

Laudable Transit Plan Tackles Temple Terrace's Teeming Roads

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Like many small communities that abut major cities, Temple Terrace has a huge traffic problem it can't control. The city has no jurisdiction over the main arteries of Fowler and Fletcher avenues or 56th Street, but the city's future growth is limited by these failing roads.

Instead of tilting at windmills, planners at Temple Terrace City Hall have decided to rewrite the city's transportation plan in an innovative way. Temple Terrace could be the first city in Florida to win approval of the novel approach.

The ambitious plan is to make the city of seven square miles and 24,000 residents a community where you don't have to use a car.

It's a forward-thinking approach worthy of support of the public and the approval of the Department of Community Affairs, the state agency that reviews local growth plans.

Over the next 15 years, the plan calls for Temple Terrace to invest \$58.5 million in building sidewalks, constructing multiuse trails for bicycles and golf carts, enhancing bus service and making pedestrian walkways safer and more inviting. The projects would be funded with proceeds from gas and Community Investment Tax proceeds, property taxes set aside for mass transit, grants and development fees.

The plan requires no new taxes, says City Manager Kim Leinbach. But when fully implemented it should become a model for communities that want to encourage alternative modes of transportation.

Temple Terrace really has no choice but to take this route. The city desperately needs to rebuild decaying sections of the city with higher-density developments - including but not limited to its New Urbanism downtown project - but developers are hampered by concurrency laws requiring road capacity to keep up with growth.

Realistically, that is not going to happen in Temple Terrace.

For example, the Hillsborough Planning Commission estimates that adding two lanes to Fletcher Avenue as it passes through Temple Terrace's boundaries would cost \$50 million - and the road would still be rated an "F" for service. None of Temple Terrace's roads stands a chance of being improved to the extent that would permit much additional development.

But five years ago, Florida provided an option for communities in such a bind by creating "multi-modal transportation districts," where cities could design plans that would limit the need to travel by car.

In Temple Terrace's plan, more sidewalks and pedestrian crosswalks over major streets are intended to make it safe for residents to bike or walk safely through the community, even along busy streets. A long-awaited trail would be built linking the east side of the city over the Hillsborough River to the popular recreation center and to streets that wind along the picturesque golf course.

The city's new downtown - construction of which should be under way by next year - would be fully accessible by bicycle paths. And the city would extend those paths to the University of South Florida,

helping USF alleviate its parking shortage problem.

With gas at more than \$4 a gallon and the need to reduce the number of cars on the area's roadways, the timing for such a plan couldn't be better.