

Traffic Issues

Escambia County continues its plans to expand Perdido Key Drive to four lanes. The engineering firm of Post, Buckley, Jernigan & Shue made a presentation at the April Perdido Key Beach Chamber of Commerce luncheon describing the proposed project. Their presentation was preliminary, costs and permitting are still being studied and there are requirements for a series of public meetings for the purpose of citizen input. What they were able to show was some conceptual drawings of a four lane divided highway, with a 19 ft landscaped median, bike lanes and a walking path on either side. There would be turn outs approximately every half of a mile, creating the necessity for some U-turns to access existing driveways. The average amount of right of way available is 100 ft, and some areas may be too narrow for the proposed plan. In that event they can either request permission from the state to reduce the width of the median, or by the rule of eminent domain, purchase additional right of way. The design phase of the project is expected to be completed by the end of 2008, with construction ready to begin in 2009 or 2010. There was no concept discussed regarding the bridge, other than another bridge will be included in the design phase. Although, we are sure this will be a huge construction project, the length of time estimated to completion has not been established yet.

The millions of dollars needed for this project is projected to come from the newly created SW Escambia Tax Incentive plan. However, Escambia Planning & Zoning Department reports that the existing roadway already has enough capacity now to accommodate the 7150 dwelling units and 1000 lodging units that are allowed by the state mandated dwelling cap on Perdido Key. Escambia Engineering Department reports that they have calculated the traffic capacity (number of trips available) and they believe the existing roadway will accommodate approximately 8,100 dwelling units. This leads to the question: If Escambia County believes that the existing roadway can accommodate all allowed construction, why is it planning to spend county taxpayers money to enlarge a state road?

County officials have stated that building a four lane roadway will allow additional development, which in turn will generate the taxes to pay for building the four lane road. (If we build it, they will come) Unless there are changes to the real estate market, and property tax and insurance issues are resolved, and the state agrees to the removal of the dwelling cap, there will be little or no additional tax revenues to pay for this project. Therefore, there is no basis for enlarging Perdido Key Drive other than to **induce additional impact**. Do we want to create additional impact? Do we want to encourage more development? Or do we just want a safely designed roadway, with bicycle/pedestrian paths and properly engineered turn lanes? What do we want this community to look like? *That is the issue.*