

Palm Bay funds I-95 report

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PALM BAY -- Palm Bay will spend \$250,000 to \$400,000 of its transportation impact fees to fund a report needed to justify a new Interstate 95 interchange between Grant and Micco roads.

Council members have agreed to spend a portion of the more than \$2 million a year they get from impact fees -- money charged for new construction -- as a needed first step in getting the interchange. The interchange would connect to the proposed Palm Bay Parkway extension through the city.

"There will be no immediate progress on the interchange justification report unless the city takes the lead," City Manager Lee Feldman said.

The proposed interchange is about two miles north of the site of another interchange at Micco Road that was approved in 1988 but never built. Now, most of the land around that site is part of the county's Environmentally Endangered Lands program, which could make development for an interchange problematic, officials said.

City officials say it makes sense to do the interchange in conjunction with the Florida Department of Transportation design next year as part of the state's plan to widen the interstate from Fort Pierce to the Georgia state line by 2020.

"It's a very important project for South Brevard. It will provide economic development as well as better traffic circulation," Assistant City Manager Sue Hann said. The proposed site doesn't impact any existing neighborhoods, she said.

Hann said the city doesn't have a timetable for completion of the report, nor has anyone under contract.

The report could take up to a year to produce. It will explore major environmental impacts and will study alternatives, constraints and traffic impacts on adjacent interchanges and the interstate.

Bob Kamm, the county's transportation planning director, said more interchanges are needed in Brevard County. The stretch between Exit 156 at County Road 512 at Sebastian-Fellsmere in Indian River County and Exit 173 for Malabar Road in Palm Bay is 17 miles.

"We need another place to get on quicker and easier for public health and safety. Now, it takes so long to respond to fires and crashes," Kamm said.

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What's next

The final report, which could take a year, will be sent to the Federal Highway Administration for interchange approval. Then, a project development and environment study is needed before design.

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