

M E M O R A N D U M

To: Tom Harmer, Town Manager
From: Isaac Brownman, Public Works Director
Report date: November 30, 2021
Meeting date: December 6, 2021
Subject: Request for Approval of the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and Barrier Island Traffic Study (BITS) Priorities

Recommended Action

Approve the MPO and BITS priorities.

Background - Sarasota-Manatee Metropolitan Planning Organization Project Priorities

The Sarasota-Manatee Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) annually requires each member jurisdiction to adopt its priority list of Transportation & Mobility project priorities and also submit/update applications related to each of those projects. Below is the current list of ongoing project priorities along Gulf of Mexico Drive (GMD) within the Town's jurisdiction:

- GMD (SR 789) from Channel Lane to the North Entrance of Longboat Club Road: Country Club Shores Left-Turn Lanes
- GMD (SR 789) at Broadway Street Roundabout
- GMD (SR 789) at Longboat Club Road Roundabout
- Sun Trail Multi-Use Path along GMD (SR 789) (East side)

Regarding the Country Club Shores Left-Turn Lane project, the Town currently has completed construction plans and are awaiting signed design variances from the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT). Final design steps include developing Technical Specifications and coordination with the Longboat Key Club Golf Course.

Regarding the roundabouts, the Broadway Roundabout initiated design kick-off in October 2021 and survey work is in progress. The Longboat Club Roundabout project development work has not been initiated.

The Sun Trail Multi-Use Path will now focus on enhancing the existing trail (essentially, building new) on the East side of Gulf of Mexico Drive, replacing the current 8-foot wide path with a minimum 12-foot wide trail consistent with the Town's development of a Gulf of Mexico Drive Complete Streets Corridor Study (previously, the Sun Trail had been targeting the West side).

Future MPO Project Priority applications and Town Commission priorities may include project elements to be derived from the Town's GMD Complete Streets Corridor Master Plan, once completed.

The recommended action is for the Town Commission to approve the ongoing priorities list for submittal to the MPO.

Background – Barrier Island Traffic Study Recommendations

The Barrier Island Traffic Study (BITS) began in July 2017 and concluded with a final report in March 2020. The goal of the study was to provide recommendations to improve access and reduce seasonal congestion to and from the barrier islands from Anna Maria Island through Lido Key. Seventy-seven (77) recommendations were developed, categorized, and ranked by the FDOT consultant Stantec. The recommendations were grouped into those that could be implemented in relatively short-term, mid-term or long-term timeframes and also those that were focused on northern island areas, southern island areas or all areas, with Longboat Key benefitting from both northern and southern recommendations, as well as all areas.

Using a weighted ranking method, Stantec ranked all 77 recommendations on the list and created a top 25 as part of their report. The Town Commission also established a BITS priority list of 9 recommendations in March 2020. With each priority listed below, staff included the relative weighted BITS report ranking and other relevant information as follows:

- Gulf Drive (SR 789) at Cortez Road (SR 684) intersection improvements
Weighted rank: 77 (as a late addition to list requested by the Town)
- John Ringling Parkway Counter-Flow
Weighted rank: 4
- Additional Flexible Lane added to future bridge replacements & Coon Key
Weighted rank: 8 and 12 (Coon Key separated out)
- Pedestrian Managers at St. Armand's Circle (and Bridge Street)
Weighted rank: 13 (Bridge Street was never included in the study)
- Anna Maria Island Trail - Bradenton Beach to channelize pedestrians to specific crossing locations
Weighted rank: 17
- St. Armand's, elimination of parking spaces with operational conflicts to improve traffic flow (for example, the Lido leg)
Weighted rank: N/A – this was removed from the final report list
- Aerial Tram (Gondola) between Sarasota and St. Armand's/Lido Key
Weighted rank: 41
- SCAT and MCAT Coordination of Transit Services
Weighted rank: 45
- Pedestrian Bridge Crossing(s) over U.S. 41
Weighted rank: 76

The staff is prepared to discuss the previously approved priorities and update the list as necessary. In addition to these priorities, staff will continue to advocate for recommendations such as informational signage (dynamic or static) strategically placed to convey when beach parking is full, and also technology solutions (for example, phone app) that can convey similar information regarding beach parking and/or St. Armand's surface and garage parking. The latter would take significant technology additions, but could provide information for the decision-making process for patrons of the beaches and St. Armand's Circle well before crossing the bridges.

Staff will also continue to advocate for and support efforts by the adjacent communities to implement water shuttle and water taxi efforts.

As a practical matter, it may be very difficult to retrofit pedestrian bridges over U.S. 41. To be fully functional and used, pedestrian bridges should likely be integrated with adjacent high-rise commercial and condominium developments with interconnectivity and elevators and stairs to the roadway and downtown areas. Pedestrian bridges alone along the FDOT right-of-way would likely have too long of ramps and landings to be of any significant use for the cost.

Also, as a practical matter, without a single vision to the purpose of pedestrian managers at St. Armand's Circle and the proper training to accomplish that vision, Pedestrian Manager at St. Armand's Circle as a recommendation is worthless when implemented as in the most recent 2021 season. In that experience pedestrian managers did not platoon pedestrian traffic during peak hours, but rather stopped vehicular traffic for any approaching pedestrian.

Next Steps

The Town will submit this year's project applications to the MPO by December 17, 2021.

The Town staff will maintain representation on the MPO's Transportation Resiliency Advisory Group (formerly Barrier Island Traffic Committee) to advocate for Town BITS priority recommendations, support other joint recommendations, and coordinate improvements.

Staff Recommendation

Approve the MPO priorities list.

Attachments

PowerPoint Presentation (Available from the Town Clerk's Office)

End of Agenda Item