

another viewpoint

No need for more bureaucracy in Broward transportation surtax issue



By Beam Furr

In November 2018, Broward County residents overwhelmingly approved a one-penny transportation surtax to relieve congestion and improve mobility and connectivity. This vote will help to improve and manage transportation in Broward County — and we are already seeing progress.

Recently, debate has occurred regarding the role of the Oversight Board in the surtax process. I was Broward County Mayor when the penny for transportation was put on the ballot and passed. I feel it is appropriate to provide some clarity on the intent and role of this oversight board, and what is planned with the surtax more broadly.

To be clear — the public voted for and has every right to expect an independent oversight board. It is one of the safeguards the Broward County Commission itself put into place to assure taxpayers that the money we are investing in infrastructure is being spent properly and according to plan. In addition, the Commission committed to not supplanting those funds already budgeted for transportation.

I appreciate the Sun-Sentinel and all residents holding us to that promise. It is in all of our interest to get this right.

When the Oversight Board was created, the idea was that this group of volunteer citizens would make sure that all the monies were being spent legally, according to state statute, and that the money was being allocated, according to the 30-year plan that was submitted to and approved in full by the state auditor in the fall of 2018.

It would not be a planning agency nor a rubber stamp on every project — it would exist to vet every project on a case-by-case basis to see if it conformed to the plan.

The language contained in the referendum frames it in this way.

One important factor when creating the Oversight Board was comprising the board of various skills and professions. That way, they would have the background and knowledge to determine the legitimacy of proposed projects. For example, they would know the difference between a street project with drainage elements compared to a drainage project with limited street work involved. Why is that important? One of those would qualify for funding while the other probably wouldn't.

We created an Oversight Board with this kind of knowledge so that they did not have to rely on additional staff or an entire bureaucracy to make determinations.

We are at a point where the Oversight Board will begin to have a lot of work to consider. Because of the number of projects and our ambitious program, it is possible this is more than this board can adequately handle. If additional resources are, indeed, needed, I would prefer when possible for those resources to come from the County. Why? Because I want every possible dollar being used to increase mobility and alleviate congestion. Building an entire new department and bureaucracy will detract from that funding and detract from that program.

The county has highly-qualified people on staff, such as traffic engineers and transit project managers, that have expertise in building a transportation plan and executing it.

We also have a skilled and independent County Auditor with a proven track record of fiscal responsibility and real independence.

Why not use these resources? They are already employed and funded — we should be taking advantage of their expertise instead of adding more cooks in another kitchen.

I do recognize that there probably will be points of tension and conflict, and there might be times where the Commission may need to consider specific requests for additional resources. Let's recognize and plan for those occasions without building an entire bloated bureaucracy that diverts money away from the work that needs to be done.

In the meantime, the [Broward County Penny for Transportation website](#) details the entire transportation plan, updates you on our current progress, and allows residents like you full insight into every step of the surtax process.

Every Oversight Board meeting is broadcast live and all its materials are posted for public view. There is an entire communications effort to ensure that this major undertaking is transparent from beginning to end. As I said, it is in all our interest to get this right and utilize these funds most efficiently.

Beam Furr is [Broward County Commissioner for District 6](#).