



Our community focused on our future

Traffic Flow and Congestion Executive Summary

SCOPE (Sarasota County Openly Plans for Excellence) is a volunteer-driven, nonprofit organization dedicated to engaging community members in approaches to improving the quality of life in Sarasota County. Through its annual study of two important community issues and publishing an annual *Community Report Card* our community celebrates its successes and tackles its problems.

Traffic Flow and Congestion was one of two topics studied in 2001-2002. The Traffic Flow and Congestion Study Group convened in July, 2001 and was comprised of any community member who wished to participate. Nearly fifty individuals participated on and off throughout the seven months of weekly meetings; a core group of 26 individuals saw this rigorous process through to the end. The study group's charge was to examine the facets of traffic flow and congestion in Sarasota County, examine successful approaches to the problem, and determine steps our community could take to improve traffic flow and minimize congestion.

Fourteen meetings were dedicated to hearing presentations from key resource people on various aspects of traffic flow and congestion. Speakers included representatives from the Sarasota/Manatee Metropolitan Planning Organization, the Florida Department of Transportation, the Center for Urban Transportation Research at the University of South Florida, and each municipality within Sarasota County. The study group devoted twelve additional meetings to reach consensus on their findings, develop conclusions from those findings, and create recommendations for change.

The study group advanced 25 recommendations ranging from land use management, traffic signalization, and transportation planning strategies, to funding and regional issues regarding public transportation and decision-making boundaries. The following highlights emphasize some of the key conclusions and recommendations for change.

Major Problems

- In Sarasota County, traffic congestion results from a variety of factors including population growth and increased tourism, and the fact that we drive more than we used to. Studies show there has been an increase in the vehicle miles traveled per household over the past ten years. Inefficient roadways due to traffic light signalization, inadequate signage and road design also contribute to the problem.
- Traffic congestion problems are strongly linked to land use design and growth management practices. Good land use design coupled with appropriate limits and timing can minimize travel demand. Transportation concurrency standards are inadequate and the coordination and enforcement of these standards are inconsistent throughout the county.

- Coordination is a challenge because of numerous organizations and jurisdictions making transportation decisions. Differences in organizational boundaries complicate coordination. For example, the Sarasota/Manatee MPO, our FDOT region and the Planning Council region all have different boundaries.
- Public transportation accounts for less than 2% of all transportation in the county and currently is not a viable transportation option in most instances.

Recommended Solutions

- Develop a coordinated, bi-county, traffic signalization system using advanced Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) applications and explore appropriate applications of ITS technologies throughout Sarasota County and contiguous counties.
- Local governments should do more to prevent additional congestion in any land-use planning. Strategies include coordinated timing of any development or redevelopment with the availability of appropriate infrastructure, access management plans, traffic calming, establishing better connectivity of road network, and adherence to strong concurrency rules.
- Improve coordination through the expanded role of the MPO and the development of coterminous boundaries for state agencies working on the related issues of transportation and land use management.
- Develop a regional transit authority to provide transit services in Sarasota, Manatee and Charlotte counties. This authority should encourage, expand and develop incentives for a public transportation network to serve the entire population.

Implementation of the Recommendations

The next step in the SCOPE process is to use the volunteer, citizen influence of SCOPE to seek implementation of the recommendations contained in the study report. This process includes the tasks of education, advocacy and monitoring. Education is aimed at increasing the awareness of the public and officials about the study. The advocacy efforts are recommendation-specific and will help build public support or target key decision-makers regarding their capacity to implement a recommendation.

Over the next few months, a volunteer Implementation Task Force will develop an implementation strategy, including a general timetable, priorities among the recommendations and some measurable objectives to assess progress. This task force will spend up to two years advancing the recommendations to appropriate decision-makers and organizations within the community. The task force will assess its progress at periodic intervals and report on the outcomes of its efforts to the SCOPE Board and to the public.

To download a copy of the full report visit the SCOPE website at www.scopexcel.org