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Another Good Plan For Gandy

For years officials in Pinellas County pushed the Florida Department of Transportation to build an extension of the Gandy Bridge, a major span crossing Tampa Bay, to connect directly to the Lee Roy Selmon Expressway, believing it was needed to better evacuate residents in the event of a major hurricane. Residents living near Gandy Boulevard on the Hillsborough side opposed any plan that would disrupt their community, especially a connector that would cut through residential neighborhoods.

In October it was announced that the costly, disruptive recommendations would be dropped in favor of a proposal that would not displace any homes or businesses. State Sen. Jim Sebesta has proposed improving Gandy's traffic flow by synchronizing traffic lights, adding right-turn lanes, installing concrete medians to guide cars making left turns, and eliminating some of the curb cuts. At an estimated cost of between \$10 million and \$20 million, the plan is much less expensive than the \$300 million FDOT proposal.

The other day, in the belief that improved evacuation routes are still needed, Pinellas officials announced a vision for improving the traffic flow on their side of the Gandy Bridge. The blueprint calls for widening Gandy to six lanes and building overpasses at the busiest intersections. Few, if any, homes or businesses would be displaced.

The overpasses, especially the one proposed for Fourth Street, would speed traffic not only on Gandy, but on streets connecting to Interstate 275. This is important because the eight-lane Howard Frankland Bridge still will be the chief evacuation route.

Sebesta has warned of the possibility of as much as \$750 million in cuts in federal transportation funding over the next two to three years, so money could be a big problem. Still, it's good to know that officials in both counties have come up with workable proposals for a major street that connects both sides of Tampa Bay.

This story can be found at: <http://tampatrib.com/News/MGA24FGHU9D.html>

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