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Cities join forces on parkway

Palm Bay, Melbourne to lobby Congress for funding

*BY KIMBERLY C. MOORE
FLORIDA TODAY*

The Melbourne and Palm Bay city councils came to a tentative agreement Wednesday night to lobby Congress together to fund the St. Johns Heritage Parkway.

The roadway, in the works for 20 years, would connect the NASA Boulevard work corridor to the parkway west of Interstate 95, run south to the western outskirts of Palm Bay, then turn east to a planned I-95 interchange between Micco and Grant roads.

"If we're going for a big dollar amount, we ought to do it jointly," Palm Bay City Manager Lee Feldman told the gathering of both city councils at the Lagoon House. "There is a unique window in Washington. This is the time when they rewrite the transportation bill."

Palm Bay voted 3-2 to work with Melbourne, with Mayor John Mazziotti and council member Kristine Isnardi voting against it.

The Melbourne City Council is prohibited by its charter from voting outside the city limits, but several members expressed a desire to work as a team. They plan to vote on the issue at their next meeting Tuesday.

"I would hope they would join with me and support lobbying Congress with you guys and gals -- going to Washington, to Tallahassee, to DeLand to build the parkway," said Melbourne Mayor Harry Goode.

"I think it's a good collaboration and a good road to travel down," said Melbourne council member John Larusso.

The panels agreed that their priorities should be, in this order, getting the money for:

- The two interchanges
- The stretch between Malabar Road and U.S. 192
- The stretch between Ellis Road and U.S. 192.

No one knows the total cost of the parkway. Building two interstate interchanges is estimated to cost \$30 million to \$40 million each, while building the roadway is estimated at \$200 million. That doesn't include required project development and environmental studies on the parts of the parkway that will be funded with federal dollars. Nor does it include right-of-way acquisition.

The parkway is needed to alleviate traffic congestion on Interstate 95, Babcock Street, Eau Gallie Boulevard and Sarno Road for the more than 25,000 people working in the NASA Boulevard corridor, said Bob Kamm, director of the Space Coast Transportation Planning Organization.

"The chances of getting \$200 million are very slim," Kamm said. "We could expect to get about \$50 million and that would be quite a good amount of money to put toward both interchanges."

Palm Bay Deputy Mayor Milo Zonka and Melbourne City Councilman John Thomas are hoping to go to Washington in the next few months to personally lobby Congress on the project.

Contact Moore at 409-1423 or kmoore@floridatoday.com.

Additional Facts

At a glance

Estimated costs of the St. Johns Heritage Parkway:

- ***\$30-40 million -- for each Interstate 95 interchange -- one at Ellis Road, one between Micco and Grant roads***
 - ***At least \$200 million -- to build the road between NASA Boulevard west past I-95, south to Palm Bay and then east to Babcock Street. Funds already in hand:***
 - ***The Brevard County Commission secured \$21 million in bond money to buy right-of-way property and for the road design.***
 - ***A\$717,000 grant for two Interstate-95 interchanges***
 - ***\$2.7 million from the federal government to build portions of the Palm Bay part of the parkway.***
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