

Responses to Citizen Comments

By Florida Department of Transportation

Comment: The published data in all of the studies reflect old data. There is no relevant data to reflect the current economic and prospective economic reality of this area. The initial survey of commuters is from 2004, the traffic counts are from June 2006, and the study on the economic impact on local businesses is based on two communities that are not comparable. You must be collectively unconscious to think that those years and a town in the mid-west reflect what is and will likely happen in this area. The banks continue to take the foreclosed homes and sell them to investors who can capitalize the banks instead of approving young families for small mortgages that yield 20% cash down payments. This will result in a continuation of a transient population, that affects the job market, school population and traffic flows. When young families are no longer the demographic jump-start for an area, retirees are the most likely demographic that will grow and they are not typically 9 to 5 commuters. They are volunteers and part time workers who want employment or entertainment closer to home.

Response: Traffic data used is from 2006 since that is when the study began. Project Development and Environment (PD&E) studies can take several years and look at a 20 year design life. It is not cost effective or practical to update traffic data continuously; growth patterns typically don't change dramatically when viewed over the design horizon. The studies done (Minnesota DOT and Lee County) to look at the effect on property values are intended for reference and were not done specifically for this project. They looked at before and after affects of similar projects on commercial property values; we could not find a similar study done regarding residential property.

Comment: The current situation has no prescient and using old data amounts to nothing more than an unwise guessing game, reaping no benefits to taxpaying citizens and causing economic and environmental harm to this area.

Response: The PD&E Study process follows standards set and accepted by the Florida Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration. Numerous intersections along Colonial Boulevard are currently failing and more will fail if no improvements are made. The resulting traffic congestion will result in economic and environmental harm to this area as well as reduced emergency response time, and higher crash rates are likely. In addition, opportunities for an expanded transit system will be limited. Business owners will be compensated for relocating their businesses and paid fair market value for the land and improvements. There are available commercial properties in the area, if not within the immediate Colonial Boulevard corridor itself for these businesses to relocate.

Comment: The importance of connecting Charlotte County is also questionable. The project will promote growth in a coastal area, which is unwise from an environmental standpoint. Taxpayers across the nation wonder why government would have a hand in helping homeowners after hurricanes and floods who are foolish enough to continue to build businesses and houses close to the water. State and local governments should be discouraging building near coastlines. The concept of building the Colonial expressway for evacuation purposes is like setting a fire to test out the fire equipment. Let's not start the fire. Access for east/west evacuation roads can be more direct than the prospect of the circuitous route of the proposed Colonial expressway.

Response: The project was developed using the 2030 long range transportation plan (LRTP) as its basis. The LRTP is developed by the Regional Planning Council and Metropolitan Planning Organization and the Colonial/Veterans/Burnt Store Corridor was shown as a need and the concept was adopted as part of the Bi-County Corridor study. The elements of the LRTP are generally adopted to handle expected growth rather than to promote it. The corridor will provide a direct evacuation route to I-75 for a large population in Lee and Charlotte Counties.

Comment: Additionally, the proposal to use McGregor Boulevard, a residential community is beyond reason. First, the City of Fort Myers has a traffic calming project was in place that will funnel downtown north/south traffic. The traffic calming project was part of an overall decision that came about when the City Council approved multiple 27 story condos near McGregor Blvd. That plan should be considered when assessing the future traffic of McGregor Blvd. See Saeed Kazemi, who was the former traffic engineer for the City of Fort Myers.

Response: Our estimates of traffic projections consider future land uses and population growth over the next 20 years. These projections do show moderate increases, and in some cases, minor decreases in traffic volumes on McGregor Boulevard when ramps connect to McGregor Boulevard from the west side, as with PD&E Study Alternative F, compared to PD&E Study Alternative D - which locates the ramps east of McGregor Boulevard with no new ramp connections to McGregor Boulevard. The increased (decreased) traffic volumes result in a degradation (improvement) in Level of Service of one letter grade. Both Alternatives still result in an acceptable level of Service on McGregor Boulevard.

Land acquisition costs for the roadway improvements are significantly lower with Alternative F since the ramps west of McGregor Boulevard are located on land already owned by Lee County. The impacts to businesses are also significantly lower for Alternative F since the footprint of the roadway improvements is significantly narrower east of McGregor Boulevard because the ramps are located west of McGregor Boulevard.

Comment: Second, the area of McGregor Blvd is mostly residential from College parkway bridge to down town Fort Myers. There are two commercial roads that run parallel to McGregor and are located less than a 1/2 mile and one mile from McGregor that could serve as a ramp to the bridge, Summerlin Rd and rte 41.

Response: Both Alternatives D and F take into consideration the capacity provided by McGregor Boulevard, Summerlin Road, and US 41, as well as every other major intersecting roadway out to the interstate. Both PD&E Study Alternatives D and F include frontage road connections to McGregor Boulevard, Summerlin Road, and US 41. However, developing a new ramp from these facilities to the Midpoint Bridge would cause significant new environmental and economic impacts since the area between these roads and the Caloosahatchee River is already densely developed.

Comment: Third, I have seen no study that indicates the prospective economic impact on the residential community.

Response: We could not find a similar study done regarding economic impacts on residential property. However, improvements to the corridor will result in improved mobility and increased transportation choices.