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## BRIDGES

From page 1

Fort Myers. The traffic tends to block side roads without traffic signals leading into Cleveland Avenue.

"It is just a perception but it seems to me that with the bridge toll (change) we have more traffic using the Caloosahatchee Bridge," said Fort Myers Police Department Sgt. William Quick. "Once at 3 p.m. the traffic backed all the way up to Fort Myers and there was no accident or cause for that to happen at that time of day. I can't say the tolls are causing the traffic."

Last week six drivers waiting at a signal to head to the bridge did not want to give the reasons they chose the Caloosahatchee Bridge. Those who did respond to questions said it was just the easiest way home. None would give their names.

To save money and possibly alleviate traffic jams, Lee County commissioners voted last summer to put one-way tolling into practice on two of the four bridges across the Caloosahatchee River starting last month. The change remains a one-year trial period.

The savings could come from canceling a \$10 million Cape Coral Bridge toll plaza expansion. A nearly \$1 million savings could come from a reduction in staffing, equipment and other operating expenses.

Overall, traffic has been declining on Cape Coral bridges despite the city's population growth to more than 150,000, Wingard said. The differences between September 2006 and September 2007 on the Midpoint Bridge, the bridge closest to the state bridges, show that 56,141 fewer trips were made across that bridge that month.

The numbers for the Cape Coral Bridge show that trips across it declined by more than 27,600 from 2006 to 2007.

Statistics for the month of November were not yet available for any bridge.

"I don't know if a large number of people

the bridges

>> Caloosahatchee River Bridge (U.S. Highway 41): 4 travel lane single-span bridge connects North Fort Myers with Fort Myers, over the Caloosahatchee River. Free.

>> Cape Coral Bridge (College Parkway/Cape Coral Parkway): Two 2 travel lane spans (one eastbound, one westbound) connect Cape Coral with South Fort Myers, over the Caloosahatchee River. Toll \$2 Westbound

>> Edison Bridge (State Road 739): Two 3 travel lane spans connect North Fort Myers with Fort Myers, over the Caloosahatchee River. Free.

>> Midpoint Memorial Bridge (State Road 884): 4 lane single span bridge that connects Cape Coral with Fort Myers, over the Caloosahatchee River. Toll \$2 westbound.

are coming over from Cape Coral for free and then going back on the state bridges," Wingard said. "With the price of gas it isn't really saving them money anyway."

However, the roads leading to the state bridges, the Caloosahatchee and the Edison, are getting busier.

"Over the four years we have seen the trend is up for travel on our bridges," said Debbie Tower, Florida Department of Transportation spokeswoman.

There could be reasons other than toll-avoidance why there are fewer drivers using the two toll bridges. Wingard said.

"The Cape is developing a lot of shopping and restaurants for people to go to," Wingard said. "They used to have to come to Fort Myers for that, now they don't."

That makes at least one Cape official who works on spurring economic development in the city happy.

"I knew it would happen; I just didn't think it would be so fast," said Mike Jackson, the city's economic development director. "We had a lot of commercial growth. Just in the past fiscal year we added 437,760 square feet of commercial buildings." ■

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