



The High Cost of Our Quality Of Life

August 2, 2005

Florida is a beautiful place providing a great lifestyle at a pretty reasonable price for most citizens. Since most of us have moved here from somewhere else, it is obvious that we think Florida offers us a better situation than where we came from. For those who were born here and remain to this day, again your choice reflects your preference for Florida.

Since Florida is so attractive, it continues to grow very rapidly, at over 1,000 new residents per day statewide and about 170 new residents every day here in central Florida. Florida has some of the nation's strongest growth management laws, designed to preserve the quality of life that attracted us here by requiring that infrastructure be put in place concurrently with development activity and that our fragile natural resources be protected. While reasonable people can disagree about how well we are doing managing growth and protecting the Florida style of life, it is true that (a) we are trying harder than most states, and (b) we are spending a great deal of money in our efforts.

Recent changes to Florida's growth management laws, and to our state's constitution, will make these efforts much more expensive in the future. Our new regulations require not only that new growth pay for all of the infrastructure it will require, but also that existing residents pay for the infrastructure that they are using which may not be up to standards.

The most expensive backlog of existing needs, not caused by new growth, is to upgrade our roadway system. To that end the state has committed \$750 million this year and promises to spend about \$1 billion per year over the next five years to upgrade the state roadway network. However, the local roadways also need massive investment for which no new money was allocated this year. The estimates range from \$5,000 per household to as much as \$10,000 per household for a total backlog of between \$40 billion and \$80 billion. It will be up to our county and city governments to craft funding plans to bring these systems up to level of service standards by 2008.

After roadways, the next most expensive bill comes for schools. Here there are two factors at work. First, a few years ago the voters modified our constitution to require smaller class sizes in an attempt to improve education. Second, the new growth management requires school concurrency before additional building permits can be issued. This doubles the pressure on school districts. They must increase classrooms to meet the class size amendment to serve existing citizens, and they must keep up with growth at the new service standards.

More on the cost for schools, next week.

This is Hank Fishkind for 90.7 FM, WMFE News.