



Lake County
Sumter County
Town of Astatula
City of Bushnell
City of Center Hill
City of Clermont
City of Coleman
City of Eustis
City of Fruitland Park
City of Groveland
Town of Howey-in-the-Hills
Town of Lady Lake
City of Leesburg
City of Mascotte
City of Minneola
Town of Montverde
City of Mount Dora
City of Tavares
City of Umatilla
City of Webster
City of Wildwood
Florida Central Railroad
Lake County Schools
Sumter County Schools

May 1, 2013

The Honorable Rick Scott
Governor
State of Florida, The Capitol
400 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0001

Re: Close the Gaps Legislation

Dear Governor Scott:

The Lake~Sumter Metropolitan Planning Organization strongly supports proposed legislation that invests \$50 million in transportation funds into the Coast-to-Coast Connector as part of the "Close the Gaps" initiative.

The Coast to Coast Connector is a coordinated regional effort to develop a safe and continuous multi-use trail from the Atlantic Coast across Central Florida to the Gulf of Mexico. When completed, the trail will span roughly 275 miles. With approximately 75 percent (over 200 miles) of the corridor already developed or funded for completion, the Close the Gaps funding will provide an exciting opportunity to complete the project and promote the Sunshine State as a global destination for cycling enthusiasts as well as serving existing residents.

Linking regional trails across Florida is, potentially, one of the most important efforts for Florida in terms of recreation, utility and tourism, providing an opportunity for cyclists and hikers to enjoy the nature and the communities of Central Florida for days on end without seeing the place twice.

In addition, regional multi-use trails provide important community connections, serve as alternative modes of transportation, increase property values and promote economic development and ecotourism (the most frequently requested information by visitors at the State of Florida's Official Welcome Centers is trail information). The impacts of a statewide connected system of trails will not only entail direct economic impacts through consumer spending but create a more robust ecotourism business sector, creating new local jobs and promoting redevelopment of areas such as the downtowns along or near the corridor.

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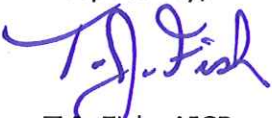
Studies completed by East Central Florida Regional Planning Council and numerous other organizations across the nation report that trails have a positive economic impact on local economies. As examples:

- The impact of the West Orange Trail on Downtown Winter Garden was shown vital in the revitalization of the downtown and that in 2010, trail users contributed to 25% of sales (\$3.6 million) in the downtown resulting in a direct and indirect estimated economic impact of \$5 million and supported 61 jobs.
- The West Orange Trail, Little Econ Greenway, and the Cady Way Trail combined had a direct and indirect economic impact of \$42 million and supported 516 jobs in 2010.
- Events such as the Bike Florida's "Forgotten Coast Tour" in 2012 had an economic impact of \$533,883.73 between travel, food & beverage, lodging, merchandise, equipment/repairs, fees, and more from visitors across Florida and the nation with 2/3's of the participants living outside the state.
- Trails are the number one community amenity sought by American homebuyers (National Association of Homebuilders, 2008).

The Lake~Sumter MPO is an organization comprised of two counties in District 5 of the Florida Department of Transportation. Through our coordination, we recognize that there are numerous counties and cities that stand ready to move swiftly to see realization of the investment into the coast-to-coast network. The following counties have Close the Gaps projects pending to accomplish the coast-to-coast concept: Brevard, Volusia, Seminole, Orange, Lake, Sumter, Hernando, Pasco and Pinellas. We believe strongly that the investment in this coast-to-coast destination trail will catalyze economic development and enhance property values across the heart of Florida.

Your support of this legislation is most appreciated.

Respectfully,



T.J. Fish, AICP
Executive Director