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## St. Johns parkway plan faces delays

Interstate exits to come first

*BY RICK NEALE  
FLORIDA TODAY*

VIERA -- Efforts to build the St. Johns Heritage Parkway face more delays, as the sagging Space Coast economy hampers acquisition of needed land, transportation officials say.

Discussed for decades, the parkway would serve as a high-speed regional corridor, skirting the western edge of South Brevard's developable property.

Portions of the future parkway pass through proposed housing and commercial construction sites, and Palm Bay officials had hoped to negotiate right-of-way deals with developers.

"We were working on that, when the economy started to do the downturn," Deputy City Manager Sue Hann said. "Those development projects are no longer happening."

Moreover, some landowners of potential right of way north of U.S. 192 no longer want to sell.

Why?

Their property values have plunged, said John Denninghoff, county transportation engineering director.

Though timelines remain distant, St. Johns Heritage Parkway planning continues on a variety of fronts.

A few weeks ago, the Federal Highway Administration approved construction of a redesigned southern Interstate 95 interchange just north of Micco Road, Hann said.

This area will likely develop into a "commercial cluster" that links with Babcock Street, Hann said.

In fact, this segment of Babcock Street probably will require widening from two to four lanes to accommodate traffic, Denninghoff said.

An interchange planning and environmental study soon will begin.

Hann said "it is not completely out of the realm of possibility" that crews will build the interchange when they widen that section of Interstate 95 from four to six lanes in 2014.

"We're going to try to make that happen, if it can be possibly done," she said.

An updated engineering study on the northern Ellis Road interchange should be completed by April or May, after which final design will begin, Denninghoff said.

Bob Kamm, director of the Space Coast Transportation Planning Organization, said the parkway would help Palm Bay neighborhoods evacuate from wildfires and hurricanes, providing an alternative to Emerson Drive or Jupiter Boulevard.

"Having another access point on the west side would provide a public safety benefit to those residents of northwest Palm Bay," Kamm said.

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## ***Additional Facts***

### *Long-discussed highway*

***Purpose:*** This multilane St. Johns Heritage Parkway would take north-south traffic off congested Interstate 95 and Wickham-Minton roads in southern Brevard County. Regarding vehicle access, the corridor could resemble John Young Parkway in Orlando, said Bob Kamm, director of the Space Coast Transportation Planning Organization.

***Estimated costs:*** Roadway construction could cost \$200 million, and each interchange could cost \$30 million to \$40 million.

***Potential speed limits:*** Likely speed limits are much like U.S. 1: 45 to 50 mph, Palm Bay Deputy City Manager Sue Hann said.

***Traffic signals:*** They probably would be placed three-quarters of a mile to 1 mile apart, said John Denninghoff, county transportation engineering director. "We want to avoid a Wickham (Road) or a (U.S) 192 kind of scenario," Denninghoff said.

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