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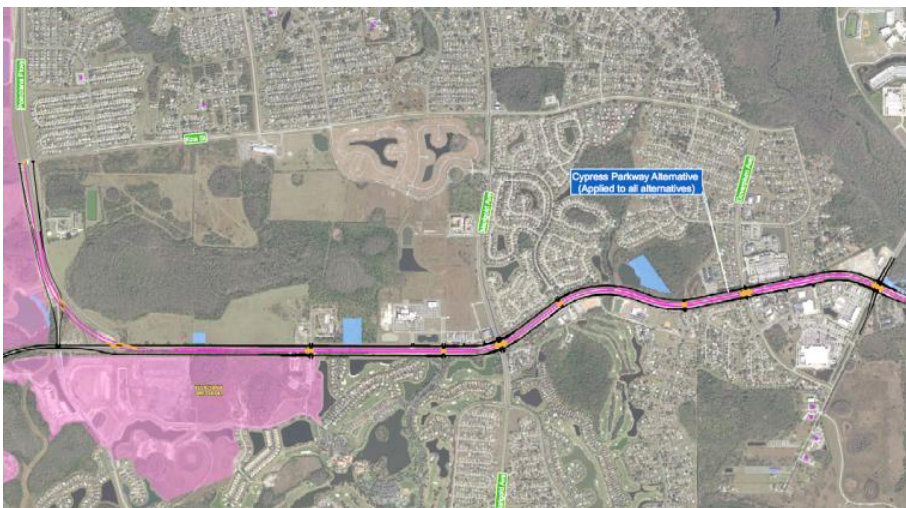
Residents: Cypress Parkway toll road creates ‘Great Wall of Poinciana’

By Ken Jackson on Tuesday, July 25, 2023

It’s the best route to help area traffic, CFX says



Poinciana residents ask questions of Central Florida Expressway Authority representatives Tuesday at a public meeting about the proposed Southport Connector toll road along Cypress Parkway. PHOTO/KEN JACKSON



The western end of the Southport Connector includes an expressway in the Cypress Parkway median, raised to pass over cross streets. GRAPHIC/CFX

The Central Florida Expressway Authority's next big project in Osceola County is to connect the southern end of Poinciana Parkway to the east side of where Pleasant Hill Road turns into Cypress Parkway, in order to build a further connection to Florida's Turnpike and points east and north.

But the leading proposal — a raised expressway in the median of Cypress along the bustling business district, with new lanes of it for local traffic on either side — creates concern for how it will affect those businesses.

The original intent of the 15-mile Southport Connector is to connect the south end of Poinciana Parkway to the Florida Turnpike. But the segment of most importance to the crowd assembled Tuesday during a public meeting at Valencia College Poinciana was the segment currently designed to run along the median of Cypress Parkway to get south of Lake Tohopekaliga. Residents are concerned about how a raised road would bisect the communities north of Cypress Parkway from the businesses on the south side, and how the acquisition of right of way, the construction and flow of lanes will impact those businesses.

The Expressway Authority (CFX) met with residents Tuesday, to provide information — and try to alleviate fears — on what they stress is a plan for a road that forms the southern end of a beltway around Osceola County, and isn't encased in concrete yet.

"The expressway will help us keep up with the growth occurring in this region, something prevalent throughout Central Florida," said Ralph Bove, CFX's program manager for the Southport Connector, at Tuesday's meeting. "We started the (impact) study in 2020, and we're continuing to evaluate alternatives that avoid or minimize significant adverse impacts."

Bove said the main reason CFX feels it needs to go down the middle of Cypress Parkway is that the space available for right of way in that corridor, 300 feet, is better than, say, along KOA Street, which only has 150 feet and would adversely and directly impact residents along it.

A community group called SCAR (Southport Connector Alternative Routes) has a website (scarofpoinciana.com), detailing how the road could instead travel along the eastern or western boundaries of Reedy Creek and not impact Cypress Parkway while connecting the two A-to-B points CFX is trying to meet.

"Those alternatives would have direct and significant adverse effects on the human and natural environment."

Bove said the new street-level Cypress Parkway would have enhanced intersections and signals, and could be expanded from four to six lanes in the future. And the expressway could be changed to just be elevated by earthen walls over cross streets like Solivita Boulevard and Laurel, Marigold and Doverplum avenues.

"All options are on the table," Bove said. "This will significantly increase the capacity and improve mobility along Cypress Parkway."

The SCAR group has even gone as far as to file suit with the U.S. Department of Transportation, saying that since the raised road would wall off the homes of a largely minority and lower-middle class community from its business, it would violate their civil rights. And, they say it will do nothing to alleviate the traffic problems currently on Cypress, caused by what they say is a myriad of uncoordinated traffic lights.

That group has started a Change.org petition to try to stop the build of what's getting called, "The Great Wall of Poinciana."

"The big corporations, Publix and Wal-Mart, they won't get involved," said Poinciana resident and SCAR member Bill Dalton. "But there are smaller retailers who will lose business. These smaller shops are just learning about it."

Since it involves legal action, Bove admitted Tuesday the court filing has stopped CFX from being able to openly meet with any residents involved in it. Brian Hutchings, CFX's communications manager, said the agency intends to stay connected with residents throughout the process.

"We have a plan in place to engage with the community, this is something we recognize we need to do a better job of," he said. "You are going to see our efforts. I'm personally committed we are aggressive in the community to share our plans, for the duration."

Dalton said he remains cynical.

"This meeting was a way to spend two hours when they really had nothing to say," he said.

