

CONNECTING DOWNTOWN SARASOTA TO THE BAYFRONT FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is the goal of the study?

The City of Sarasota is interested in developing measures that reconnect the Downtown to the Bayfront using the most effective and efficient means with an emphasis on pedestrian comfort. This goal requires changing the current relatively high-speed, pedestrian-unfriendly character of the Tamiami Trail, or US 41.

Study efforts are focused on developing an action plan that guides the design and construction of physical improvements, which will use progressive concepts such as Complete Street Design, Context Sensitive Design, and those related to New Urbanism. The study will recommend improvement measures that will be phased as short-term (0 – 3 years) and long-term measures (3+ years).

What is the problem with the way things are now?

The current high-speed traffic pattern of US 41 creates a physical and visual barrier that separates the primary community and regional focal point of Downtown Sarasota away from its natural waterfront amenities and key destinations along the waterfront, such as Marie Selby Botanical Gardens, Island Park and Marina, the Ritz Carlton hotel, the Multi-Use Recreational Trail (MURT) and various redevelopment projects. Today, U.S. 41 (Tamiami Trail) – which is actually designated as a designated Scenic Highway through Sarasota and Manatee Counties – is lacking the design features and multimodal facilities that make for a complete street to adequately serve the needs of ALL users and ALL modes of travel. What should be a signature street that creates an inviting gateway into the community instead is an obstacle that emphasizes regional mobility for cars and trucks over local accessibility. The analysis will examine how to find a proper balance for those various user needs.

Wasn't this studied a few years ago? Why is this study necessary?

This project is a direct outgrowth of the Downtown Master Plan, adopted in 2000, which has served as an official guide for the City's redevelopment, mobility and recreational improvement efforts. A core recommendation of the Master Plan entailed transforming the character of the Trail through downtown and creating a series of enhanced pedestrian access points, called "sleeves," that would strengthen the Downtown-Bayfront connection. Other measures, such as roundabouts and intersection treatments, were included in the Master Plan to help slow down traffic and create a visual gateway into the Downtown.

In 2003 a Downtown Mobility Study performed a technical evaluation of several transportation options for the Tamiami Trail corridor that were originally recommended in the Downtown Master Plan. These options included reducing the number of travel lanes from four to two. However, the reduction of travel lanes and realignment of US 41 were the only projects not adopted by the City Commission, of the total 12 projects recommended. Other recommendations from that Study are moving forward, but the question of how best to address the physical design modifications to the Tamiami Trail has been left unresolved.

What changes to US 41 are being considered?

As the study begins, there is no specific set of physical changes anticipated. However, through the study process, which will feature significant public participation and technical analysis to guide the development of recommendations, a series of measures will be identified to

improve pedestrian accessibility, safety, comfort and convenience, both along the Tamiami Trail corridor and connecting across it to link desired origins and destinations for residents, visitors and workers consistent with the project goals.

Example types of possible design changes may include reducing travel lane widths, providing on-street parking and/or bicycle lanes, wider sidewalks and medians, landscaping, signage and pavement marking improvements. Additionally, key intersections could be enhanced to provide for better pedestrian visibility and convenience crossing Tamiami Trail, including a possible overpass.

Does this mean the City will take over maintenance responsibility of U.S. 41?

Not necessarily. The City intends to work cooperatively with the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), which has maintenance responsibility for state roads and U.S. Highways. FDOT has committed to be an involved stakeholder during this project. In 2003, the City Commission decided not to pursue a realignment of U.S. 41 in favor of keeping the existing alignment of today. U.S. 41 (Tamiami Trail) is an important part of the interconnected state highway system. There is a potential option of reconsidering the alignment of U.S. 41 along Tamiami Trail to other roadways as part of this Study, but all stakeholders would need to agree that such a change is in their best interests, and this proposal would need to be adopted by the City Commission.

Just to be clear, are you trying to reduce the number of lanes on US 41?

No. The reduction in travel lanes from four to two through lanes (one in each direction) was examined as part of the Downtown Mobility Study, but was not included in the final recommendations. This project will focus on other measures to meet the project goal.

Is the study area limited to the road itself?

The study will primarily focus on the publicly maintained right-of-way along U.S. 41, including the area of vehicle travel and from the edge of pavement to the property line of adjacent land uses, between 14th Street to the north and Osprey Avenue to the south. This focus reflects the goal of the project to examine measures that can help create a more complete street that properly balances the needs of auto and truck traffic, pedestrians, cyclists and transit users.

However, it is also important that the study area has an influence area beyond just the U.S. 41 corridor. This project will consider connectivity issues and opportunities that will link the downtown and various surrounding neighborhoods to the Bayfront ensuring both accessibility and mobility. Additionally, the City will examine the impacts of potential changes to ensure that traffic flow is acceptable in the future and does not unduly affect established neighborhoods.

Who are the “stakeholders” in this project?

“Stakeholders” is a general term used to describe people or agencies with a stake, or representative interest, in the fortunes of the U.S. 41 corridor study area. Key stakeholders include downtown residents, property owners along U.S. 41, the residents of the barrier islands, downtown businesses and organizations, and neighborhood associations within the study area. In addition, obvious stakeholders include the City of Sarasota and Florida Department of Transportation, as well as public agencies and departments responsible for transportation such as the Sarasota/Manatee Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), Sarasota County, Sarasota County Area Transit (SCAT), Manatee County, the

Sarasota/Bradenton Airport Authority and the cities along US 41. In short, the public, as users of the roadway and taxpayers, are important stakeholders in this process and the outcomes.

How will transit be addressed in the project?

In this time of high fuel prices, transit is an increasingly vital component of the area's transportation system. The Tamiami Trail corridor is the Sarasota/Manatee region's most important corridor for transit service because of its access to jobs, services and institutions throughout the region. Sarasota County and Manatee County have recently initiated transit service improvements along this corridor, and Sarasota County is currently planning for Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) along the parallel CSX rail corridor to reduce travel times and improve customer comfort and convenience between the Sarasota/Bradenton International Airport and Siesta Drive.

The Connecting Downtown to the Bayfront Study will focus on the comfort and convenience of transit riders (aka pedestrians) accessing the bus service operating within the study area. The analysis will also consider transit operations and ways to enhance service through this corridor.

Aren't there a lot of trucks using the road? What about their needs?

As a state road with regional connections, trucks use Tamiami Trail for a variety of reasons, such as moving freight and goods through the region, and making deliveries to nearby businesses. However, it has been identified that heavy trucks represent only 1% of the total traffic using the corridor. This will help the project team identify measures and develop recommendations that will ensure adequate truck access consistent with the project goals.

What are the opportunities for residents or businesses to offer ideas and comments?

The primary opportunity for public input is through the charrette activities, scheduled for November 14, 15, 17 and 18. There are daily opportunities for the public to participate in working sessions with City staff and consultants to help guide the analysis and shape recommendations. A detailed schedule and meeting locations are provided on the City's web site at www.downtown.sarasotagov.com. In addition, there is a kick-off public presentation scheduled for October 14th at 6:00 PM located at the Sarasota City Hall building. Members of the public will also be involved in discussion groups, forums, and presentations to various community organizations throughout the study schedule. Contact the City's project manager, Steven Stancel, at (941) 954-4195 for more information.

What is the project schedule and next steps once it is finished?

The total project schedule is anticipated for eight months. The next steps leading up to the charrette entail performing a technical feasibility evaluation. The community design charrette in mid-November will then focus public and stakeholder input on how the Tamiami Trail should look and function. Following the charrette, its outcomes will be further evaluated as necessary and translated into project recommendations for review and potential approval from the City Commission. The approved alternatives will then proceed toward final design, permitting, and construction.