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Cape traffic upgrade costly

\$255 million price tag for downtown projects

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Nearly \$255 million would be needed today to pay for all the changes a consultant says will improve traffic flow and increase pedestrian safety in downtown Cape Coral.

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But the projects are divided into phases — a \$1.6 million first phase; \$121.1 million second phase and a \$122.2 million third phase.

The goal is to help the downtown district develop into a bustling area where residents could live, work and find entertainment options from bookstores to restaurants and shops. The city's Community Redevelopment Agency is working with developers to turn the vision into a reality.

"The cost is going to be so much more than what you've presented," Mayor Eric Feichthaler told Susan Joel, an engineer for Vanus Inc., the Tampa-based engineering firm that completed the study.

No budget constraints were placed on the study, said Vanus spokeswoman Susan Joel.

"We were asked to just deal with the traffic issues," Joel said.

Part of the cost comes in the form of homes and businesses that would have to be purchased to complete projects. One such project is a frontage road on the south side of Cape Coral Parkway that would loop under the Cape Coral Bridge and come back along the north side.

"Unfortunately, there are major improvements that have to be made to

deal with the traffic issues," Joel said.

Other improvements range from creating two new streets, placing roundabouts at eight intersections, a two-lane flyover over the Del Prado Boulevard-Cape Coral Parkway intersection and doubling the number of lanes on the Cape Coral Bridge.

At one time stormwater, parking and traffic issues were three main obstacles for the CRA, City Manager Terry Stewart said.

"The major stumbling block remains the traffic flow," he said.

Councilman Chris Berardi said he liked some of the first-phase projects such as removing parking and turn lanes on Cape Coral Parkway to help the traffic move. But the second-phase projects such as the frontage road concerned him, he said.

"There were far too many takings of property for my liking," Berardi said.

The impact of taking away parking on Cape Coral Parkway gave Councilwoman Dolores Bertolini pause.

"What happens to all those businesses?" Bertolini asked.

Feichthaler also questioned Joel on the benefits of building a regular overpass to take Cape Coral Parkway traffic over Del Prado Boulevard instead of building a two-lane flyover bridge over the intersection that would start near Southeast 46th Street and land near the Chamber of Commerce building.

Traffic seems to flow better once it gets through the intersection and is on its way to the bridge, Feichthaler said.

The flyover provides more benefit, Joel said, but the mayor had his doubts.

"It seems it will move problems to the east," Feichthaler said. "That's an enormous flyover. It's going a long, long way," said Feichthaler, who added that he'll review the numbers to see if it's more cost effective than an overpass.

The city's transportation staff will compile a final report with recommendations on how to proceed, said city traffic engineer Rashad Hanbali. The report should be ready in early August.

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