

# Safe roads summit in Cape Coral tackles regional issues

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A “complete streets” campaign doesn’t require putting a bicycle lane on every road; it aims for intelligently designed streets that motorists, cyclists and pedestrians can use comfortably.

The community’s economic health and public safety are at stake: If transportation and land-use planning doesn’t work in tandem, that community will lose employers and talented workers to other areas.

Those were two of several concepts speakers drove home Friday at the regional Transportation Summit in Cape Coral. Streets Alive of SWFL and the Royal Palm Coast Realtors Association were the organizers.

Roughly 200 people, including county and municipal leaders, engineers, planners and members of the public, attended the gathering at the Cape Coral Yacht Club.

They heard from some local elected leaders and planning experts as well as from such notables as bicycle and pedestrian authority Dan Burden, who coined the term “road diet”; Paula Flores Benway, international president for the Institute of Transportation Engineers; Ian Lockwood, a transportation engineer promoting inclusive street design; and Billy Hattaway, avid cyclist and District 1 secretary, Florida Department of Transportation.

“Road diet” means right-sizing lane widths and the number of traffic lanes to make room for walkers and bicycle riders, and to discourage unsafe driving speeds.

Hattaway got a spontaneous smattering of applause after saying, “We no longer design for a higher speed than we’ll post for the road.”

The complete streets priority needs to be on arterial roads, “where most people are getting hurt and killed, and where most of our destinations are,” said Lockwood, a livable transportation engineer with the Toole Design Group.

Lockwood is working with the city of Bonita Springs and Lee County government on ways to make Bonita Beach Road more user-friendly to pedestrians and bicycle riders.

The road links the city’s only Interstate 75 exchange with its beach. But despite running six lanes wide at its broadest segment — it’s prone to traffic jams and slowdowns.

In its present shape, Bonita City Manager Carl Schwing doesn’t ride his bicycle on it. Why not?

“It is a perception of a lack of safety,” Schwing told the group.

Summit talks were long on ideals, with scant mention of the challenges of finding the money to make changes. Cape Coral Mayor Marni Sawicki briefly mentioned that “performance measures are going to be crucial to determine what kind of (federal) funding we get.”

And, Lee County Commissioner Larry Kiker alluded to the balancing act of allocating “limited resources” to redesigning existing roads when so many – especially in Lehigh Acres – “need to be fixed.”

Making roads safer for bicyclists, bus riders and walkers is an economic as well as ethical imperative, said Burden, who’s innovation director for Blue Zones LLC. “The economy, the budget of cities, the health of our cities, all tie to this marriage of transportation and land use.”

This made sense to Joyce Owens, a Fort Myers-based architect attending the summit.

It parallels tenets of her profession, she said, where design “is not just about the building, but the environment and how people interact with buildings and the environment.”

Sharing the latest transportation knowledge with leaders is “fantastic, important,” Owens said, adding:

“This can be a game-changer.”

## **The grim facts**

Increasingly, transportation professionals are embracing a goal of zero road fatalities.

They aren't promising the goal will be reached, but they want to raise the bar.

The United States has a long way to go.

Some 2015 numbers:

More than 35,000 people died on U.S roadways.

It was the biggest jump (7.2 percent) in one year since 1965.

Cyclist deaths rose 12.2 percent, year-over-year.

Motorcyclist deaths rose 8.3 percent.

SOURCE: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration