

LOCAL

W. Atlantic widening: 11-year haul?

The \$84.5 million project's first phase has begun, but the end could be years away

By Mike Diamond
Special to The Post

The good news: The state Department of Transportation (DOT) has begun the first phase of a critically needed \$85.4 million widening project on West Atlantic Avenue from Florida's Turnpike to Jog Road.

The bad news: The work

may not be finished until 2031, which means that the congested roadway will become even more jammed with new development recently approved for the west-of-Delray Beach area.

"This project cannot come soon enough," Lori Vinikoor, executive vice president of the Alliance of Delray Residential Associations, told The Post. "We will continue to work to expedite this project so that it can be done sooner. The current timeline is not acceptable. This has been moving at

a snail's pace."

DOT officials met Thursday with the county's Transportation Planning Agency (TPA) to discuss its \$2.1 million Project Development & Environment (PD&E) study that began in February. During the next two years, DOT officials expect to meet with groups such as the Alliance and hold a number of public meetings to obtain input regarding the project. The study, required by federal

See PROJECT, B5



When the work is eventually completed on West Atlantic Avenue, the highway will be expanded from two lanes in each direction to three lanes. A 22-foot wide median will be built along with seven-foot wide buffered bike lanes and six-foot sidewalks on both sides of the road.

(FDOT PHOTO)

PROJECT

From Page B1

law, will examine environmental, noise, social and community impacts along with how to not disturb canals operated by the Lake Worth Drainage District.

DOT expects to report its findings at a public hearing in December 2021 and adopt the report in the summer of 2022.

DOT can then begin to enter into the design phase of the project (\$3.4 million), which may take another two years to complete.

And then it may take three more years to acquire the property needed to permit West Atlantic Avenue to be widened (\$44.7 million).

If all goes as planned, construction will start in 2027 and be completed in 2031.

Another issue is that the \$35.2 million in construction costs has not yet been funded.

Much of the 1.8-mile stretch of highway is rated an "F," the lowest possible designation that traffic officials can assign.

The designation means that the highway is already at overcapacity. Traffic on West Atlantic often resembles a parking lot.

More than 40,000 vehicles a day travel on the section between Hagen Ranch and Jog roads.

The congestion has sometimes made it difficult for Palm Beach County Fire & Rescue vehicles to respond to emergencies in a timely manner.

When the work is eventually completed, the highway will be expanded from two lanes in each direction to three lanes. A 22-foot wide median will be built along with

seven-foot wide buffered bike lanes and 6-foot sidewalks on both sides of the road.

The state plans on putting in a sidewalk from Michelangelo Boulevard to west of Jog Road.

The highway will have a width of 126 feet once the work is completed.

The Alliance has an ally in the TPA.

Executive Director Nick Uhren told The Post that it too will stress to DOT that the project needed to be done "yesterday," noting the widening of the road is at the "top of the agency's priorities."

Palm Beach County Commissioner Richard Weinroth also urged DOT to expedite the project.

Uhren said the county and the state developed plans to widen the road in 2008, but the project kept rising in cost and then the recession hit. "It is too bad that it was not done then as there have been a lot of rooftops added in

the interim."

Uhren already has one suggestion for DOT.

He wants to see a combined walking and biking path as opposed to a separate sidewalk and bike lane.

It would be much safer for bicyclists, he noted, as they otherwise would be close to motorists.

A 13-foot combined path would be wide enough to accommodate both bicyclists and pedestrians, he noted.

While not part of the current PD&E study, the project will also result in widening of West Atlantic from Lyons Road to the turnpike.

DOT has developed a web site, <https://www.fdot.gov/projects/AtlanticAvePDE>, for the project to keep residents updated on the status. Alexander Estrada is the project manager for DOT. He can be reached at alexander.estrada@dot.state.fl.us.