

St. Johns Heritage Parkway study finds benefits for drivers

VIERA — The northernmost portion of the St. Johns Heritage Parkway in Melbourne and Palm Bay will deliver \$2.41 in **benefits** to motorists for every \$1 spent on construction, a new study shows.

These benefits include estimated travel-time **savings** and reduced vehicle operating costs generated by future highway's 6-mile stretch linking Ellis Road in Melbourne with Emerson Drive in Palm Bay.

"This is new **information** on the parkway, first of all. This is not information we've had before," said Bob Kamm, executive director of the Space Coast Transportation Planning Organization.

TPO officials hope this cost-benefit analysis helps secure a federal construction grant for the segment. Estimated construction cost is \$49.8 million, and Brevard County officials have set aside \$17 million for the project.

Eventually, the St. Johns Heritage Parkway may swing southward from Ellis Road to a proposed I-95 interchange near Micco Road, opening large portions of southern Brevard County to development.

Projected annual savings for the Ellis-to-Emerson portion:

\$7.8 million in travel time savings.

Planners multiplied work-commute time savings by \$10 an hour, or half of the Palm Bay average household **income**.

\$277,000 in vehicle operating costs.

This includes fuel (\$3.43 per gallon), oil, **tires**, maintenance and vehicle depreciation.

Other benefits that cannot be quantified include improved police, fire and EMS response times; property value increases; and job creation, said Nick Lepp, a senior transportation planner with the Orlando firm that conducted the study.

During Thursday's TPO meeting, Titusville Mayor Jim Tulley questioned whether the \$7.8 million time-savings projection was realistic.


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“Most people don’t get paid for their travel time to and from work,” Tulley said.

Lepp replied that his study assigned value to drivers’ lost free time, and Commissioner Andy Anderson said some commuters have to shoulder child-care costs.

The projected \$49.8 million price tag does not include construction of an Interstate 95 interchange at Ellis Road, TPO Executive Director Bob Kamm said.

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