When Lake County Commissioner Welton Cadwell was tapped as chairman of the new Central Florida Expressway Authority (CFX) in July 2014, he was lauded for his regional approach, no-nonsense style and understanding of what the traveling public wants — the freedom to get where they want, when they want and how they want more efficiently.

One month earlier, Gov. Rick Scott had signed Senate Bill 230 to create CFX, superseding the existing Orlando-Orange County Authority and broadening its scope. The agency’s board was increased from five to nine members, jurisdictions were expanded to also include Lake, Osceola and Seminole counties; and multimodal responsibilities were added.

Cadwell, a Lake County Commissioner since 1992, is charged with charting a new course for the agency. At the top of the list is rebuilding public trust. Cadwell talks about progress and purpose since that time:

In less than a year, Welton Cadwell has accomplished much in steering the Central Florida Expressway Authority on a course to the future.

by MICHAEL CANDELARIA

FORWARD FLORIDA: YOU ARE COMING UP ON YOUR ONE YEAR ANNIVERSARY SERVING AS CHAIR OF THE CENTRAL FLORIDA AUTHORITY. WHAT WOULD YOU SAY IS MOST NOTABLE ABOUT THIS NEW BOARD?

WELTON CADWELL: Outside of me, there are real smart people [chuckle]. Seriously, something momentous is happening at CFX, and I believe it’s because of the leadership and make-up of this board. First, the state Legislature was smart in mandating that an elected official serve from each of the four counties — Lake, Orange, Osceola, and Seminole — and the City of Orlando, alongside three governor appointees. This is good not only for public accountability, but also it forces us to look at issues from a regional, not a county, lens. Think about it. Our future project decisions now cover an area larger than the state of Delaware and impacts more than 2.2 million residents. The scale alone forces us to think regionally and really plan ahead. We’re not talking about what is needed this year or even what is needed this decade. This is about what the region needs to stay competitive and be mobile for the next 20 or 40 years.

Second, I have been around long enough to have worked or served with each of these elected folks on other boards or committees. Let’s say there wasn’t an courting period. We jumped in starting day one and got down to business. The last thing I would say is that this board cares. Caring, it turns out, takes effort. It’s raising the bar to the point where we really got to stretch. Some days it’s uncomfortable, but we all agree it’s worth it.

FF: FOOT’S CONSTRUCTION ON THE 42.3 MILE CENTRAL FLORIDA EXPRESSWAY PROJECT SEARING UP. SIX YEARS OF CONSTRUCTION WILL HAVE A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON PEOPLE WHO NEED THEIR CARS TO COMMUTE TO WORK. DOES CFX HAVE PLANS TO EASE THE TRANSITION?

WC: It was Seminole County Commissioner Brenda Carey and Governor Appointee Michael Scheeringa who asked the same questions months ago, especially since many Seminole residents take I-4 to work. And, what the board talked about is if there is a perception out there that ‘I can’t afford to use the Expressway.’ So we wanted to do everything we can to help them out. CFX staff got to work and presented several options that were in line with our board commitments. We pushed for discount tolls for volume drivers during the construction period and dropping the minimum opening balance on E-PASS accounts. The board approved it. And, starting July 1, 2015, those drivers taking S.R. 414, S.R. 429 from Apopka to Disney and S.R. 417 from University Boulevard to International Drive will see relief — both in time and money.

FF: CFX SECURED A $194 MILLION TIFIA LOAN AFTER WORKING ON IT FOR YEARS. TIFIA STANDS FOR THE TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE FINANCE AND INNOVATION ACT AND IS ADMINISTERED BY FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION. THESE FEDERAL FUNDS WILL HELP SPEED UP CFX’S PORTION OF THE $3.6 BILLION WEKIVA PARKWAY PROJECT, POSSIBLY TAKING 18 MONTHS OFF THE SCHEDULE. THAT MEANS WE WOULD BE FINISHED WITH OUR SECTIONS IN 2018 — WHICH WILL HELP COMPLETE THE BELTWAY AROUND METRO ORLANDO MUCH SOONER THAN EXPECTED.

I would like to add that Wekiva Parkway is one of those transformational projects transportation folks like to talk about in trade journals. I won’t get technical, but let’s just say we’re completing the beltway around Metro Orlando, giving customers another choice to get to work, get home or get wherever they want. It’s one of the projects that my grandchildren’s children will talk about, wondering what life was like without the Wekiva Parkway.

FF: YOUR 2040 MASTER PLAN HAS BEGUN. HOW DOES THAT PLAN MESH WITH THE CENTRAL FLORIDA EXPRESSWAY AUTHORITY’S BROADER POWERS THAT NOW ALSO ENCOMPASS MULTIMODAL TRANSPORTATION?

WC: Our 2040 Master Plan is going to be created with community input across Central Florida — much further beyond traditional planning councils, transportation planning MPOs and chambers. Not only will we involve more people in the process, but also the scope will be larger because the legislature added multimodal to CFX’s mission. The timing coincidently couldn’t have been better. Look around you. All the talk in transportation circles centers on greater connectivity. Look no further than SunRail expansion, All Aboard Florida, OSA (Orlando International Airport) connections, Lynx’s Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), and the list goes on and on. Multimodal conversation is nothing new to this community. But what is new is that the region’s local tolling authority, CFX, now has a seat at the table. What that looks like? That’s for our customers, the community and the board to work out.

FF: THE END OF THE FORMER ORLANDO-ORANGE COUNTY EXPRESSWAY AUTHORITY WASN’T PRETTY, WITH ALL THE QUESTIONS ABOUT ETHICS. HOW DO YOU MAKE NEGATIVE PERCEPTIONS GO AWAY AND HAVE PEOPLE BELIEVE IN THE NEW CENTRAL FLORIDA EXPRESSWAY AUTHORITY?

WC: I would say that only in the last 60 days or so that all the TV stories haven’t started with “scandal” — We thought it might take a little longer. We’ve been talking about it. You just have to suck it up and realize that every article might start with the past. This is a new board and new agency that relates to our mission and how we do things. Fortunately we have inherited a solid organization and staff. I think we’re getting to a better place quicker, and I think hopefully with the work we’re doing and with the customer outreach we’re doing, we can show people that we care, that we’re truly engaged. I am looking forward to what the future holds for us.