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Changes on way to ease traffic flow

Work set for Cape Coral Parkway, Del Prado

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Go. Stop. Switch lanes. Go. Stop. Honk the horn. Stop. Go back in the other lane. Stop.

The morning traffic heading east on Cape Coral Parkway and south on Del Prado Boulevard is a drag.

Coming back after work isn't a breeze either.

Mercedes, Ford Escorts, sport utility vehicles, and pickups form a line that stretches from the intersection's traffic lights west to Coronado Boulevard and sometimes beyond.

Waits can last more than 30 minutes heading east. Westbound moves faster, but it also lags.

But plans are being put in place to ease the traffic problems.

Working with the Lee County Department of Transportation, Cape Coral's Transportation Division plans to eliminate parking lanes on Cape Coral Parkway, make the road six lanes and increase turn lanes on Del Prado Boulevard.

The project became a joint plan because that part of Del Prado Boulevard remains a county road.

Adding lanes and moving turn lanes would help move the more than 48,000 vehicles that use the road every day, transportation planners said.

Steve Neff, city transportation manager, set the six-lane priority at the July 10 meeting of the Community Redevelopment Agency.

The redevelopment agency also supported moving the Veterans Memorial from the center median of Cape Coral Parkway to make way for the expanded lanes west of Del

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Privileged."

- Mike Quaintance, chamber executive director

Prado Boulevard.

The idea would be to refinish the memorial and place it in Bernie Braeden park next to the Cape Coral Chamber of Commerce building. There people could visit the memorial without risking their lives to get through the traffic on Cape Coral Parkway.

"I'd be honored to have the Veterans Memorial next to our building," said Mike Quaintance, chamber executive director. "Privileged."

The Veterans Memorial will stay put until city and county officials authorize the plans for the improvements.



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• Commuters wait Friday at the intersection of Del Prado Boulevard and Cape Coral Parkway.

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"It is my goal, with the approval of the (redevelopment) board to take the improvements to City Council for approval," Neff said. "Because we have another workshop with the CRA in August, it probably won't be until September."

The approval, design and bidding process could take a year before construction to remove the parking lanes begins, Neff said.

At least one business owner thinks the loss of about 50 parking spaces on Cape Coral Parkway's north side and 14 spaces on the south side will hurt downtown businesses.

"Big John's (shopping center) parking is maxed out," said Lou Simmons, owner of the Cape Dog Bakery. "No one is going to want to walk along the parkway with cars whizzing by next to the sidewalk. It doesn't make the street good for pedestrians. I thought that's what we want downtown."

Other business owners in the area, such as Stacie Lee at the Stacie Lee Nicole Salon, and Mark Moore, at The Dinner Bell restaurant, didn't think that it would make much difference.

Moore's restaurants sits on the north side of Cape Coral parkway.

"It is progress, I guess," Moore said. "If it will bring more business downtown it is good."

On the other side of the street Lee said she had plenty of parking in back.

"I don't think losing spaces on our (south) side of the street will hurt us," Lee said. "We don't open until 10 (a.m.) anyway."

The traffic study estimates a \$349,500 cost for the improvements, including median changes, traffic-line painting, pedestrian signals and other work.

Because the improvement plans call for both city and county roadwork, the county will share the cost. Details have to be worked out as to percentages, officials said.

"We have \$750,000 in our budget for the project in Cape Coral," said Amy Davies, county transportation spokeswoman.

The price probably will go up from the traffic study's estimate, Neff said.

"We have an opportunity to do more while we change the lanes," Neff said.

Instead of just grinding out the old lane striping paint and repainting, the entire section of Cape Coral Parkway could be repaved removing the broken and patched paving there now, Neff said.

"Short of building a new bridge, this is what we have to do," said John Jacobsen, redevelopment board chairman.

When complete the Cape Coral Parkway would lose all street parking along the downtown. The road's section from west of Coronado Boulevard almost to the bridge would be three lanes in each direction.

The two left-turn lanes heading north on Coronado off Cape Coral Parkway would be reduced to one left turn lane.

Driving south on Del Prado Boulevard to make a left on Cape Coral Parkway to the bridge could get easier when the project adds another eastbound turn lane. Instead of two there would be three.

Heading east there would be three lanes slowly merging into two to get over the Cape Coral Bridge, Neff said. The recent county decision to remove the toll booths from eastbound lanes of the two toll bridges that feed traffic in and out of the city could play right into helping traffic flow from the intersection over the bridge.

The tolls will be \$2 heading west, starting Nov. 1, for a year test of the system before a final decision is made.

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