



6601 Main Street • Miami Lakes, Florida 33014  
Office: (305) 364-6100 • Fax: (305) 558-8511  
Website: [www.miamilakes-fl.gov](http://www.miamilakes-fl.gov)

## Memorandum

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Date: August 25, 2015 (Revised September 25, 2015)

From: Brandon R. Schaad, AICP, LEED AP  
Director of Planning

To: Alex Rey  
Town Manager

Re: Summary of Town of Miami Lakes 2015 Transportation Summit

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On July 31, 2015, the Town of Miami Lakes hosted a Transportation Summit bringing together the relevant stakeholders and transportation professionals from regional agencies, to brainstorm and discuss ideas to relieve traffic congestion and mobility issues in the Town. The impetus for this event was direction from the Town Council. Many individuals and organizations participated in the Summit, including but not limited to District 13 County Commissioner Esteban Bovo, the Mayor and Town Council members of the Town of Miami Lakes, the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), the Miami-Dade Expressway Authority, Miami-Dade County Public Works, Miami-Dade County Transit, the Miami-Dade Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), Miami-Dade County Public Schools, South Florida Commuter Services (SFCS), as well as Town civil/traffic engineering consultants Kimley-Horn and Associates and Corradino and Associates.

While traffic is a perennial issue in many communities, anecdotal evidence suggests the problem has worsened significantly in recent months in the Town of Miami Lakes. Furthermore, resident and business surveys conducted as part of the Town's adoption of a new Strategic Plan show that is the largest concern and complaint among residents and businesses, by a wide margin. Recently-gathered traffic counts and analysis show that the Town experiences major peak hour congestion on Miami Lakes Drive, particularly west of the Palmetto Expressway, with related severe congestion on NW 77<sup>th</sup> Court, NW 79<sup>th</sup> Avenue and roads that directly connect with these. At the same time, while traffic counts show that NW 67<sup>th</sup> Avenue is within an acceptable level of service, it is obvious to regular users that this is not the case (the disconnect between traffic counts and actual congestion is likely related to its intersection with the Palmetto Expressway at the northern end of the Town).

While the Town in many ways enjoys the fruits of proactive planning from decades ago, elements of its basic development pattern contribute to its current transportation problem and make solutions difficult to find. While the multitude of highways that come together in, and in the vicinity of, Miami Lakes make it



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relatively accessible, it is nevertheless difficult to move through the Town, due to a lack of connectivity both internally and externally. Although the Town is 3.5 miles from east to west, there are only three surface streets that transverse the Town from north to south (NW 57<sup>th</sup> Avenue, NW 67<sup>th</sup> Avenue and NW 87<sup>th</sup> Avenue). There are a few other instances where access in one direction exists, but I-75, the Gratigny Expressway, the Palmetto Expressway and Opa-Locka Airport all serve as barriers to effective external connectivity. Internally, the Palmetto Expressway divides the eastern and western halves of the Town, with the only crossing at Miami Lakes Drive. Further, development on the north and south sides of Miami Lakes Drive just west of the Palmetto Expressway were poorly coordinated, resulting in misaligned roads and therefore the existence of five signalized intersections and two unsignalized intersections (seven in total) in the space of one-half mile (and more acutely, six intersections in the space of approximately one-quarter mile). Gated and blocked roads in the northwest quadrant of Town shift traffic to other east-west ways, including Miami Lakes Drive.

In terms of non-automobile mobility, the Town has a generally good network of sidewalks and other pedestrian facilities (with some weaknesses), but is more or less lacking in bicycle infrastructure. The Town recently approved the Greenways and Trails Master Plan, seeking to address this issue. Transit ridership, as evinced by ridership on the Town's local Moover service, is growing rapidly but is still low.

The Summit included presentations by most of the agencies present, which outlined their own plans that will affect transportation in the Town, and an opportunity for questions and interaction between agencies, leading to improved coordination. Significant future improvements included the forthcoming addition of express lanes on the Palmetto Expressway and I-75, a project that includes proposed intersection improvements at Miami Lakes Drive and NW 67<sup>th</sup> Avenue, where there are exit/entrance ramps for the Palmetto Expressway. In addition, the Miami-Dade Expressway Authority plans to extend the Gratigny Expressway westward to the Florida Turnpike, a project which would ultimately make an expressway connection between I-95 and the Turnpike.

Following presentations and questions, Summit participants were asked to form two groups, one of which focused on brainstorming solutions for the west side of Miami Lakes, and the other for the east side of Town. Ideas from these brainstorming sessions are as follows:

#### **East**

- Transit-only entrances onto expressways from a park and ride lot at Miami Lakes Drive/Palmetto Expressway
- Improve carrying capacity of 57<sup>th</sup> Avenue, including removal of traffic lights and capacity expansions, with the goal of shifting traffic from the more constrained NW 67<sup>th</sup> Avenue
- Staggering of school schedules
- Palmetto Expressway underpasses at NW 146<sup>th</sup> Street and/or at the "Big Bend" to improve east-west connectivity



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- Creation of an exclusive transit lane on NW 67<sup>th</sup> Avenue, perhaps changing from southbound in the morning to northbound in the afternoon
- Transit signal priority at intersections
- Queue jumps for transit at intersections
- Extending NW 59<sup>th</sup> Avenue south to Miami Lakes Drive
- Creating a standard of an eight foot sidewalk for all new road construction/refurbishment
- Densification of three locations along Miami Lakes Drive (Town Center, NW 151<sup>st</sup> Street and vicinity of NW 79<sup>th</sup> Ct) with fast bus service between the three.

#### **West**

- Improved signalization/Smart signal technology at Miami Lakes Drive/Palmetto Expressway
- Increase traffic control police officers during peak hours on Miami Lakes Drive.
- Bob Graham Education Center staggered hours/drop off times
- Increased marketing of the Moover
- Educate motorists to use Commerce Way, rather than 77<sup>th</sup> Court

Together with the analysis by Town Staff and consultants, as well as recommendations already presented in the 2013 Commute Trip Reduction Plan (CTRP) and 2014 Greenways and Trails Master Plan and plans presented at the Summit by the participating agencies, the ideas generated by these breakout sessions have been synthesized into five Strategies, with a brief explanation/analysis of each.

#### **Strategy #1: Improve Transit and Pedestrian Mobility**

Many of the ideas suggested involve improving pedestrian and transit mobility, which can help provide an alternative to contending with gridlocked traffic (at least for some trips), as well as reduce overall demand for automobile travel and thereby reduce traffic congestion. Improving pedestrian mobility – making walking a safe, feasible and attractive option – means not only providing appropriate infrastructure, but also ensuring that land use policies contribute to the creation of walkable environments. Transit mobility, meanwhile, depends heavily on not only the quality of transit service and transit infrastructure (i.e. bus shelters), but also on the level of walkability near the beginning and end of the transit trip, since nearly all transit users are pedestrians at those points in their trip.

On the infrastructure side, the Town has adopted the Greenways and Trails Master Plan, with a total estimated cost of about \$6 million. Some projects in this planned network are either already constructed or have funding committed, as shown on the map in Exhibit A (the portion of the NW 170<sup>th</sup> Street Greenway between NW 82<sup>nd</sup> Avenue and NW 77<sup>th</sup> Court has now been constructed). Additionally, the recently-adopted Town Center Zoning District Ordinance aims to ensure that Town Center, currently the most walkable area in Miami Lakes, will maintain and improve its walkability through requiring wider sidewalks and pedestrian-friendly design of private development projects. One significant barrier to the



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success of Town Center as the Town's primary walkable center is the County-controlled NW 67<sup>th</sup> Avenue that bisects it. This street includes eleven foot wide lanes and, while it does feature relatively good street tree coverage, it lacks on-street parking or many of the other features that would slow down cars and thereby make the area safer and more inviting for pedestrians. There is also only one sanctioned crossing of NW 67<sup>th</sup> Avenue (at Main Street) for the entirety of the approximately two-thirds of a mile that it runs through Town Center. The result is that without effective pedestrian integration of the two halves, Town Center cannot reach its full potential, and is less attractive as a walkable, transit-conducive center. One discussion at the Summit focused on the potential to connect these two halves, specifically by adding two pedestrian crossing points and/or reducing lane widths from eleven feet to ten feet, in order both to slow traffic and to reduce pedestrian crossing widths. Engineers from Miami-Dade County's Traffic Engineering Division were of the opinion that doing so would worsen the vehicular level of service on NW 67<sup>th</sup> Avenue, though I strongly disagree with this conclusion, for reasons that I will detail elsewhere.

Additionally, the Town Council recently endorsed the highly related concept of Complete Streets, directing staff to integrate a Complete Streets policy into the upcoming Strategic Plan. While Complete Streets is a broad concept that can be implemented in a range of different ways, its essential thrust is to provide infrastructure for not only automobiles, but also for pedestrians, bicyclists and transit users. One way that a Complete Streets policy begins to come into play is in proposed infrastructure improvements, which all too often try to add automobile capacity, without taking into account the consequences this can have on other modes of transportation. This only serves to make those other modes less feasible, increase auto dependence and contribute to the "need" for still more capacity enhancements – a vicious cycle. It is essential for the Town to bear the Complete Streets concept in mind as it considers the improvements proposed to intersections of the Palmetto Expressway with Miami Lakes Drive and NW 67<sup>th</sup> Avenue by the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) as part of the Palmetto Express project (currently in the Project Development and Environment Study phase).

Tactics suggested at the Summit to improve pedestrian mobility, and closely related to Complete Streets, included ensuring accessibility throughout the Town according to the standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), as well as increasing the standard sidewalk widths on arterial and collector roadways to ten feet. The Town has been awarded a grant for Fiscal Year 2018 that includes \$50,000 for an ADA Accessibility Study. Additionally, the Town is planning to crowd-source data gathering about "incomplete streets", such as missing or insufficient pedestrian infrastructure, via its mobile app. Capital funding will be required for implementation, though some of these improvements may be combined with the implementation of the Greenways and Trails Master Plan. Other potential sources of funding/implementation include a Code amendment requiring developers to (for example) build any missing sections of sidewalk adjacent to their development, as well as Code changes currently under study to replace the traffic concurrency system with a new system to require mitigation for transportation impacts of development/redevelopment.



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One idea conceived at the Summit is to identify future walkable “hubs” along Miami Lakes Drive (from east to west: the area north of Miami Lakes Drive along NW 151<sup>st</sup> Street and NW 153<sup>rd</sup> Street; Town Center; and, on both sides of Miami Lakes Drive between NW 77<sup>th</sup> Court and NW 82<sup>nd</sup> Avenue), and re-imagine the Town’s Moover service to run frequent trips between these areas. Staff believes that these areas either have (in the case of Town Center) or show significant potential for (in the other two instances) a high level of walkability. The Comprehensive Plan identifies an approximately 10 acre area at the northwest corner of NW 87<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Miami Lakes Drive for commercial development, and this location might be added to this transit/hub corridor. In this case, though, it would be advisable to encourage or require a more walkable and transit-friendly style of development in this location than the current approved site plan shows. The merits of this idea include that making the Moover more frequent would make it more attractive and presumably increase ridership, that it would provide better connections to Miami-Dade Transit routes (none of which currently cross the Palmetto Expressway east to west) and that walkable hubs could significantly reduce car trips by making commuting via transit a more feasible alternative and make walking feasible for many more trips. Negatives include that the redevelopment required to make the NW 151<sup>st</sup> Street area the west of the Palmetto areas walkable are fairly long term, and that changing the Moover service in this way would no longer directly serve the schools, a large portion of its current ridership.

There are a number of other ideas regarding transit mobility that are included in other strategies below. An additional idea from the Summit, though, is to place “queue jumps” for buses at strategic locations. A queue jump is essentially an extra lane for exclusive use by transit vehicles that allow these vehicles to pass the queue at an intersection. These queue jumps have proved to be successful in many places by keeping buses on schedule and making transit a more attractive alternative. However, the method also has a public perception problem, as drivers see a lane that is often “empty” and that they feel could be used to move more cars, even in cases where the buses using the lane actually carry more people than an automobile lane.

**Strategy #2: Improve Distribution of Traffic (Spatially and Temporally)**

Largely because of the Town’s lack of sufficient external connectivity, those connections that do exist (and often also feature a freeway interchange) act like a funnel, as traffic from a relatively wide catchment collects onto them to squeeze through a narrow opening, resulting in acute congestion at these points. Potential solutions include finding ways to spatially and temporally distribute this traffic in a more optimal way. For example, NW 67<sup>th</sup> Avenue handles a large volume of traffic simply “passing through” the Town. It was suggested that NW 57<sup>th</sup> Avenue, which is far less of a “character” street and tends to feature conventional, auto-oriented and unwalkable uses along it, could have infrastructure changes to handle more traffic at a higher rate of speed, thereby shifting some trips away from NW 67<sup>th</sup> Avenue.



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These enhancements might include additional lanes and removing traffic lights and/or extended green lights.

Additionally, as the Miami-Dade Expressway Authority extends the Gratigny Expressway west to the Florida Turnpike, opportunities may exist to create new interchanges of the Gratigny with NW 67<sup>th</sup> Avenue and with NW 87<sup>th</sup> Avenue, lessening the need to use the Palmetto Expressway and Miami Lakes Drive.

Regarding timing, this strategy also involves a more optimal distribution of traffic throughout the day, reducing peak hour congestion. There were several observations during the Transportation Summit that traffic congestion seems to be much worse when schools are in session, prompting calls to adjust school hours so as not to coincide with rush hour. School hours are set by the School District, an independent entity.

Reducing peak hour automobile trips is also the primary focus of the Commute Trip Reduction Plan (CTRP), a study completed in 2013 based on a commuter survey and extensive analysis that provides a set of transportation demand management (TDM) recommendations. The recommendations include a close partnership with South Florida Commuter Services (SFCS) to promote and provide information to commuters about carpooling/vanpooling options, emergency ride home information for carpoolers/transit users, commuter tax benefits, transit information, etc.; leading by example to reduce peak hour commuting by Town employees; identifying and targeting 25 sites that have the highest potential to reduce commuting trips to work with employers to develop and implement specific plans to reduce peak hour trips by their employees, to target for multimodal infrastructure improvements and potentially provide incentives; to adopt a TDM ordinance, which would make implementation of TDM strategies (i.e. compressed work week or flexible hours) mandatory for employers with over 50 employees; and, changes to the Comprehensive Plan and Land Development Code that would require features in new developments to encourage alternative commuting. The ongoing Alternative to Concurrency Study includes analysis of utilizing the strategies recommended in the CTRP as mitigation for transportation impacts of development.

### **Strategy #3: Improve East-West Connectivity**

The Town of Miami Lakes is divided approximately in half by the north-south portion of the Palmetto Expressway. The highway essentially acts like a river in many other cities, where people crossing from one side to the other must funnel into a limited number of crossings or chokepoints (i.e. bridges or, in this case, underpasses). Miami Lakes Drive is the only such crossing within the Town, and the only crossing for a mile in either directions (and those nearest crossings are marginal). Combined with other factors impacting Miami Lakes Drive west of the Palmetto (see discussion of the “trouble spots” under Strategy #4 below), this creates – according both to the data and anecdotally – the most severe instance of traffic



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congestion in Miami Lakes. A smaller, but still significant, east-west connectivity issue concerns the prevalence of blocked and/or gated streets in the northwest portion of the Town, which has the effect of forcing some east-west traffic in this area onto NW 170<sup>th</sup> Street and, more prevalently, onto Miami Lakes Drive.

The forthcoming construction on the Palmetto Expressway as part of the Palmetto Express project (primary purpose: adding express lanes), presents opportunities, as expressed at the Transportation Summit, that will likely not come again for several decades: to add one or more additional east-west crossing points. Two ideas were discussed in this regard:

1. Allow those exiting the northbound Palmetto Expressway at Miami Lakes Drive to access NW 77<sup>th</sup> Court (on the west side of the Palmetto Expressway) via an underpass of the Palmetto from the northbound frontage road, thereby bypassing Miami Lakes Drive.
2. Create an underpass of the Palmetto Expressway at NW 146<sup>th</sup> Street, which would primarily allow those workers in Business Park West who either commute from the east side of Miami Lakes or to points north/east via the Palmetto Expressway, to avoid the Palmetto/Miami Lakes Drive chokepoint. This improvement, by distributing crossing traffic to two different routes, would be even more effective if the northbound ramp/Palmetto Frontage Road were realigned/combined with NW 77<sup>th</sup> Avenue (which is currently lightly used), thereby reducing the number of intersections and further reducing friction points on Miami Lakes Drive.

In addition to providing an additional east-west crossing point, either of these ideas might also allow for less lanes/destruction of green space on Miami Lakes Drive, as currently included in FDOT plans as part of the Palmetto Express project. If so, this would help to preserve a community character more in keeping with Miami Lakes, as well as being more friendly to pedestrians and bicyclists, major goals expressed by the Town.

Another idea expressed is to improve greenway connectivity between the east and west sides of Town, largely via a street outside the Town's boundaries, NW 169<sup>th</sup> Street. The NW 170<sup>th</sup> Street Greenway is completed, the NW 77<sup>th</sup> Court Greenway south of Miami Lakes Drive is funded for Fiscal Year 2018, and, based upon conversations with FDOT, the portion of the NW 77<sup>th</sup> Court Greenway north of Miami Lakes Drive to NW 164<sup>th</sup> Street is likely to be funded and built on an accelerated basis. The most feasible way to connect these is via an FPL easement leading from NW 77<sup>th</sup> Court to NW 169<sup>th</sup> Street and connecting NW 169<sup>th</sup> Street to the NW 170<sup>th</sup> Street Greenway (a greenway along this easement is included in Miami-Dade County's Open Space Master Plan). Assuming this connection is made, it would be logical to utilize NW 169<sup>th</sup> Street to connect to NW 67<sup>th</sup> Avenue just north of the Town's boundary. The Town's Greenways and Trails Master Plan shows an off-road greenway on NW 67<sup>th</sup> Avenue, providing access to Miami Lakes Town Center and a funded greenway on Miami Lakeway.



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**Strategy #4: Targeted Improvements at Trouble Spots**

With one notable exception (redevelopment planning), ideas included in this Strategy seek to provide the most immediate relief for very specific problems, essentially making small investments or operational changes to wring the best possible performance from the current system, as opposed to making fundamental change. These ideas include the increased use of law enforcement personnel to direct traffic at peak times and improve flow through intersections, adding turn lanes or allowing turns from lanes where they are not currently allowed (specific suggestions include an additional right turn only lane on northbound NW 67<sup>th</sup> Avenue at NW 167<sup>th</sup> Street and allowing left turns from the right lane on southbound NW 79<sup>th</sup> Avenue onto eastbound Miami Lakes Drive, the latter of which is already under study) and adding adaptive signal technology, which allows traffic signals to adjust signal timing to respond to actual traffic conditions in real-time.

A more robust, but also more long term, idea is to create a redevelopment plan for the Miami Lakes Drive corridor from the Palmetto Expressway west to NW 82<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, addressing what has been identified as the Town’s most severe congestion problem by correcting some of its root problems (in addition to the lack of other east-west connections, as discussed elsewhere) that have been brought on by past lack of planning: namely that there are too many intersections in too short a span, and in some cases are not aligned on the north and south sides of Miami Lakes Drive. This type of redevelopment planning effort will require significant resources, and implementation would take a number of years and be dependent upon the private sector, likely with inducement through land use entitlements and/or public infrastructure improvements to leverage private investment. Along with creating additional east-west connection(s), this idea creates among the greatest opportunities of any discussed in this memorandum, not only to vastly improve transportation, but also to create more valuable and economically beneficial land uses, and to create an aesthetic environment more in keeping with Miami Lakes at the Town’s most important and visible gateway. In any case, redevelopment of this area will occur at some point, and whether it is done in a piecemeal fashion or as part of a coordinated plan, with public and private sectors on the same “page,” depends on whether the Town takes a proactive approach.

**Strategy #5: Provide Mobility Alternatives for Intra-Town Trips**

Strategy #5 – Provide Mobility Alternatives for Intra-Town Trips – consists of a variety of ideas or ways to get to and from destinations within the Town by ways other than single-occupant vehicles. Some ideas include focusing on build-out of the greenways called for in the Greenways and Trails Master Plan, particularly safe pedestrian and bicycle paths to schools; working with the School District and parents of schoolchildren to facilitate carpooling for school drop-off and pickup trips; providing shuttle services to Town events; finding an alternative to the current on-demand bus service, which largely caters to seniors (likely via car sharing services such as Uber, Lyft, etc., assuming that Miami-Dade County legalizes these services); and, increasing the hours of operation of the Town Moover, which is currently limited to only



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weekdays between the hours of 6:00 AM – 10:00 AM, and 2:15 PM – 7:00 PM. By expanding the Moover’s hours, the service may become more attractive and/or feasible for some, thereby increasing its use.

### **Conclusion**

As noted above, traffic congestion appears to be the most pressing local issue for Miami Lakes residents and businesses, and there is a widespread perception that the problem is worsening. These concerns and urgency for action led to the Town’s Transportation Summit. It is important to remember, though, that neither this problem, nor calls for action, are limited to Miami Lakes, as demonstrated by a recent series of articles in the *Miami Herald* describing the situation (e.g. “No Way Out: For drivers caught in gridlock, little relief down the road,” May 17, 2015; “Business Slowdown: Traffic jams up South Florida’s economy,” May 17, 2015) and potential out-of-the-box solutions (e.g. “County needs to raise \$102 million for rail line west,” July 28, 2015). Based upon suggestions gathered through the Transportation Summit and the process around it, there does exist potential opportunities to improve the traffic congestion situation in the short term at the margins – basically, ways to get the best possible performance from the existing transportation system. To make a more dramatic improvement in mobility, however, the inescapable reality is that fundamental change in land use and transportation systems are needed, and these will take longer to accomplish.

Besides the public consciousness and official attention being paid to the issue of transportation, there is another major reason that the Town is at a moment of opportunity on the issue: the upcoming Palmetto Express project, currently in the PD&E stage, that will include significant reconstruction of the Palmetto Expressway to accommodate the addition of express lanes. For example, if the Town were to determine that establishing an additional east-west crossing point is in its best interest, this may be its last realistic opportunity to do so for several decades. The project also includes proposed major changes at intersections where the Expressway has access points – in the Town’s case, at Miami Lakes Drive, NW 67<sup>th</sup> Avenue and NW 57<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The ultimate design of these changes will have large impacts on mobility within the Town, and Town leaders must think carefully about the future in evaluating these impacts not only on traffic but also on its “complete streets” concept of pedestrian, bicycle and transit mobility, and its impacts on aesthetics and community character.

The Town, thanks to thoughtful and proactive planning, began as something unique, resisting the bland uniformity that gripped the development of most South Florida suburbs. Unfortunately, pressure to reimpose the bland uniformity is constant and pervasive, manifesting in the transportation realm with calls for more pavement at the expense of green space, road designs that neglect community character and insistence that faster is better and engineering standards that make it difficult or impossible to create walkable places and thereby ensure that transit is mostly for those who have no other choice. The cruel irony of such policies is that, for all the sacrifices they demand of aesthetics and non-auto mobility, they



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consistently fail to achieve their goals, as clearly demonstrated by the traffic crisis that exists throughout South Florida and in too many places around the country. At the same time, by ensuring that other modes of transportation are infeasible, dangerous and/or unattractive, these policies force us all to endure the traffic nightmare they have created, and to contribute to it. To create a better future – to not be satisfied with slowly morphing more and more into the conventional patterns that pervade in surrounding areas – the Town must reassert its legacy of proactive planning, demand better and insist on being unique. As the adage goes, “Have a plan, or be a part of someone else’s.”

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**Exhibit A**

