

## Osceola County chair: 1-cent sales tax needed to keep people moving | Commentary

By Cheryl Grieb

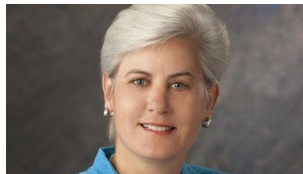
| GUEST COLUMNIST |

MAY 06, 2019 | 9:05 AM



Cheryl Grieb, chairwoman of the Osceola County Commission, writes that a 1-cent sales tax increase is needed to address traffic problems. (Red Huber / Orlando Sentinel)

**We get it. For years, developers pretty much enjoyed free rein in Osceola County. But in 2016, Osceola County took some drastic steps to rectify those past mistakes — imposing development impact fees to make sure that growth pays its own way. Osceola County now charges about \$22,000 per home in impact fees — the highest in the state. Seminole County collects about half that amount; Orange County about one-third less.**



Cheryl Grieb (Courtesy photo)

**We understand. And we've made the hard decisions to ensure a more equitable future for our citizens. Even so, that money can't pay for the sins of the past.**

**So who will? On May 21, Osceola voters will be asked to approve a 1-cent increase in the local sales tax, which will raise \$67 million a year to help fix our roads, fill potholes, build sidewalks, create multi-use trails for bicyclists and pedestrians, improve intersections and expand mass transit options.**

**Every dime of that money will be spent exclusively on transportation projects in Osceola County. And nearly *half* of the money raised will be paid by visitors who also use our roads, sidewalks, intersections and mass transit systems. The average citizen would pay about \$10 per month. Conversely, it would require a**

**40% increase in property tax rates to raise the same amount of money — all of which would be paid by residents.**

**In a recent editorial, the Sentinel acknowledges that traffic is “choking county roads” but offers no alternative solution to help ease the gridlock. Wagging a finger at past mistakes doesn’t help.**

**The Sentinel also wants a dedicated portion of the sales tax revenue to be spent on mass transit. Already we dedicate the majority of the 5-cent gas tax for vitally needed LYNX expansion — critical for our many zero-car households. And if the one penny passes, we can look at expanding SunRail service and additional needed transit.**

**Osceola County has a \$1.1 billion backlog of needed road improvements, and about 1,200 miles of sidewalk gaps — many being safe routes to school. We need an expansion of transit options that could link our downtown areas with employment centers in the tourism corridor, and improved intersections to get cars moving.**

**The list is daunting. But we can’t seal off the county’s borders. Seminole and Orange counties are largely built out. That’s not the case in Osceola County, where the population is expected to nearly double by 2045.**

**Nothing has been rushed or timed to minimize voter turnout — indeed, the county recently got high marks from independent state auditors who took a deep dive into how well hard-earned taxpayer dollars are spent. It’s the urgency of the problem that propels us. Doing nothing to address these needs is no longer an option.**

**It will be the voters’ choice to make on May 21.**

*Cheryl Grieb is chairwoman of the Osceola County Board of County Commissioners.*