

THE COUNTY LINE



Commissioner Wayne Harris, District 1

\$300 Million Would Go a Long Way to Meet Transportation Needs

Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery grants, or what is commonly referred to as the TIGER Grant. The TIGER Grant is a request by Okaloosa County of almost \$300 million for projects through the *American Recovery Act (Stimulus)* money that could have a significant impact economically and to our North-South transportation needs.

These projects are as follows:

- SR 85 Interchange (overpass) at Duke Field (An add on to the TPO priority list)
- SR 85 6-lane Widening from Duke Field, to just south of PJ Adams
- SR 85 6-Lane Widening from SR123 to Duke Field
- SR 85 6-Lane Widening from SR 20 to SR 123
- Park and Rides at SR 85 in Crestview and Niceville
- SR 123 4-Lane Widening from SR 85 S to SR 85 N
- Mid-Bay Bridge Connector from SR 123 to SR 85
- SR 85 Interchange at the Mid-Bay Bridge Connector a “Shovel Ready project that realigns Mid-Bay Bridge from White Point Road to Range Road, eventually connecting Highway 20 to 285 and 285 to 85.
- Alternative Corridors Study from Shoal River to US 90 – To look at alternate routes equivalent of six-lanes

We could sit and debate the political “good and bad aspects” of the TIGER Grant, but while we do that it could very well pass us by, and I am not one for letting any opportunity pass by that could add a significant economic impact to our county and our region, as well as alleviate some of our transportation issues.

The wisdom of the above projects is self-evident, the economic and transportation impact will only be felt after most or all are complete. But if estimates are correct, over 46,000 people will be employed in the completion of the projects bringing billions of dollars to our county and our region. These are not numbers, if accurate, that we should politically debate.

Will it happen? I can't say for sure. By all estimates we have a 75 percent or better chance. I can tell you that if we sat and argued the political aspects of the TIGER Grant and let it pass then we would have a 0 percent chance of success. You choose. We can debate later.

We'll know in January or February 2010. Even if we get only a part and we can create jobs and better infrastructure for our transportation needs, then we win. If you have more questions or need more information then give us a call or check out our web site, www.co.okaloosa.fl.us.

Vice-Chairman Wayne Harris
850-689-5030, wharris@co.okaloosa.fl.us