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## Our opinion: A gateway to Garnet and Gold

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Tell us if you've heard this one before:

“FSU just does their own thing. No collaboration. No advance word. No nothing. The rest of Tallahassee might as well not even exist.”

Regardless of whether there was truth in that characterization, it has been a perception.

Well, we are pleased to report the new airport “Gateway” project is a welcomed departure from that perception.

The university has jumped in, collaborating with local government on a plan that would use tax dollars as efficiently as possible to solve a decades-long problem of getting folks from the airport to town in a way that showcases Tallahassee and what makes it unique.

This is what planning should look like – effectively and efficiently leveraging tax dollars to the highest benefit of the overall market.

It also helps that we think this plan is a winner – it will be a huge boost to this market without causing undue harm.

And FSU has a stake in its success – the university will be contributing \$2 million in cash and another \$7 million in donated right of way costs to the project.

Now, that doesn't mean everyone's tossing confetti on this plan.

Some residents and at least one elected commissioner want to pump the brakes.

- Property owners on Springhill Road (Segment G): The original Blueprint Airport Gateway Project called for Springhill to be upgraded with bike lanes, sidewalks and beautification all while remaining a two-lane road. The same thing will happen under the new plan. The only difference is that the original Blueprint plan ALSO called for the purchase of right of way (to

the tune of \$10.8 million) on the chance that the road might need to be expanded to four lanes sometime in the future. Now, Commissioner Bill Proctor is voicing opposition to the plan, presumably because property owners on that road (which is in his district) won't see a windfall of money for an expansion that might not even be needed in the near or even distant future.

This is just the kind of rank opportunism that this market needs to outgrow. We have much more pressing needs in this community than unnecessary right-of-way purchases. Not to mention that if the use of eminent domain can be avoided, it should be. Our guess – there has been some property speculation based on the chance of large right of way purchases and now those folks may have gotten too far out over their skis. Not the public's problem.

It should be noted that, regardless of how this shakes out, all the Blueprint money allocated to the project will be spent on the south side.

Finally, Springhill is simply not the type of road Tallahassee needs as the sole gateway to our city. That route requires vehicles to pass the T.P. Smith Water Reclamation Facility which processes raw sewage. Is this really the only “gateway” we want travelers to pass through?

- South Lake Bradford Road (Segment A): The new plan does a very modest million or so dollars' worth of improvements to this connector from Orange Avenue to Capital Circle SW. It does not widen the road, but simply improves it, mostly aesthetically. Lake Bradford residents are understandably concerned with a major influx in traffic, but even if the car count is up, the speed won't be and they'll be gaining a nicely upgraded street.

- Lake Bradford Road, from the stadium to Orange Avenue (Segment E): The original plan involved widening the road by just a few feet, which would have meant relocating all the utilities and tearing up large stretches of concrete and pavement, just to slightly widen the lanes. The new plan is far less invasive to the local businesses and residents – it improves the road without all of the hassle and mess. We can't imagine there would be significant opposition to this change. It will be much less onerous on businesses, consumers and commuters.

As with all growth projects, the devil is in the details and there are winners and losers.

But what should carry the day is what works for the greater good. Not growing is not an option and improving the transition from the airport into the city is one of our community's top priorities.

We support this plan and commend FSU for taking a more cooperative, inclusive approach.

