

Group: Put road on the fast track**FLORIDA TODAY (Melbourne, FL)** - Sunday, April 23, 2006**Author:** Staff, LINDA JUMP

LINDA JUMP

Florida Today

PALM BAY -- A group of residents has formed to lobby for money for the long-awaited Palm Bay Parkway.

Among their first decisions: Call the route the South Area Beltway or anything else to emphasize that it benefits more than one city, that it's important to much of Brevard County.

"If we have to stamp our feet, carry signs, wear T-shirts and talk with demanding voices, we will," said Bonnie Cameron, who said she got involved because of growing traffic and concerns about evacuation routes in hurricanes. "If we can't get the county to help, we need to go the state. If they don't listen, we go to the federal government."

Proposed for more than a dozen years, the 21-mile road would connect Ellis Road in West Melbourne to Malabar Road in Palm Bay and lead to a proposed interchange to Interstate 95 between Grant and Micco roads.

The city and two developers are promising money for part of the project, but other funding has not come through. Total costs have been estimated at more than \$20 million.

Tommy Redmond, president of the reorganized South Area Alliance, said it's time for action, not finger-pointing over why the roadway has been stalled for so long.

"We're offering a hand and getting behind our elected officials," Redmond said. "We want to know what the citizens need to do to get this built."

About 35 people attended a meeting recently at City Hall to talk about what to do.

Cameron said 69,000 people who live west of I-95 would have to use Malabar Road or Emerson Drive and then Minton Road to evacuate ahead of a hurricane. She said it takes her 35 minutes to get from U.S. 192 to Palm Bay Road on her way home every evening.

"Nothing can go west, and we're building more and more," Cameron said.

"Everyone wants to move here, and I don't blame them," said Ronnie Mulvihill, who has lived in Palm Bay since 1988. "We just have to have a way to get out if we need to."

Two developers working with Palm Bay officials have agreed to pay for the sections that go through their housing developments. And city officials recently voted to use more than \$50,000 in city transportation impact fees to work on drainage.

For the past three years, Gov. Jeb Bush has vetoed \$4.1 million in state funding for the road, saying it's not on the state Department of Transportation road project list. City officials are talking about how to get the project on that list.

Assistant City Manager Sue Hann said DOT officials won't put the road on their work list because there's no other money for it and because it's not on the county metropolitan planning organization priority list.

"We need to coordinate with the county and MPO staff so there is no confusion about who's doing what," she said. "Then the state DOT and Legislature have to be on the same page."

Contact Jump at 409-1423 or ljump@flatoday.net

What's next

The South Area Alliance plans to lobby at the next Brevard County Metropolitan Planning Organization meeting at 9 a.m. May 11 in the County Government Center, Building C, 2725 Judge Fran Jamieson Way, Viera. To contact the group, call 508-4998.

Edition: Final/All

Section: Local/State

Page: B01

Record Number: brv27806063

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