

## Myths About Development

A common myth is that new roads bring new development—you might call it the “build it and they will come” myth. The fact is that building a road does not cause development. True, you have to be able to get there, but access is only one of the contributing elements. The area served has to be desirable. There has to be unfilled demand and critical infrastructure must be available—water, sewer, schools, communications, etc. In places that are already accessible zoning actually plays a far more important role than transportation infrastructure. How many times have you seen an area with virtually no planning, and growing traffic congestion attract unsightly roadside development. If an area is ready to develop, very little can be done to prevent it.

In a community poised for growth the greater concern is a misguided effort to try to stop population increases by blocking attempts to put in place needed long term infrastructure. If nothing is done, development will occur along the existing roads, the empty land will fill up with new housing, congestion will increase to the point that it is intolerable, and the accident rate will continue to grow. If we wait, the only thing that can be done to prevent gridlock is to widen the existing roads. Disruption to the community and the environment will be significant and the cost will be monumental. Unrestricted access to the travel way, like that typically provided by four-lane roads, will encourage still more development, including strip malls, fast food establishments, service stations, and convenience stores. Eventually, unplanned and unwanted development will overwhelm the area.

Johns Island is a prime example of a community “poised for growth”. For years Johns Island was a rural oasis on the periphery of the Charleston urban area. Swing bridges over the Stono River made travel to and from the island unreliable. The roads were narrow and lined with big trees close to the road. In 2006, new high level bridges over the Stono were completed and travel to and from the rest of the region became more reliable. The real estate market picked up and “land for sale” signs appeared everywhere. Several larger housing developments were opened and dozens of smaller developments were planned and laid out. The island was on the verge of “all out” development. Then, the real estate crash of 2007 brought the anticipated boom to a temporary halt.

Since then, Boeing has moved into the area. Google has built a major site in Goose Creek. Advent Environmental Inc. of Mount Pleasant will participate in a contract from the U.S. Air Force worth up to \$350 million. SAIC has been awarded a \$6.3 million contract for tactical mobile systems by the U.S. Navy. Wind Mill Research, Mankiewicz Coatings, LLC and a major tire manufacturer have all made plans to locate new facilities here. The new director of the Port of Charleston anticipates a revived future for the port. Cruise lines are now operating from Charleston. This is only a partial list of developments promising new growth in the area as a whole. Retirees have discovered that the Low Country is a great place to live. Several thousand acres have been targeted

for development. The “for-sale” signs have now returned. This time Johns Island will participate in the area-wide growth that is about to occur.



Some say that there are no real traffic problems on Johns Island. There are lots of places in the region that are more heavily populated and have more traffic. However, a problem already exists. The Sea Islands of Kiawah and Seabrook, with their surrounding development, are major sources of employment in the region, providing jobs for about 11,000 area citizens as contractors, service workers, suppliers, and shop keepers at Freshfields and Bohicket Marina, as well as town, Resort, and Club employees. Freshfields shoppers add still more traffic. In addition, there are more than 100,000 island visitors during the course of a year for vacation and recreation--golf, tennis, boating, and birding--or just to relax on the beaches. While the islands have more than 6,000 homes, residents actually account for less than 10% of daily trips. By 2030, total traffic to and from Kiawah and Seabrook is expected to average more than 20,000 trips per day.

In addition, more than 10,000 “commute-to-work” trips per day are forecast for Johns Island residents who live to the south and east of Maybank Highway and work off-island. While Sea Islands workers are coming onto the island to work, these Johns Island residents are headed to jobs off the island. About two-thirds of these jobs are in Charleston, Mount Pleasant, James Island or West Ashley. What’s worse, the population in this portion of Johns Island can double without a single change to the current zoning. For example, there is the direct impact of the Beach Company's planned development in the vicinity of Mullet Hall. Over 1,000 units for residential, recreational and commercial use were discussed in last June's Post and Courier article about County

Council's approval of the project, and there are other projects as well. With Johns Island's population estimated at 15,000, this could result in an increase of more than 10%, without planned expansion of the road system to handle this additional traffic.

The fact is that congested roads are dangerous roads and congestion is reached at much lower traffic volumes on narrow country roads without shoulders than they are on freeways with wide lanes, adequate shoulders and no side interference. It is important to address this problem now while something can still be done—while open land still exists, and construction costs are still low.

Communities that don't plan for future growth will be forced to live out their future in poorly functioning, unattractive and degraded environments. Only if the community acts now can we provide the safe, attractive infrastructure needed to retain the rural character of Johns Island.

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*For more information see: [www.supportthegreenway.org](http://www.supportthegreenway.org).*