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## Study recommends S.E. 46th Lane widening

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Easing traffic congestion for drivers trying to get across the Cape Coral Bridge each morning could affect more than the intersection of Del Prado Boulevard and Cape Coral Parkway.

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A host of other suggestions that could transform downtown into a more vibrant and pedestrian-friendly place are included in a consultant's report that is now undergoing its final fine-tuning by the city's staff.

But it also could lead to a radical transformation for neighborhoods along Southeast 46th Lane.

The study recommends widening 46th Lane from two to a divided, four-lane street running from Del Prado Boulevard west to Santa Barbara Boulevard.

The study looked for ways to improve traffic flow in the downtown community redevelopment district. The city, through its Community Redevelopment Agency, hopes to turn downtown into an area where the city of 166,000 can live, work, shop, dine out and generally enjoy life. The city will allow up to 11,000 housing units to exist in the 432-acre district.

The morning commute through the district is a major encounter with congestion. Improvements to the Cape Coral Bridge and the intersection of Del Prado Boulevard and Cape Coral Parkway are the most talked about changes so far. But drivers are using streets parallel to Cape Coral Parkway to escape the jam.

Widening 46th Lane could help, according to the study.

But doing that would require crossing the Rubicon and San Carlos canals.

On the way it would pass through the middle of the 12-unit Brian Court condominiums and through single-family neighborhoods established before Cape Coral even became a city.

“My biggest concern is do they have the coffers to support it. It’s a long way in the future before our street is in jeopardy,” said Lucy Costa, 43, who lives in a single-family area toward the western end of 46th Lane. “It just seems so pie in the sky right now.”

Lydia Thiersmann, 78, however, lives in a condominium just west of Del Prado. Condominiums fill the north side of 46th Lane and business the south side. The street, while still two lanes, also is wider. Adding two lanes would add to a speeding problem already present especially during the morning rush hour, she said.

“It’s already a racetrack. How would we get off our property,” Thiersmann said.

The change might help businesses in the area, but not the residents, she said.

Yet John Jacobsen, a downtown businessman and chairman of the CRA’s board, said he’s not sold on the idea of diverting traffic to other streets.

“Spreading cars to other roads is just going to annoy people and may not be good for business,” said Jacobsen.

The street is considered a midterm improvement that will take some traffic off Cape Coral Parkway.

“Southeast 46th Lane was chosen because it connects to the east side of Del Prado Boulevard and it is outside the core area of the existing business development, which oftentimes has the higher concentration of pedestrian traffic,” according to the executive summary of a study by the engineering consulting firm of Vanus Inc. of Tampa.

Midterm improvements should be made as soon as money is available, according to the study. They should make alternate routes available and make it easier for pedestrians to cross streets. Eight roundabouts — five on Southeast 47th Terrace and three on Miramar Street — are suggested in the plan as a way to reduce the risk of accidents and to help pedestrians.

A direct route from Santa Barbara to Del Prado Boulevard would be a tempting alternative to Cape Coral Parkway of 47th Terrace and its stop

signs or roundabouts, said Lisa Carlson, 41, who lives in a residential neighborhood on Southeast 46th Street, one block south of 46th Lane.

"We need more facts," Carlson said.

"It would give us another corridor. There would be less cars than on Cape Coral Parkway so it would be an advantage," said her husband, Richard Carlson.

But safety, noise and property issues might outweigh those advantages for people who live on 46th Lane and other nearby streets, Richard Carlson said.

Details of the study were scheduled to be presented to the city council during a workshop on Monday. Staff will take the council's comments and prepare a final report and recommendations for the council, said city engineer Rashad Hanbali. The presentation probably won't be scheduled until August at the earliest because the council will be on its summer break from mid-June to mid-July.

It will be up to the council to decide what recommendations from the study should be put in place. Major new projects, however, may be delayed depending on what the state Legislature does next month about property tax reforms.

The city may have to adjust its budget to cover a reduction of \$52 million in property taxes, according to one analysis by the city.

People need to get the facts to have a reasonable debate on the traffic plan, Costa said.

"The bottom line is they have to do something about traffic," Costa said. "I hope people get involved and be aware."

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