

Sudden impact: Mobility fees may soon pave way to improve buses, bikes, other transportation

By KATHERINE ALBERS

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Soon, the fees developers pay to maintain roads may also be used for bus shelters, bicycle paths and other modes of transportation. The county is going to evaluate the transition from a roads-based impact fee to a mobility fee. The change will allow the county to expend impact fee revenue on capital infrastructure that supports all modes of travel, including buses, stop/station area infrastructure and transit supporting bicycles.

"Right now, you have the impact fee districts and you only look at building roads. But your urban area grid is finishing itself," said Nick Casalanguida, the deputy administrator of the county's Growth Management Division, told the commissioners last month.

"(A mobility impact fee) allows you to be more flexible with your money. It still covers the same issue as the impact fee does, but it makes your money much more flexible."

The plan is expected to have a minimal impact to the overall fee amount, between 1 and 3 percent is typical, county officials have said.

Collier County road impact fees currently range from \$584.37 per student for a private elementary school to \$74,793.30 per 1,000 square feet for a drive-in restaurant, according to the county's impact fee schedule.

But Commissioner Georgia Hiller was skeptical.

"I think taxpayers are at their limit when it comes to fees," she said. "And if you are going to propose a fee, what is the fee going to be? Who will it be imposed on?"

Casalanguida said the county's roads impact fee does not take into account the people who ride the bus or walk. A mobility fee would still allow the county to improve roads, but would also be able to address those areas of transportation.

"It's not meant to be a new fee, but a replacement fee," he said. "The upside is that it is only a 1 to 3 percent increase. And the board could direct us for it to be cost neutral."

The concept of a mobility fee goes back to 2007, but discussions of the mobility fee began in earnest when the Master Mobility Plan Study started in January 2011, according to county staff. The discussions through the public participation process for

Phase II of the master plan allude to the concepts of a "mobility fee," according to county staff. The first formal presentation of a mobility fee as a Master Mobility Plan recommendation came in November to the Collier County Metropolitan Planning Organization.

The Collier County Planning Commission on Dec. 15 approved the recommendation to evaluate impact fees.

If Collier County were to use a mobility impact fee, they would not be the first in Florida. Currently, Pasco and Alachua counties also have a mobility impact fee, as do the cities of Destin and Jacksonville, among others. Kissimmee and Orlando are also in the process of calculating a mobility impact fee.

Brad Cornell, the Southwest Florida Policy Associate, told the commissioners that the recommendations in the mobility plan, including the fees, need to be vetted by the public and see the light of day.

"Good transportation mobility requires efficient land use and that's what provides the ability to protect wildlife and habitat," he told commissioners last month.

"In addition, we are also concerned about the community benefits. Mobility is an issue. There are people in this community who can't afford cars or who can't drive anymore. ... This is addressing many of those issues."



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