

Committee on Island Congestion

Current Priorities:

VEHICULAR CONGESTION

Background. The best metric we have for vehicular congestion is causeway crossings. Vehicles crossing the causeway increased steadily from the opening of the facility in 1963 until 2001, when they peaked at 3,460,000. Traffic stayed at about that level until Hurricane Charley in August of 2004. In the twelve months following the hurricane vehicle crossings dropped 500,000 below the preceding year. There has been some increase since then, but the annual rate remains below 3,000,000. The attached Document V-1 gives details.

Current Activity. In December of 2007 City Council approved in principle hiring a consultant to study transportation alternatives for visitors to the Ding Darling Wildlife Refuge. The study is the result of a \$700,000 grant authorized by the 2005 federal Transportation Act; its official name is the Sanibel Alternative Transportation in Parks and Public Lands Program Project. A consortium of Sanibel, Lee Tran, and the Refuge is supervising the project, with Lee Tran serving as the project manager. Document V-2 attached is the draft of the consultant's Scope of Work statement.

While the stated purpose of the project sounds narrow, the data collection phase has a rather broad scope. The Committee hopes that the study will provide useful information for Sanibel's transportation planning and is tracking the activity. We hope that the recommendations will help the city deal with congestion. We are aware of the risk that proposed solutions focused on the Refuge may have unintended bad effects on overall congestion on the Island..

SHARED USE PATHS

Background. Sanibel has 23 miles of paved shared use pathways, used mainly by bicyclists and pedestrians. Motorized vehicles are not permitted on the paths, with the exception of controlled use of Segways on managed tours. Pathway maintenance is a significant expense for the City. In a November, 2006 presentation, COTI included City information that SUP maintenance costs the previous fiscal year were approximately \$15,000 per mile, about the same as the maintenance cost for roadways. The City will be opening new bids for maintenance this month. There are hopes that the current construction slowdown in our area will produce lower costs.

The only significant recent change affecting the paths was the relocation of part of Periwinkle Way in 2007, to move it farther from the path for safety reasons. The cost for the relocation and associated changes was \$1.5 million.

Segways. COTI has consistently opposed the operation of Segways on the shared use paths because of concern for safety. The following extract from a May, 2007 submission to City Council expands on our rationale.

“In the January discussions at Council on Segways, COTI took the position that these devices have a bad accident record on Sanibel, and should be barred for safety reasons. Our view didn’t prevail, but it hasn’t changed. The record of the meetings at that time describes four Segway accidents during the trial period, two of them involving serious bodily injury. It appears that the consultants’ recommendation relied on national data, without a review of the Sanibel record. We regret that we still have the tours, but at least the tours have guides who can warn pedestrians of the possibility of approaching danger. There would be no such assurance for individual riders. Motorized vehicles do not belong on the shared use paths. We believe that the current ordinance should be retained.”

Current Acitivity. Sanibel has been working on the development of a Master Plan for shared use paths for some time. The City retained a consultant to assist in this effort. The consultant’s report, submitted in April, 2007, was not acceptable to Council. The draft report has been undergoing revision since then.

COTI has provided three statements in connection with this project. The first was in November, 2006, for a public open house. It is attached as Document S-1. In May of 2007 we submitted a commentary on the consultant’s report, attached as Document S-2. In May of 2008 we made a slight modification to our position on the width of shared use paths. The resulting position statement is attached as Document S-3.

We expect that a revised draft report will appear soon. We plan to offer comments at that time.

BEACH CARRYING CAPACITY.

Carrying capacities are not receiving current attention. We want to learn more about carrying capacities of fragile environments. We are looking at loads on both beaches and other fragile ecosystems. We would be pleased to partner with other institutions that have similar interests.

Our sense is that the best approach is to find one or two volunteers willing to undertake this research. We expect that they would use the internet and networking with people in the field. Thus we see the characteristics of likely individuals as:

- Skilled in web searches.
- Knowledgeable about academia and the role of research in it; probably based on graduate study.
- Good interpersonal skills for networking.
- Probably island residents.