

A Path Toward Long-Term Transportation Funding

The 2020 election is setting up to be a historic one. Not only is there the battle for the White House, but also a potential minimum wage amendment in the Sunshine State. Additionally, in Orange County, local government will be taking a hard look at how to fund public transportation long-term for the first time in nearly two decades.

Every week, nearly 1,000 residents move to Central Florida. This presents challenges in providing proper roads, infrastructure and mass transit. At his 2019 State of the County, [Orange County Mayor Jerry L. Demings](#) announced his objective to pursue a transportation sales tax referendum in November 2020.

Currently, Mayor Demings and his team are hosting [transportation town hall meetings](#) seeking input from residents to ascertain what the 1.35 million residents of Orange County identify as their transportation priorities.

The goal of the initiative is to find long-term solutions that work for everyone, and the County is working to gather feedback that will shape a proposed plan to improve transportation in Orange County for the foreseeable future.

A ballot initiative such as Mayor Demings' proposed sales tax referendum was not an option for Orange County until 2009, when the LYNX Board of Directors successfully worked with the state legislature to change language in state statute 212.055(1), which originally said counties chartered on or after Jan. 1, 1984, could not implement a sales tax for transit.

This language impacted all three counties LYNX serves, including Orange, Osceola and Seminole. Keeping the year 1984 in the statute would never allow Central Florida to go after a dedicated funding source for transportation. As such, the LYNX board made changing the year in the statute its No. 1 priority.

LYNX and its regional partners first set about trying to convince state legislators to sponsor and change the year required to be a Charter County. Staff visited senators and representatives, questioning them about why only counties chartered before 1984 (12 in total) were granted this provision.

Realizing that changing the date was not going to be an option, the region cleverly came up with the idea to simply remove the date from the statute. It worked, and today every county in the state has the ability to put a sales tax initiative on the local ballot as a referendum as long as the county commission agrees to it.

So, as the community is educated on the importance of finding a solution to funding transit in Orange County during the next year, it is important to remember when the state statute was changed to make doing so possible. And if all goes as planned, the Central Florida community will have a voice at the ballot box in November 2020.

The first Orange County transportation survey can be found here: www.ocfl.net/TransportationSurvey. More information on the initiative can be found at www.ocfl.net/Transportation.