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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-094

January 31, 2006

Commissioner John Albion
Chairman
Lee County Metropolitan Planning Organization
1926 Victoria Avenue
Fort Myers, FL 33901

Dear Commissioner Albion:

Nearly one year ago the Chairman of the House Transportation Committee, Representative Don Young, accepted my offer to come to Southwest Florida to see first hand the extent of the transportation infrastructure challenges facing our region.

During his trip in early 2005, Southwest Florida came together and presented a sound and passionate plea for resources to expand Interstate 75. When Chairman Young returned to Washington, D.C. he understood that this project was vital to our region's economy, our quality of life, and the safety and security of Southwest Florida's residents and visitors.

As a result of the Chairman's visit, Representative Mario Diaz-Balart and I were able to secure \$81.1 for the expansion of I-75 in Lee and Collier Counties. An additional \$10 million was provided by Congress for the Coconut Road Interchange project. This money would fund a study to determine the need of expanding the interchange at Coconut Road, a project which is strongly supported by many Southwest Florida leaders.

Since that time, however, the Lee County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) has voted against including the Coconut Road Interchange project in its 2030 transportation needs plan, which prevents the MPO from using this funding.

While I respect the right of local leaders to make local decisions, there are several federal implications of this vote which I wish to call to your attention.

First, as a result of discussions with the Transportation Committee it does not appear the \$10 million for the Coconut Road Interchange project can or will be re-programmed for other purposes. Second, if the MPO chooses to not utilize this \$10 million for this project, there is a reasonable chance that my colleagues in Congress will work to rescind these funds in light of the overall emphasis of reducing federal spending obligations.

Moreover, the unintended message from the MPO to my colleagues in Congress is that our region is willing to reject scarce federal resources. I am concerned that the MPO's vote will make it difficult for Southwest Florida to have future success in securing federal resources for other important projects, many of which will not fall under the MPO's purview.

In light of the ramifications of not utilizing this \$10 million for the Coconut Road Interchange project, coupled with the strong support of many other Southwest Florida leaders who want to proceed with this study, I encourage the MPO to reconsider its decision at the earliest possible date.

Sincerely,

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Connie Mack
Member of Congress