

Editorial published Oct 7, 2003

## **Down the road**

There is no question that a proposed transportation link between the Oaks Mall area and the Archer Road commercial corridor is a much-needed transportation improvement for southwest Gainesville.

The project would relieve traffic pressure on SW 34th Street and SW 20th Avenue and help eliminate the often dangerous backup of local traffic waiting to get onto Archer and Newberry roads from I-75.

The possibility of getting as much as \$18.5 million in state and federal funding for the project is exciting, and the County Commission should certainly do what's necessary to help secure that funding.

Improving traffic flow in that southwest area would not only relieve congestion but help facilitate development of the "student village" concept long favored by UF officials and perhaps even keep some of the "big box" operations on Archer Road from decamping for more traffic friendly locales out in the urban fringes - thereby preventing sprawl.

Having said that, UF President Charles Young was premature in his proposal to donate university land in order to allow an improved SW 24th Avenue to extend eastward to join Archer Road, well east of SW 34th Street.

Faculty members already are up in arms over the idea of a four-lane highway cutting through what is now UF's Natural Area Teaching Laboratory.

That extension may help facilitate the flow of traffic from east Gainesville to west Gainesville. But the impact of the highway on UF's campus has yet to be explored.

And anyone who doesn't think that faculty opposition can hold up a project for months - or even years - wasn't paying attention when former President John Lombardi tried to move the Bat House. Opponents ultimately went all the way to the governor and Cabinet - and the Bat House continues to stand on its original site.

No, there may be a case to be made for the extension, but it hasn't been made yet. And trying to rush the extension through will only cause more faculty resentment and resistance.

T.J. Walker, chair of the Natural Area Advisory Committee, in a letter published this weekend in The Sun, advised President Young to withdraw his commitment and allow the next president - who is about to be selected - "to re-evaluate the wisdom of the donation in the light of traffic studies and input from appropriate faculty committees."

With time running out on his presidency anyway, that strikes us as good advice.

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