and years of analysis is that there is a large gap between the density that can reasonably be served by highways and the density needed to support high capacity public transit. As a result, the community that attempts to concentrate development in order to ultimately achieve the density needed for transit will endure years of crowded highways--an ugly situation. The community that embarks on a high-capacity public transit project before it has the necessary density will endure years of poor transit system performance and the associated financial burden--another ugly situation.

Neither of these strategies is workable in an environment where cities and counties compete with each other for development. The best way to attract new commercial development projects (and the jobs and tax base they bring) is to adopt a low-density sprawling urban form supported by a continuing incremental expansion of the arterial highway system with an occasional new (toll-funded) freeway. Ultimately, the result will be a huge network of congested roadways and an urban development pattern that cannot be economically served by public transit--a fairly accurate description of urban Florida today.

Avoiding this fate requires two parallel strategies. First, the underpricing of highway travel must be addressed. This will entail a range of policies including parking supply and price, higher road user taxes, peak period toll road pricing, and aggressive demand management regulations. Second, more efficient means of supplying public transit services must be implemented. This will involve developing activity center circulators, concentrating high-frequency bus service on commuter routes, and making smarter capital investments in fixed guideway systems. Attractive, fast and frequent transit service can compete successfully with auto travel for a share of daily urban trips.

**Summary**

The state of Florida has come a long way in the past six years toward implementing the original vision of a well-planned state where a high quality of life and a clean natural environment could be achieved without sacrificing a strong and growing economy. The transportation component is, however, still something of a puzzle that will not easily be solved. The fact is that, while a lot of planning has gone on, no city in Florida has done much with transportation infrastructure that represents any significant departure from what has been happening elsewhere in the Sunbelt. A tremendous amount of highway construction has taken place. Public transit is still a minor player. The state has built fabulous airports. But the dream of using carefully planned transportation system investments as a powerful force in achieving the state's larger growth management objectives has yet to be realized.

**Notes**

1. Urban areas with populations over one million include Jacksonville, Orlando, Tampa/St. Petersburg/Clearwater, West Palm Beach/Boca Raton, Ft. Lauderdale/Hollywood and Miami/Hialeah.
3. Sec. 187.201(20), Florida Statutes.
4. Sec. 163.3177(10)(b), Florida Statutes.
5. *Florida Transportation Plan*, Table 4-2, page 4-8, Florida Department of Transportation, September, 1986.
6. This was a phrase used often by the Governor and Secretary of Transportation during 1989 when the debate over this issue peaked.
7. Chapter 334, Florida Statutes.
8. The difference in these two estimates was attributable to the assumptions each study made about the costs of acquiring right of way for highway construction.
9. Section 335.18, Florida Statutes.
12. Orlando's plan has yet to receive state approval as of this writing. The primary outstanding issue is state highway LOS standards.