

Palm Bay wants beltway built now

FLORIDA TODAY (Melbourne, FL) - Monday, July 15, 2002

Author: Staff, Brad Buck

By Brad Buck

Florida Today

PALM BAY -- Palm Bay officials say there's been enough talk it's time to build the Palm Bay Beltway, even if it's just two lanes.

City officials want municipal leaders throughout Brevard to rally the county's Metropolitan Planning Organization to find funding and build the road. But so far, the response from cities has been lukewarm.

Only the Indian Harbour Beach City Council has approved a resolution sent to them by the Palm Bay City Council supporting the beltway's construction, Acting City Manager Sue Hann said. Cocoa Beach returned the resolution, saying Palm Bay needs to stick by the normal processes of obtaining money for road construction.

"That roadway is very important to Palm Bay, and we'd like to move ahead," Hann said. "We'd like to start small."

If it's ever built, the beltway will be a county road, but in the meantime, funding for it could come from several places -- county, state and federal government. So Palm Bay is lobbying all jurisdictions to build the road.

Deputy City Manager Dan Greenfield sent a letter May 21 to city councils around the county, asking for support to build the road. The 19-member county MPO board has discussed the proposed highway for a decade. Board members seem hung up on the design of the road and how many interchanges it should have, Hann said.

"The Palm Bay City Council is strongly urging support to move forward with the MPO Beltway, rather than the continual postponing of the project," Greenfield wrote. "It is time to stop discussion on how many exits and lanes the beltway should have and how far east it should run."

Ronnie Mulvihill, president of the West Pine Estates Homeowners Association in Palm Bay, also wrote a letter to MPO Director Bob Kamm, asking why, after nearly 10 years of discussion, the beltway still hasn't been constructed.

"In the case of an emergency evacuation such as a hurricane, fire or canal washout, it will leave the residents west of Minton Road in a deadlocked situation," Mulvihill said. If residents had to evacuate they will have no way to get out, he said.

The beltway, which is proposed to run from Malabar Road to U.S. 192, needs to be designed and built, Greenfield wrote.

Currently, the beltway is in the state Department of Transportation's five-year plan. It's in what's known as a Project, Design and Environment study phase. That's where DOT staffers try to determine whether the road is really needed, where interchanges might be and a possible alignment for the road.

Without the study, the road cannot get federal funding, and the county would have to pay for it, Kamm said, something that is not financially feasible.

"We certainly are aware of the Palm Bay City Council's interest in moving forward on the beltway," Kamm said. But the study is the best way to go, he said.

Edition: Final all

Section: Local;State

Page: 03

Record Number: brv2002071616234774

Copyright (c) FLORIDA TODAY. All rights reserved. Reproduced with the permission of Gannett Co., Inc. by NewsBank, inc.