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## **Downtown traffic draws forum crowd** **Officials outline plans for lane, flow changes**

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Ask anyone trying to get across the Cape Coral Bridge from the canal city to Fort Myers at rush hour and they would agree — change is good.

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The same rang true at Thursday's public information session

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highlighting the proposed traffic improvements to the downtown area. The evening session took place at the La Venezia Ballroom on Club Square in Cape Coral.

"The traffic is what we are always complaining about," said Cape Coral resident Sylvia Keilman, 68. "I live on 45th Street and sometimes the traffic is so backed up at 47th and Del Prado that I have to take Midpoint Bridge to go to work in Fort Myers."

Of the more than 100 people who attended the session by 6:30 p.m., everyone spoken to agreed that traffic has gotten out of hand in the downtown area.

The information session's hosts, the Community Redevelopment Agency, the city's traffic department and their consultants put three, floor-to-ceiling aerial photos of the downtown area along the walls of the meeting room. The photos illustrated proposed changes to the area by time frame from 2006, 2015 and 2030.

Consultants Gray-Calhoun & Associates proposed almost 50 specific changes that could be implemented in 2006-2007. These changes included adding two temporary left-turn lanes on Del Prado for those turning east onto Cape Coral Parkway during morning rush hour.

The concrete median at the intersection would be leveled and to open up three right turn lanes to traffic coming from the bridge on Cape Coral Parkway to Del Prado Boulevard from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.

The four-lane section of Cape Coral Parkway would be turned into six lanes by using the parking lanes and right-turn-only lanes. Parking could be an option in off-peak hours.

Other innovations would move and change the timing of traffic signals in the area. It would allow more space between lights for vehicles to approach the intersection, said Rashad Hanbali, Cape Coral traffic

engineer.

The traffic study proposed midterm improvements that could be implemented by 2015. These proposals included but were not limited to widening Southeast 46th lane to four lanes and installing five roundabouts along it from Coronado Parkway to Southeast 17th Place.

It also proposed a frontage road extending under the Cape Coral Bridge to allow drivers to cross under Cape Coral Parkway instead of across it.

"It just seems to me that no matter what you do, traffic will back up because of the toll booths," Cape Coral attorney William Merchant said. "It looks practical but you hope it will work and not interfere with people staying and coming over to Cape Coral."

The Lee County Department of Transportation plans call replacing the toll plaza. When completed, the area will have 12 lanes instead of the current 10.

"That's not good enough," said Cape Coral resident Joe Lentini, 58. "The bridge has to be expanded."

The consultants proposed widening the bridge to eight lanes by 2030.

The plans looked good to John Miehle, 61, who said he faced similar problems when he was the Santa Monica, Calif., Police Department's chief of staff.

"An area similar to the CRA here in Santa Monica had similar traffic flow problems," Miehle said. "This looks promising, but I'm going to have to study it and take a while to digest it."

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