

Communicating the Selling Points of Transportation

FBT Leadership Retreat Focuses on Getting Right Message Out on Mobility Needs

FLORIDIANS FOR BETTER



Selling the benefits of transportation to the public can be as difficult as pitching a heater to a Floridian on a steamy, mid-summer afternoon – the person can't see the need to buy now even though they may need it somewhere down the line.

With tremendous growth occurring throughout the Sunshine State, Florida's leadership must plan for the future and the most obvious place to start is by investing in the state's transportation infrastructure. Though a hard sell, communicating that particular need can be better achieved if the message coming from the industry is humanized, that's according to a nationally renowned transportation researcher who spoke at the second-annual Floridians for Better Transportation (FBT) Leadership Retreat. The event, which emphasized selling transportation, was held July 10-11 at the Mission Inn Resort at Howey-in-the-Hills northwest of Orlando. More than 150 transportation advocates, including many members of the Florida Transportation Builders Association, were in attendance to listen to national and state perspectives on the current status of transportation issues.

Dr. Frank Luntz, the retreat's keynote



Numerous state and federal transportation officials offered their viewpoints on current issues at the FBT Leadership Retreat. Above, Earl Durden, Denver Stutter and Ken Morefield discuss hot topics at the statehouse. Frank Luntz (right) provided a presentation on how to better communicate transportation needs to the public.



speaker, told the group most Americans don't want to pay for improved transportation through increased gas taxes, tolls, etc. However, if the transportation community can do a better job of personalizing its message on the benefits of investing in transportation – not the process – to the individual, the public will respond positively. For example, look at how you might address safety.

“You can turn it around and ask one very simple question – ‘At what price do you value life?’” Luntz said. “If we know we can save lives, not just improve the quality of life but actually save lives, at what price do we invest so we know our kids get home at night after returning from practice, or our spouse gets back from the grocery store, that we can go from point A to point B safely.”

You can do the same for seniors in Florida, he said, by stressing that most people killed on highways are older,

and investing in safer roads can save their lives.

“(Americans) understand the personal impact of taxation ... acknowledge there is a cost,” he added. “In life, nothing good comes for free; the public understands that and elected officials understand it. Don't be afraid to acknowledge the negative (i.e. gas tax increase) if it allows you to put this in the right kind of context.”

From there, Luntz's speech focused on concerns from the audience about fighting off raids on the state highway fund to pay for education, which could become a public-relations nightmare for the industry. Luntz suggested instead of going to fisticuffs with education, find a link to schooling and play off that connection.

The same logic can be applied when dealing with the ease of getting amendments passed to Florida's constitution, such as the recent pregnant pigs issue.

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Rich Juliano

“Get your best minds together, come up with two or three really good ads and become part of the process,” he said. “Always go through the expected channels first, and go and try to make this happen the right way. A ballot effort is truly a last resort ... but if the process is screwed up and denying you, then join the process and push somebody else to the back of the line.”

TEA TIME

Aside from Luntz’s speech, much of the discussion at the FBT Retreat centered on current efforts in Washington to reauthorize TEA-21, the six-year federal transportation funding legislation.

Rich Juliano, public affairs director for the American Road & Transportation Builders Association (ARTBA), summarized the various options legislators could employ to increase federal transportation spending, such as spending down the Highway Trust Fund, removing tax credits for ethanol and indexing the federal gas tax to inflation. Juliano also detailed plans pushed by the leadership of the House Transportation and Infrastructure (T&I) Committee, which calls for an increase in the federal gas



Tyler Duvall

tax, that would significantly increase Florida’s funding share.

“It would bring at least \$2.5 billion in annual funding by the end of this cycle for Florida and more than 56,000 jobs would be created in Florida alone over the next six years,” Juliano said. “The bottom line is 57 percent more federal highway funding for the state.”

However, Tyler Duvall from the U.S. Department of Transportation predicted that a gas tax increase wouldn’t be passed this year, adding “the President has stated his opposition to any tax increases.” His talk focused on the Bush Administration plan to reauthorize TEA-21 with its SAFETEA proposal, which doubles the amount of money delegated for safety improvements as well as streamlines environmental concerns and issues private activity bonds, despite lower overall funding amounts than the House T&I plan.

“We’ve got 43,000 people dying each year on the nation’s highways, almost an equivalent to the amount who died in the Vietnam War,” Duvall said. “The Secretary (Norman Mineta) has basically said this number has got to come down.”

Florida is also working to get its fair



Doug Callaway

share of funding back. Florida Transportation Commission (FTC) Chairman Earl Durden stressed the importance of making sure the state gets back 95 percent of the federal gas tax dollars it sends to Washington. Currently, it gets around 87-88 percent. But Juliano senses a problem might arise on that issue if there is not an increase in federal funding that could come through a federal gas tax hike.

“The problem is if the pie is the same size as last time, how are (legislators) going to be able to put together a bill that will pass in the House and the Senate?” Juliano asked. “If you take money away from other states, if they have a net loss, how do you expect to get votes from their delegation? That’s the problem.”

Spotlight on State Issues

The FBT Leadership Retreat also featured many presentations on various transportation modes occurring all over the state. Expressways, turnpikes and toll roads were the topics for a state panel, which informed the audience about efforts to increase SunPass toll collections and plans to build the first toll road with no toll plazas. The panel

stressed the importance of tolls to the state's economy and meeting its infrastructure needs, noting that nearly all new miles of highway being built in Florida will be some type of toll road.

"There are 700-750 miles of toll roads in this state ... that will eventually be collecting \$1 billion per year in revenues to go to the state highway system," said Pat McCue from the Tampa-Hillsborough County Expressway Authority. "That's equivalent to 10 cents a gallon in the state's gas tax. Can you imagine trying to abolish the toll agencies and raise the gas tax a dime?"

"We can't built enough roads – we do need to build a lot more than we've got – but we can't build enough roads to take care of this (congestion)," FTC Chairman Durden said. "We have to get into variable pricing where they can level out these peaks and valleys and I don't see any other way. Tolls seem to be one of the keys to these lulls in getting traffic smoothed out."

Denver Stutler, Gov. Jeb Bush's Chief of Staff, emphasized the growth opportunities in all modes of transportation throughout Florida, especially in the Jacksonville and Orlando areas. He also emphasized Gov. Bush's opposition to the light rail initiative in the state. "The governor oftentimes says we need to connect our modes with high-speed rail, then he always has a pause and says in about 20 years. I think the veto (on this issue) is a huge, huge tap on the brakes."

Ken Morefield, assistant secretary for the Florida Department of Transportation, urged transportation advocates to talk to people who don't know the issues or the consequences if Florida stands pat.

"The department of transportation can provide you all types of statistics

you need," Morefield said. "It'll show you we are congested today and if we spend all of our money in the next 10 years, we're going to be more congested in 10 years than we are today, the growth is happening just that fast. We've got to plan for the future."

That all goes back to selling and marketing transportation to the masses.

"Our job is to sell an essential product, that's why we came up with the (retreat) title "Selling Transportation" because we have this great product and yet it doesn't register on anybody's top-10 list of things that should be funded," FBT President Doug Callaway said. "That's our job now."

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ROASTED CRANE

**Long-time
FBT leader
honored by peers
with tribute**

*On a night to honor
Florida's most influential
person on transportation,
Don Crane couldn't help
but thank those who
helped him along the way.*

Many of Crane's peers came together on the first evening of the Floridians for Better Transportation (FBT) Leadership Retreat for a light-hearted "roast" for Crane, known affectionately as "Mr. Transportation." Crane was one of the founding members of FBT and served as the organization's first president from 1998-2002.

Despite all his success in elevating transportation to Florida's forefront, Crane deflected any praise and thanked those who assisted him in his long tenure as a Florida legislator and with FBT. He handed out a double-sided sheet filled with countless names of individuals who offered support to Crane and FBT.

"I doubt seriously that I ever accomplished anything without somebody's help," he said. "Everything is about how people help you. Somebody told me one time that life is full of block-



Long-time FBT President Don Crane was honored by his colleagues with a good-natured roast at the FBT Leadership Retreat. Crane served as the first FBT President for more than 15 years and is widely recognized as Florida's most influential transportation advocate.

ers and I've had my share of blockers helping me along the way."

To celebrate his achievements, those who have worked closely with him gave the crowd in attendance some insight on Crane – some professional and some humorous. Here are thoughts from the presenters who described the impression Crane left on them.

- "Don is one of these people who never worries about the credit for something. He just wants to get things done and he's got a lot done. I don't think anyone could be more passionate about their job than Don Crane." – Bob Burleson, president of the Florida Transportation Builders Association.
- "Florida wouldn't be the state we are today if it wasn't for your specific efforts and what FBT has done. I just want to congratulate you for keeping it together all these years. It was an impossible job you did ... we proved that

small, focused, under-funded organizations can make a big difference in this state." – Dick Beard, founding member of FBT

FBT Chairman Fred Leonhardt recalled a story when Crane was asked to give a presentation to a state commission about transportation. "He got up there and gave an eloquent speech and never mentioned transportation a single time. He talked about the real important part of this picture and it's the economy – the importance of the economy and having a viable, healthy economy to the future of our state. It was a remarkable, visionary presentation and it greatly moved this commission." After listening to nearly two dozen people that day, the commission decided its No. 1 goal was to follow up on Crane's vision.

It's that ability to gaze into Florida's future, and the impact transportation will have on it, why the American Road & Transportation Builders Association (ARTBA) named Crane the state's top public official of the

20th century for his advocacy of transportation development and investment. He was honored at the retreat by the national transportation association.

There was a lighter side to Crane's tribute. To celebrate the honoree's career, current FBT president Doug Callaway, with the assistance of the Florida Department of Transportation, presented a video on the "Top-10 Reasons Why Don Crane is Leaving." Leonhardt also gave a humorous slide presentation on "This Is Your Life, Don Crane."

Crane was honored with several framed awards as well as a cruise for he and his wife Shirley for his unending commitment. He finished by urging those to continue to push transportation for the betterment of themselves as well as the state.



Among those who offered their insight on Don Crane were FBT Chairman Fred Leonhardt (left) and FTBA President Bob Burselson.

"You need to get yourself and other people in the transportation industry to get out and make something happen because I have learned the hard way in the last 14-15 years that we really aren't in this on our own," he said.

"We have some members who have been super, super contributors to FBT and I hope you all will stay that way."



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