

orlandosentinel.com/news/local/lake/orl-lroads2507nov25,0,6664113.story

## OrlandoSentinel.com

### Lake County panel will examine how to pay for road improvements

**Lake commissioners hope to find alternatives to impact-fee increases they rejected in August.**

Stephen Hudak

Sentinel Staff Writer

November 25, 2007

TAVARES



Lake County commissioners have appointed fresh eyes to take a look at an old but growing problem.

The task force that will examine how to pay for new roads was conceived about three months ago after commissioners rejected a controversial proposal to increase road-impact fees 400 percent to 800 percent.

"It hits everyone every day," Commissioner Elaine Renick said of traffic on the county's clogged thoroughfares. "The task force's work, I think, will be vital."

Commissioners selected five people, all of whom volunteered.

They include Virgil Clark, a retired Chrysler executive from Clermont; Bud Beucher, owner of the Mission Inn Resort & Club; Howey-in-the-Hills Town Council member Fred Johnson, a financial planner; and a pair of engineers, H. Bennett Walling of Okahumpka and Duane Booth of Umatilla.

Two other members will be nominated by the Lake County Industrial Development Authority, an advisory board to commissioners.

Commission Chairman Welton Cadwell will serve as a nonvoting liaison to the task force, which will be asked to meld new ideas with those suggested by the Lake-Sumter Metropolitan Planning Organization and the county's economic-development department.

Though the commission rejected impact-fee hikes three months ago, a boost is still likely, said T.J. Fish, executive director of the Lake-Sumter MPO.

"We're faced with very large big-ticket needs in the area of transportation," Fish said. "I would expect that the task force will look for funding options that are in addition to -- and not in place of -- impact fees."

He predicted that the task force would examine controversial funding alternatives that include tolls, a nickel-a-gallon gas-tax hike and other user fees, none of which would be popular.

But higher road-impact fees were hardly a hit with the public.

One of the largest crowds ever to attend a County Commission meeting turned out in August and applauded commissioners when they rejected the huge hike suggested by a county study of needs and projected costs. Fees for single-family homes would have jumped from \$2,189 to \$11,396, while businesses such as drive-through restaurants would have seen an increase from \$17,706 to \$147,231.

Commissioners said they didn't bow to pressure from home builders and business leaders, who fiercely opposed the increases. They said they voted against the higher fees because of concern that the dramatic increases would further depress a slumping housing market, which is considered crucial to the local economy's health.

But higher impact fees are necessary to improve and expand a transportation network that already lags growth, some county officials say.

"There are those people out there who want impact fees to go away. They're not going to," Renick said.

*Stephen Hudak can be reached at [shudak@orlandosentinel.com](mailto:shudak@orlandosentinel.com) or 352-742-5930.*

Copyright © 2007, [Orlando Sentinel](#)