

Traffic Analysis – State Road 282

Perdido Key Drive

By Kelly G. Robertson & Dan Henderson - Feb. 2009

Traffic conditions on the Perdido Key Drive portion of SR-292 continue to be a contested local issue. Should Perdido Key Drive be widened to the four-lane divided highway as called for in the county funded PD&E study, or should we seek some alternative solution? What are the reasons that contribute to either approach?

If traffic concurrency (to allow for more development on Perdido Key) is the reason, then widening makes little sense as we already have concurrency for building out to the allowed Cap. If hurricane evacuation is the primary concern, then it makes little sense to widen Perdido Key Drive before there are improvements to the Theo Baars Bridge and other roads leading out of the county. Four lanes of traffic leading up to a two-lane bridge and evacuation route is not sound (or sane) fiscal practice. Improvement to SR-292 for safety concerns should be the number one criteria for any proposed changes to the road. So, how dangerous is Perdido Key Drive, and are there any alternatives to the current configuration that will alleviate the problems?

According to a summary of the crash data along the stretch of SR-292 from the west end of the bridge to the state line, Perdido Key Dr. isn't all that dangerous when compared to other county or state roads. Jonathan Harris, District 3 Safety Program Manager for FDOT states "there were 120 total crashes over the past 5 years (through the end of 2007). The percentages are roughly the same for each year. Looks to be the worst problems are on Friday and Saturday and are probably out of town folks, some drinking and driving, but not much worse than 'average' for the state. Nearly half of the crashes involved speeding, some excessive speeding. Seat belt usage is about average for the state."

Over that five-year period, PK Drive had four accidents involving pedestrians, one involving a bicycle, and ZERO fatalities (although there was one accident resulting in fatalities in 2008, unrelated to alcohol or drugs). "Average" for the state doesn't point to any critical or specific problems, but hardly anyone will argue against the need for improvements to the road. Here are a few suggestions:

First, providing pedestrian and bicycle paths as called for in the 1997/2003 PKNP would be a terrific help. On any given day, at any given time, you might see upwards of a dozen or more joggers/walkers along the road regardless of weather conditions. The Plan called for this improvement designed to "enhance the overall character of the neighborhood", and "encourage non-motorized transportation, thus increasing recreational opportunities to Perdido Key residents" by the year 2002 - independent of widening the road. So it is long overdue.

Second, a reduction in the speed limit along with added strict enforcement would be

welcome to combat safety issues.

And third, let's not forget those pedestrian rights-of-way for safely crossing the road, which is a common practice throughout Florida's coastal paradise. (Added note: a few more public beach access points, also called for in the plan, would be a tremendous addition to the ped-xing program.)

The fact is most visitors and residents alike don't see SR-292 as "over-crowded." Back-ups at the state line or elsewhere do not occur during most hours of use or under normal operating conditions unless special events are scheduled on the island – such as Mullet Toss weekend - and 6 lanes of highway wouldn't help that situation. If you want to see real traffic – try the four-lane stretch of Hwy. 98 through Panama City or Destin. Or try 8am or 5pm anywhere in any city.

Regarding 2, 3, or 4 lanes for Perdido Key Drive, consider this: will increasing the number of lanes curb driving while under the influence? Will it increase or decrease the average speed; lessen or focus greater amounts of thru traffic? How will it impact compatibility with a pedestrian/bicycle friendly neighborhood environment? And consider this: even though the Perdido Key Area Chamber of Commerce professes that "people need to realize how important it would be for us to have four-lane roads," there are only two sections of four lane road on all the islands on the western side of Florida from Sanibel northward through Perdido Key.

We may or may not get an opportunity to voice our opinions at the ballot box on how we shape Perdido Key in the future, including the road, but don't you think we should?