

Group won't oppose Gandy plans

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Abstract:

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Full Text:

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Hillsborough County's top transportation group decided Tuesday not to oppose the state's options for improving Gandy Boulevard, despite pleas from residents and county commissioners.

The Metropolitan Planning Organization voted 7-5 against sending a letter to Gov. Bush asking him to cancel plans to connect the Gandy Bridge and the Lee Roy Selmon Crosstown Expressway.

Several members of the group - which includes county commissioners, City Council members and representatives of local transportation agencies - said they want to wait until the state finishes studying the options before taking a stand.

"We have a process we have to go through, and we're right in the middle of that," said Shawn Harrison, a Tampa City Council member.

County Commissioners Pat Frank, Jan Platt and Thomas Scott supported the letter, which they hope will end the decades-old debate.

"I think we need to move on and let these people go back to living normal lives,"

Platt said. "Forget any more studies and deal with it in a way that does not negatively impact people."

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Residents have debated the options for decades but only recently banded together to fight the project.

About 30 of them attended Tuesday's MPO meeting seeking support from the 15-member board. Anne O' Hara, who represents homeowners in Guernsey Estates north of Gandy, told members that traffic on Gandy has held steady in the past 10 years, based on county statistics.

Ellen Nimon, who lives in nearby Regency Cove, said she was amazed the state wants to go ahead and spend money on a costly project that no one in the community wants.

The state estimates the elevated highway would cost \$311- million, versus up to \$277-million for the bypass. The totals include the costs of design, construction and land.

After the meeting, Nimon she was disappointed but not discouraged. The City Council took a similar stand last week.

"Finally, we're getting their attention," she said. "Right now we're just in a wait-and-see. We have not given up."