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Thar’s Gold in Them Thar Hills (of trash)
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One Man’s Trash Is Another Man’s Treasure

From SUV’s to LSV’s - the Rise of Sustainable Communities

A key driver in design of today’s sustainable communities is a multi-modal transportation network – one that accommodates and encourages alternate methods of transport particularly for short commutes. The benefits are obvious and continuous – reductions in traffic congestion, reliance on traditional passenger vehicles, dependence on fossil fuels, and greenhouse gas emissions.

In addition to provision of safe and convenient pedestrian and cyclist access, an emerging component of these transportation systems is the introduction of networks to accommodate low speed electric vehicles (LSV). These are basically enhanced multi-passenger golf carts that incorporate the safety components of cars, such as seatbelts, horns, windshield wipers, turn signals, brakes and tail lights. LSVs also have the ability to operate on public roadways with posted speed limits up to 35 miles per hour.

In recent years, some cities and master planned communities have planned for and implemented LSV networks as an alternative mode of transportation.

Pilot Program In Sarasota County

The most recent example of planning for LSVs in a multi-modal network is in Sarasota County, Florida, as part of plans for its Economic Energy Zone. This pilot program developed a model for communities seeking to cultivate green economic development, discourage sprawl, develop energy efficient land use patterns, and reduce greenhouse gases.

In Sarasota one of the main components linking land use and transportation was the introduction of a functional LSV network as part of the overall plan. The goal was to provide a jobs-to-housing balance and link these areas with an interconnected street pattern and separate green radial corridors. This would link the living and working areas with opportunities to walk or bike. An internal LSV network was a main component of these corridors as a separate designated pathway. This also provided an opportunity for LSV connection to a transit hub for external connections outside the community.

The LSV service radius was 6 miles, which accommodated a typical 20 minute commute. Moreover, the LSV network focused not only on the jobs-to-housing connection but identified major attractors within the area including commercial areas, schools, health care facilities, recreation areas and other community services. Connecting these facilities was accomplished by evaluating the roadway network to determine where LSVs can currently share roadways, identifying roadways that could be converted for LSVs by reducing current speed limits (35 MPH or lower) and/or creating a separate designated pathway. The pilot program also called for design and integration of additional essential components of a multi-modal program to include the more traditional pedestrian, bicycle, and mass transit systems.

Wider Application for Existing Suburban Communities

While designing a multi-modal transportation network is more easily accomplished when setting out plans for new communities, it has untapped potential for use within existing, low density suburban areas so plentiful throughout Florida. With careful planning and execution that involves network design, (i.e. intersection compatibility, strategic reduction of speed limits), policy development and enforcement, and a robust public communications program, an LSV network can be viable approach to greening our communities, new and existing.

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