



February 24, 2015

Lawrence Massey  
Systems Planning Administrator  
Florida Department of Transportation, District 1  
Post Office Box 1249  
Bartow, FL 33831-1249

Dear Mr. Massey,

The Manatee Chamber of Commerce represents more than 2,000 members who employ 76,000 residents of our area. We have engaged discussions in our Downtown Redevelopment and Transportation Committees regarding the **Central Manatee Network Alternatives Analysis**. Our recommendations are as follows:

**Short Range: Immediate**

- Third Avenue to Manatee Avenue (on 9<sup>th</sup> Street West) extension of a right hand turn lane (and median reduction) in order to allow southbound motorists to turn right. Project is programmed for 2017-2018, but should be accelerated via congestion management funding within 2015-2016.
- All study options should be thoroughly weighed for the intersection of 7<sup>th</sup> Street on U.S. 301/41 in Palmetto and the flashing traffic signal, including extending 7<sup>th</sup> Street to Haben Boulevard in order to improve access and safety in the greater area surrounding the Convention Center and proposed hotel.

**Short to Mid-Range: 1-5 years**

- Downtown Bradenton is the junction for three state roads (64, 45 and 55). Dispersing east-west traffic from SR 64 to existing local roads in downtown Bradenton would help relieve congestion. This dispersion of traffic through the City's grid system would also ease north-south and east-west movement and facilitate an expedited intelligent traffic system (light synchronization signals).

**Mid-Term Range: 6-11 Years**

- In order to respond to an identified need and priority from the Manatee Chamber's Leadership Conference and Planning Retreat, the downtowns of Bradenton and Palmetto are very livable and desirable housing markets. They are locations of numerous walkable events and venues for the young and the old to live, work and play. Complete streets (such as trolleys) should be investigated fully as well as a bus rapid transit (BRT) public-private partnership between Manatee and Sarasota counties (see attached Resolution and SmarTransit.org). Fewer trips and improved traffic flow would result due to an enhanced BRT system.

**Long-Term Range: 11 Plus Years**

- Studied for well over 50 years, a third bridge needs to be **expedited** due to downtown redevelopment, growth, congestion, the hospital's presence and emergency care access/needs. A 15<sup>th</sup> Street East bridge over the Manatee River needs to be included as a preferred alternative. Tolling options for two and four lane bridge alternatives should also be studied under this Network Analysis. Rehab and repair of the existing DeSoto Bridge are also needed.

In conclusion, as part of the Manatee Chamber's Infill Committee's issues, support was recommended to Manatee County Commissioners for the hotel concept / development in the Convention Center area of Palmetto - - which is already progressing to an Intent-to-Negotiate proposition. It is anticipated building will only accentuate the need for a new / improved bridge for both sides of the river. Also, these above recommendations would go a long way in bringing the core downtown Bradenton and Palmetto areas back to where they were before the two-way pairs and Business 41 created speedway conditions and clogged arteries, respectively.

Sincerely,



Jonathan Fleece  
Chairman of the Board

cc: Ben Bakker, HJB Properties  
Mark Barnebey, EDC Chairman  
Betsy Benac, Chairman Manatee County Commissioners  
Whit Blanton, Renaissance Group  
Jeff Burton, City of Palmetto  
Shirley Bryant, Mayor, City of Palmetto  
Dick Coombs, RK&K  
Ron Gregory, URS  
David Gustafson, Bradenton DDA  
Billy Hattaway, FDOT District One Secretary  
Mike Howe, Sarasota-Manatee MPO  
Ed Hunzeker, Manatee County Administrator  
David Hutchinson, Sarasota-Manatee MPO  
Wayne Poston, Mayor, City of Bradenton  
Ron Schulhofer, Manatee County Public Works  
Claude Tankersley, City of Bradenton Public Works  
JB' Taylor, Fawley Bryant Architects  
Allen Tusing, City of Palmetto Public Works