

## Buses 'Preferred' On Sanibel? Preferred By Whom?



by Barbara Joy Cooley, president, Committee of the Islands

The consultant for the Alternative Transportation Study in connection with the J. N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge has now come up with a plan called the Locally Preferred Alternative. The problem is, it is not preferred at all by the locals.

### How did this happen?

At Committee of the Islands, we realize that vehicular traffic congestion during the peak season has long been an important issue for the residents of Sanibel. We have participated in all of the major studies of this problem since the incorporation of the city. We started reaching out to the members of the steering

committee for the current study in January, 2008. Below is an extract from our winter 2008 newsletter indicating our involvement and position:

"City Council's December 18 [2007] meeting marked an important new development on the traffic front. Council approved in principle the contract for a \$750,000 study (now \$1.6 million) funded by the U.S. Department of Transportation. The application for the grant stated its objective as seeking, 'alternative transportation options to reduce the number of vehicles entering environmentally sensitive property within the City of Sanibel and at the J. N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge.' The study includes money for an analysis of island and refuge carrying capacity thresholds.

"Sanibel, the refuge and Lee County, through LeeTran, have established a joint steering committee to oversee the study. LeeTran will serve as the project manager and funding conduit. The work will include data collection, probably during the March, 2008, peak season. The plan provides for substantial public involvement. The first task

is a review of available information and the design of studies to produce additional data needed. The public engagement program, the data collection and the carrying capacity assessment will feed the generation of alternative options. The final stage of this grant is the evaluation of the options. If that process produces an action plan, there may also be grants available for implementation.

"COTI sees potential benefit for Sanibel in this grant. The data collection should help us understand the traffic situation better. We find the focus on carrying capacity encouraging. At the same time, we are concerned over the risk that inadequately considered changes focused on the refuge might have unintended adverse effects on island traffic overall. We plan to work with other interested groups to help channel the process constructively. We hope that the results of this effort can assist with the search for answers to our traffic congestion challenge."

### Where is the data?

So what happened? An important component of the initial plan was to carry out a "destination study." Where is that study? Where is the data that was supposed to be collected in March of 2008? Where is the analysis of island refuge and carrying capacity thresholds? What about that "substantial public involvement"? True, three public workshops were held in early 2009, but where is the documentation of what the public said? What we heard residents say at these events was that they don't want buses brought onto the streets of Sanibel, because there was no evidence that they would alleviate congestion – only that the buses would bring more people instead.

Where can one go to view the "locally preferred alternative"? Answer: no place.

What we did see at the meeting held earlier this year, on January 26, at The Community House was a slide showing a circulator bus plan, with the bus stopping at island resorts and a few other places like the refuge and the shell museum.

But there were no handouts or reports distributed that could be examined. No data. No analysis.

Back in December, 2008, the Committee of the Islands submitted comments regarding the \$1.6 million study funded by the U.S. Department of Transportation. (Your tax dollars at work.) We said, "The data collection portion of the study is a major component." Where is it?

### A 12-month solution to a 3-month problem?

Our comments also urged "that any proposed changes recognize the seasonality of the problems we are trying to mitigate. Sanibel traffic is an issue for only three months of the year. We do not need 12-month solutions." Common sense, right? This common sense is not part of the consultant's "locally preferred alternative."

The locals, at the January 26 meeting, said very clearly that they preferred the "no change" alternative. In other words, no buses, thank you. The one change that was fervently requested was a re-paving of Wildlife Drive, to make it usable by bicycles. But that change was not a part of this study. (It will probably happen anyway, as a part of other work to be done in the refuge.)

We say the locally preferred alternative in this transportation study is "no change." What do you say?

Plan to speak up at the next one of these Alternative Transportation Study public meetings, on April 13 at 4:30 p.m. at The Community House, 2173 Periwinkle Way. You can also email your comments to sancouncil@mysanibel.com.

Committee of the Islands also invites your comments. Email them to coti@coti.org. Information on this and other island issues is also available on our website at coti.org.✧

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