

Proposing Off-Island Parking and a Free Shuttle Service

800 words

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Life presents you with motivational moments.

"My thoughts are to have fewer vehicles on the island. Vacationers should park offsite, and ride free shuttles [electric] from secure-parking areas [across the bridge]. Orange Beach has become a very expensive parking lot," said Ian Boles, a resident of Orange Beach in an email.

Developing a strategy for off-island parking with free shuttles makes sense, eliminating the need for a Flyover Bridge west of the Foley Beach Express, and the proposed Wolf Bay Bridge by Doc's.

Imagine taking the \$87 Million allocated by the State of Alabama for the Flyover Bridge, and the \$60 Million earmarked by the City of Orange Beach for the Wolf Bay Bridge, using those funds to lower the environmental impact of traffic. Electric buses, recharged by solar panels, running every five minutes along the Beach Road (Hwy. 182), Canal Road (Hwy. 180), and Orange Beach Blvd (Hwy. 161), minimizing the congestion problem.

We must create several secure parking areas off the island for vacationers, enhanced by Orange Beach's family-friendly atmosphere, simultaneously providing better control over the visitor experience.

City Managers do it at Beaver Creek, Davos, and Disney. Why not here?

The city is growing at a phenomenal rate, outstripping infrastructure resources for traffic and boat launches. The Council must find innovative solutions that do not include more parking per condo bedroom, minimizing gridlock on the island.

Crafting a 2030 Plan with off-site transfers is vital, engaging with City Council, businesses, and residents, creating policies for the future of parking in Orange Beach, perhaps imitating the example of other successful resort cities.

"From timely shuttle buses to complimentary door-to-door transportation, getting around Beaver Creek is easy," according to a report on the Beaver Creek web site (<https://www.beavercreek.com/explore-the-resort/about-the-resort/getting-around.aspx>).

"Complimentary standard parking [off-site] is available to Guests," according to a report on Disney World (<https://disneyworld.disney.go.com/guest-services/parking/>).

The key issue is Mayor Tony Kennon, refusing to have a publicly viewable 2030 Plan, as if the future is an undecided secret. Mayor Kennon told Fox10 News, "You can't stop the growth. It's coming whether you like it or not." Are the constituents comfortable, knowing their City Council has an insatiable appetite for big developments and the dollars they bring without consideration to the quality of life?

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A 2030 Plan should not be considered a threat to elected officials. Rather a blue print, providing a venue for meaningful discussions from residents and businesses before adoption.

“All I know is we need a road through the State Park,” said Mayor Tony Kennon in an interview with John Mullen of the Lagniappe, putting commerce ahead of environmental impact, supporting development of the natural resource the State Park was created to protect.

Exploitation of the State Park seems to be his real plan, exposing this protected area to development. Luckily the Deep-Water Horizon Settlement Team blocked his proposed roadway across the State Park for 20 years, putting his caucus “in check” for the immediate future.

Some will argue Mayor Kennon already has a plan, widening Canal Road, building a Flyover Bridge, and constructing a span across Wolf Bay. Throwing concrete and asphalt at the traffic problem is short sighted, simply hoping it goes away. Orange Beach has had no professional infrastructure studies done by independent-academic bodies. Professional-planning research (aside from ALDOT) is the start of the solution.

The Orange Beach Police Jurisdiction (PJ) stretches from the Foley Beach Express to Pirates’ Cove, including many agricultural areas suitable for parking north of the Intracoastal Waterway, according to the GIS Map from Community Development (http://maps.digitalmapcentral.com/production/VECommunityView/cities/orangebeach_al/index.aspx#).

Respectfully, I propose the city debate off-site parking, because politics is the art of the possible. Elected Officials must undertake feasibility studies by multiple universities, buying non-wetland areas north of the Intracoastal as loading points for environmentally-friendly electric busses, transporting tourists to and from the island, as if Orange Beach were a theme-park resort.

ENDS.

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Disclosure: The views, thoughts, and opinions expressed in the text belong solely to the author. I have no business relationship with any company whose stock is mentioned in this article.