

Rio Grande Avenue Pedestrian Safety Study

Virtual Community Meeting

December 6, 2021

Question and Answer (Q&A) Forum

Below is a summary of the questions, comments, and responses discussed during the live Q&A forum.

Q: What is the plan for all the traffic that this is going to create?

A: In addition to studying the corridor, we are going to take updated traffic counts along the corridor and on its side streets before and after the improvements are implemented. We will compare these counts with the counts that we collected previously for the study. The reason why Phase one is starting out with changes to pavement markings and delineated posts is because if we need to make modifications, we can easily do so. We will be implementing Phase one to get a good feel of how everyone including automobiles, pedestrians, and bicyclists will be using the corridor. The cross sections presented in the presentation are just typical sections. High-volume intersections like Michigan Street, 33rd Street, LB McLeod Road, and Gore Street will be treated differently because we still need to provide the ability for vehicles to turn right and move through the intersection.

Q: When is that going to be posted and is that going to be part of the study?

A: Posted on the project website is the entire study where you can see exactly what the conceptual plans will look like. Those conceptual plans are what we will be using and they show exactly where right turn lanes will go at the major intersections. We will be taking traffic counts before and after the improvements are made to make sure we are paying attention to everything in the community, not just Rio Grande Avenue.

Q: Rio Grande is a fairly heavily traveled road and reducing the vehicle lanes will hinder flow and traffic efficiency. The issue that I see isn't the amount of lanes, rather the speed at which a few people daily fly down Rio Grande. Has additional speed control by officers been considered?

A: Absolutely. Our Sheriff's Department does a great job with enforcements. Unfortunately, they cannot be there every day, so we need to look at other ways to reduce speed. As part of the study, we are looking to reduce the speed limit to 35 mph throughout the corridor which should be helpful. We realize there are different sections of Rio Grande Avenue which need to be treated differently. As we go through the process of the study, we will be counting on the community to

provide input and let us know if there are any issues. The study team will be taking all input into consideration before making any permanent changes.

Note: Please keep in mind that Orange County's Sheriff Department, OPD, and even FL Hwy Patrol have limited resources. Speed control will not only send a message to the community to slow down, but will also generate some revenue for the departments. Another area of enforcement that could help pedestrian safety is to keep vehicles from parking across sidewalks down the Rio Grande Avenue corridor. Blocking the sidewalks forces pedestrians into the road and is very dangerous. Enforcement of speed and parking should help tremendously.

Q: Could you talk about the opportunity for economic development?

A: There have been other locations within the county that have done similar projects. Edgewater Drive did something similar a few years back with the same cross section that the Rio Grande Avenue Study has recommended. Based on the changes that were made on Edgewater Drive, speeding issues decreased and more businesses were brought into the area. Making changes like this to a community makes it more walkable and livable. People like to live in communities where you can walk, ride or bike to places. There are a lot of school age children that walk to the five schools within the corridor. There are also a lot of transit riders (three times more than the County average) as well.

Q: Almost daily, some drivers will drive 70+ mph, often passing traffic in the center turning lane. Have raised medians been considered to stop that from happening, as well as lending a stopping place for pedestrians crossing Rio Grande?

A: Part of phase two is to add raised medians along Rio Grande Avenue at appropriate locations. We want to make sure motorists can still turn into their street on their way home, but we still plan on adding raised medians to stop people from using the center lanes.

Q: What originally raised the concern about the road? How many accidents per year do you think this is going to reduce?

A: We have received a lot of complaints and concerns from pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, students and crossing guards that there are people who use the center lanes to get by traffic while people are crossing the street. As shown in the presentation, these safety initiatives reduce crashes quite a bit depending on the type. Lane repurposing reduces all crash types by 19%, speed reduction reduces all crash types by 32%, adding a raised median reduces pedestrian related crashes by 32%, and adding Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons (RRFBs) at the crosswalks reduce pedestrian crashes by 47%. We will be implementing two additional crosswalks throughout the corridor to allow more opportunities for pedestrians to cross the street safely.

Q: Would there be opportunities for aesthetic improvements such as landscaping and hardscape?

A: The long-term improvements that we discussed includes incorporating landscaping in the raised median and buffered bike lanes with a physical barrier. The City of St. Pete has used planters in their buffered bike lanes as a physical barrier element. The community used the planters to put flowers and nice landscaping to help with aesthetics. Other places have used painted barriers to showcase community artwork. There are a lot of creative unique opportunities that can be applied to improve the aesthetics.

Q: Are the number of crashes posted somewhere? Will there be bus turn in's as part of this "improvement"?

A: The number of crashes shown in the presentation was pulled directly from the study and can be found on the project website. Regarding buses, we will be working with LYNX to see what we can do because we think it is very important to have the ability to have locations where buses can pull in.

Q: Do you have volumes for pedestrians and bicyclist users? How many residents would benefit for such improvements?

A: The volume information that we collected as part of the turning movement counts for pedestrians, bicyclists, and vehicles is included in the study which can be found on our project website. It is important to note that residents who take the bus are also pedestrians and bicyclists. On average, there are at least more than 2,000 people using transit in the study area that will be helped by some of these improvements.

Q: What are the next steps?

A: The next steps are collecting fresh data on the existing side street volumes and traffic, then working on design for implementation of phase one, which includes pavement markings and delineated posts in certain locations. We will see how that works and listen to concerns from the community. Within the presentation we have given several ways to contact us with questions or concerns. We will take a good look at the concerns, and the volume and traffic counts in the study area about six months into it to see if the improvements have done what they are intended to do, which is to make the corridor safer and more useful for all users. After completion of phase one, the next step would be working on obtaining funding for the next phase.

Q: What is the anticipated costs for Phase 1?

A: The anticipated cost for phase one is currently estimated at \$200,000. The estimated engineer cost was originally closer to \$500,000. The reason we were able to bring the cost down is because the Traffic Engineering Division will be doing the work internally. We want to keep the cost down as much as possible because we want to begin with Phase one implementation to see the results and move quickly to next phase to make some of these safety enhancements permanent.