

TRAFFIC

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them have a car or two.

"We are a growing area. New people move here every year," Loveland said. "We are planning for it. The baby boomers will make a huge impact."

The county's population grew 30 percent from 2000 to 2006. And that growth remains constant despite the housing market's decline.

And traffic keeps getting worse, despite recent statistical drops in traffic counts in the county.

Traffic dropped on many major county roads when November 2006 counts were compared with last November.

Slow housing construction and the subsequent downturn on the economy along with gas prices at more than \$3 a gallon likely influenced the decline.

The intersection with the largest drop in traffic counts stood out as the intersection of Daniels and Metro parkways. The intersection dropped 8,350 cars counted from last November's total, 54,510, to 46,160 this year, officials said. Transportation planners expect more traffic rather than less and are planning for it.

"We have our real traffic problems at the peak hours when people are going to or returning from work," said Tammy Hall, a Lee County commissioner and member of the county's Metropolitan Planning Organization. "On the east coast they have the congestion as early as 2 p.m. We need to keep ahead of it."

To deal with traffic, the planning organization's staff updated its long range plans to 2030. It is going to extend the long term to 2035, said Ron Gogoi, organization deputy director.

"We found that our population model had to be revised upward from our recent model," Gogoi said. "For example: Even with the housing market going down, Cape Coral and Lehigh acres experienced more growth than we thought."

Serving Lehigh Acres, Fort Myers and south Lee County, two-lane State Road 82 should see construction begin ahead of the scheduled 2010 date. Planning organization officials hope that collaboration among state, city and county governments gets the road rolling in the fall of '08.

The costs could be split with Fort Myers contributing \$10 million, the state \$25 million, the county \$10 million and developers along the road \$15 million.

That would see the road widened to six lanes from I-75 to Lee Boulevard. Future projects could continue to widen S.R. 82 south from Lee Boulevard south to Alabama road to State Road 29.

"This is something I like to



PHOTO FLORIDA WEEKLY

Construction crews are working to widen Three Oaks Parkway in South Lee County to accommodate growth. The project that began a year ago will widen the Parkway to four lanes between Corkscrew and Alico roads.

see, the city, county and state governments working together," Hall said. "We should work together to prioritize more projects."

The Florida Department of Transportation recently began a cooperative highway program dubbed iROX75.

Snowbirds and tourists add to Interstate 75's more than 100,000 cars per day. That makes it our busiest road.

The only interstate in our area it is the areas major commercial, commuter and hurricane evacuation route. Construction started on a 30-mile segment from Golden Gate Parkway in Collier County to Colonial Boulevard in Lee County.

The \$430.5 million project is expected to finish in 2010. The construction plans call for resurfacing I-75s existing four lanes, building one new lane in each direction on the median and improving the Immokalee Road intersection in Collier County.

IROX is the largest joint-venture, road-construction project in the state, said David Parks, project information officer.

"It is a public and private venture," Parks said. "Usually design, financing and building are in phases. This was all done together."

Anderson Columbia Company Inc. and Ajax Paving Industries pooled resources and will act together to build the lanes. HDR is a design firm on the project and Metric Engineering provides construction engineering and inspection services.

Plans call for the companies to build the project in three years, however, the contractors are financing the project and accepting payments over five years.

The arrangement allows the transportation department to lock in today's construction prices while private companies provide the cash to start construction.

"In cooperation, the com-

panies are actually fronting money for the project," Parks said. "This is in one contract for the entire 30 miles. Usually we have multiple contracts for smaller sections until the project is finished."

Money for the project comes from the department of transportation's five-year work program. State and federal money sits in that five-year pot.

Growth management funds account for \$106 million, \$4 million comes from the Transportation Regional Incentive Program, Collier County put in \$16 million and \$81 million came from the federal coffers for the construction project.

The construction schedule for I-75 includes temporary lane closures from 8 p.m. to 5 a.m.

"We wanted to work at night to cause as little disruption as possible," Parks said.

Work on the Immokalee Road intersection will include resurfacing current exit and entrance ramps. Plans also include two new I-75 bridges over Immokalee Road. Under the bridges Immokalee road will be widened to six lanes.

Another way to lessen traffic along the I-75 north and south corridor by 2030 is called the Bi-County Corridor.

The idea, according to a concept report, is to add vehicle capacity through Burnt Store Road expansion from Charlotte County south to Veterans Parkway.

The plan proposed for Burnt Store Road calls for new construction of a four-lane divided highway by 2015 to Van Buren Parkway and possibly to Pine Island Road. A two-lane, two way road for local traffic would parallel the larger road.

The existing four lane roadway along Veterans from Pine Island road to Skyline is deemed sufficient for traffic until 2030.

Going east on Veterans Parkway, the parkway would go over four-lane cross roads such as Chiquita Boulevard, Skyline Boulevard, Santa Barbara Boulevard and Country Club Boulevard by 2020 to the Midpoint Bridge.

Other expansion projects taking Colonial to I-75 are also contemplated in the plan. As it sits, the project remains in various stages of development many of which have no funding.

Officials stressed a \$2 billion deficit that could delay many projects including the section of Colonial Boulevard planned to be built as an expressway.

Colonial Expressway, pegged at \$397 million, would be an elevated toll road with four lanes above Colonial Boulevard from McGregor Boulevard to Metro parkway. It would eventually run to I-75.

Gas taxes and road impact fees have not been generating enough money to cover increasing construction costs. An unintended consequence of the

traffic projects

Other road construction projects:

--With Summerlin Road's expansion to six lanes from Gladiolus Drive to San Carlos Boulevard including flyovers at Gladiolus and San Carlos complete, plans call for more widening on Summerlin.

The road will be enlarged to six lanes between Boy Scout and Cyprus Lake drives. The work includes a flyover at College Parkway. The expansion of Summerlin plans to lessen traffic flow between Fort Myers and south Fort Myers. It could also moderate beach bound traffic that takes the route.

Construction costs came in at \$25.2 million, under budget by \$13 million probably because of more competition for work.

--The Three Oaks widening project began December 4, 2006. The project will widen Three Oaks Parkway between Corkscrew and Alico to four lanes and is nearing completion. Other Construction on the parkway south of Brooks to east Terry Street started May 2006 and continues for about 20 months.

Phases in road programs:

- Design and permitting
- Right of way acquisition
- Construction

Income projections from impact fees collected at building permit stage of process for fiscal years from 2008 to 2012:

2008-	\$71,529,000
2009-	\$73,023,940
2010-	\$74,484,317
2011-	\$75,974,003
2012-	\$77,493,483

Impact fee revenue must be spent in the local district where collected or on a project that will benefit that district. They can only be used for increasing road capacity.

Other projected revenue from 12-cent local option gas tax:

2008-	\$11,008,899
2009-	\$11,246,406
2010-	\$15,214,399
2011-	\$17,587,311
2012-	\$17,921,469

Most gas revenue goes to resurfacing roads and intersection improvements such as traffic lights.

real estate market down turn is that competition for road jobs heated up resulting in more competition of lower bids on road projects.

The possibility of building toll roads and a penny sales tax targeted at transportation projects were ways to raise money discussed, officials said. ■

