



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

DECEMBER 2009

DOWNTOWN MOBILITY STUDY



SUBMITTED TO:
CITIES OF BRADENTON
AND PALMETTO



SUBMITTED BY:
RENAISSANCE PLANNING GROUP



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

In a way unlike any since the boom years of the 1920s, the rules truly have changed. Florida and its communities are facing a series of challenges that threaten the state's long-term fiscal health, its livability and its very character. With boom-burbs gone bust and empty storefronts lining many suburban commercial corridors, there is a heightened interest in quality redevelopment, infill and mobility strategies that strengthen the economic vitality of Florida's cities. This push comes from several sources, including rising fuel costs and a greater interest in developing alternative forms of transportation, a national and statewide emphasis to reduce greenhouse gas emissions linked to climate change, and concerns about long-term energy sustainability.

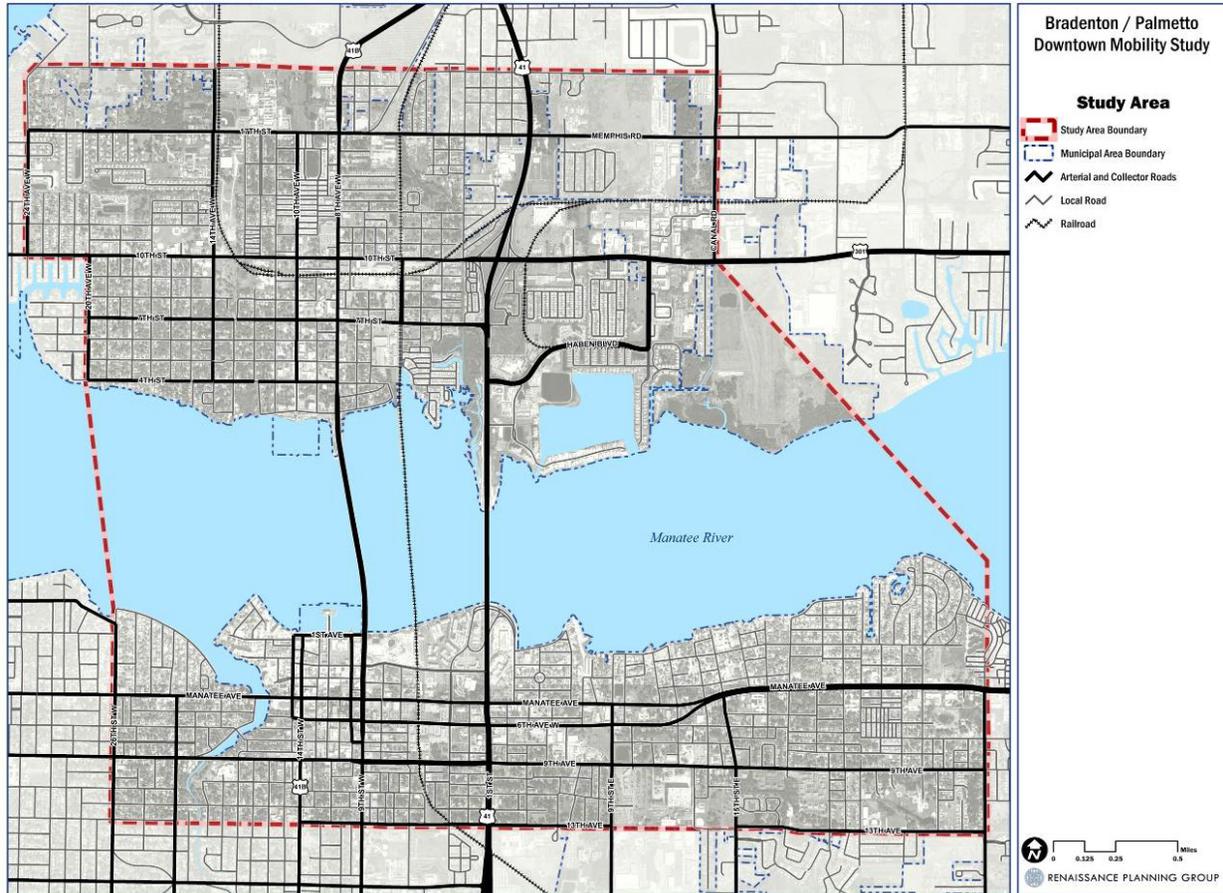
Perhaps most significantly, the Florida Legislature acted in 2008 to change the rules concerning transportation concurrency to encourage development within the state's urban centers. With the passage of SB 360, the Legislature expressed its interest in shifting statewide policy from conventional growth management based on roadway levels of service to create transportation concurrency exception areas in Florida's dense urban areas. Based on criteria set by the new law, the cities of Bradenton and Palmetto are now exempt from state-mandated concurrency to achieve and maintain roadway level of service standards. Instead, the communities must create and define funding strategies for a mobility plan that addresses development of alternatives to single-occupant vehicle travel. This is a major change in the rules that supports redevelopment and mobility goals for both Bradenton and Palmetto.

Cities largely remain the state's economic engines, serving as hubs for business, government, health care, culture and entertainment. With the state's population and revenues in decline, cities provide the regional access and concentration of resources that draw jobs, people and the services they need. Their effectiveness at generating economic activity requires thoughtful attention and careful planning to achieve the proper urban form and enhanced multimodal mobility and access necessary to benefit the community and region.

STUDY GOALS AND CONTEXT

The Bradenton/Palmetto Downtown Mobility Study represents a two-year effort to imagine, analyze, plan and build consensus for viable mobility strategies that effectively serve the regional and local travel needs in the downtown areas of both cities. Figure ES-1 identifies the study area, which generally focuses on the downtown areas of both Palmetto and Bradenton, including adjacent neighborhoods. The goal of the study is to define a long-term vision and strategic blueprint for mobility that supports the redevelopment and revitalization goals of both cities to make their downtown areas inviting, attractive and economically sustainable destinations that benefit the entire community and region. Both communities have completed redevelopment plans for their downtown and waterfront areas. Thus, the outcome of this extensive planning process is a practical, cost efficient plan that provides a balanced set of recommendations intended improve livability, personal mobility and access, while also serving regional and through traffic needs.

FIGURE ES – 1: STUDY AREA



The creation of the Tampa Bay Area Regional Transportation Authority (TBARTA) and its adopted Regional Multimodal Master Plan has major implications for Palmetto and Bradenton. TBARTA has given new impetus to various forms of regional transportation, particularly inter-county passenger rail, Bus Rapid Transit and express bus connections, which include both Palmetto and Bradenton as important anchors of this regional network.

The study evaluates near- and long-term transportation improvement options, including the feasibility of recommendations to convert the one-way streets of Manatee Avenue and 6th Avenue into two-way streets, as well as a possible series of street connections to enhance circulation, the placement of roundabouts, improved access for existing and future transit service, and ensuring continued truck access for deliveries. Transit enhancements, bicycle and pedestrian connectivity, and parking availability are essential to an effective downtown mobility plan.

At the outset, the study sought to define a balanced traffic circulation and mobility plan in support of the economic vitality and enhanced livability of the downtown area, while also maintaining traffic flow and improving safety. This entailed creation of a phased implementation program for transportation projects tied to development and traffic growth in the area. Recommendations include an implementation action plan that identifies capital project priorities, funding strategies and policy changes to improve downtown mobility and access in both communities. The study



entails a blend of technical analysis with focused public participation activities to create a mobility improvement plan that reflects consensus on strategies and priorities for each local government. Because of the complexity and competing demands of the downtown transportation network, a primary objective of the study entailed substantial efforts to achieve acceptance by the Florida Department of Transportation as well as other stakeholders in the community.

PROJECT PARTNERS

The Sarasota/Manatee Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) allocated funding for the Bradenton/Palmetto Downtown Mobility Study through its Congestion Management Process, and the Florida Department of Transportation provided the funds to conduct the study. The City of Bradenton provided the contractual and administrative oversight of the consulting contract, with Bradenton and the City of Palmetto serving as joint project managers for the completion of the study. Other agency study partners have included Manatee County Government, the Bradenton Downtown Development Authority (DDA) and the Central Community Redevelopment Agency.

With funds coming from the MPO's Congestion Management Process, the study established a horizon year of 2013 to focus on near-term, low cost projects that could improve mobility and relieve congestion. A longer term vision helped provide the framework for these strategies.

RECOMMENDED MOBILITY PLAN

Figure ES-2 presents the recommended short- and long-term strategies for the Downtown Mobility Study. Tables ES-1 and 2 shows the breakdown of these projects into short, intermediate and long-term horizons, with planning-level costs developed for each. The Plan first established a long-term regional vision for transportation serving the downtown area, with short-term projects through the 2013 analysis year designed to make substantial progress toward achieving the study goals. With more than \$60 million in recommended transportation improvements, the study recommends starting small with projects that can be achieved in a financially feasible way over the next several years.

Braderton/Palmetto Downtown Mobility Study
Roadway Network - Short and Long Term Strategies
November 2009

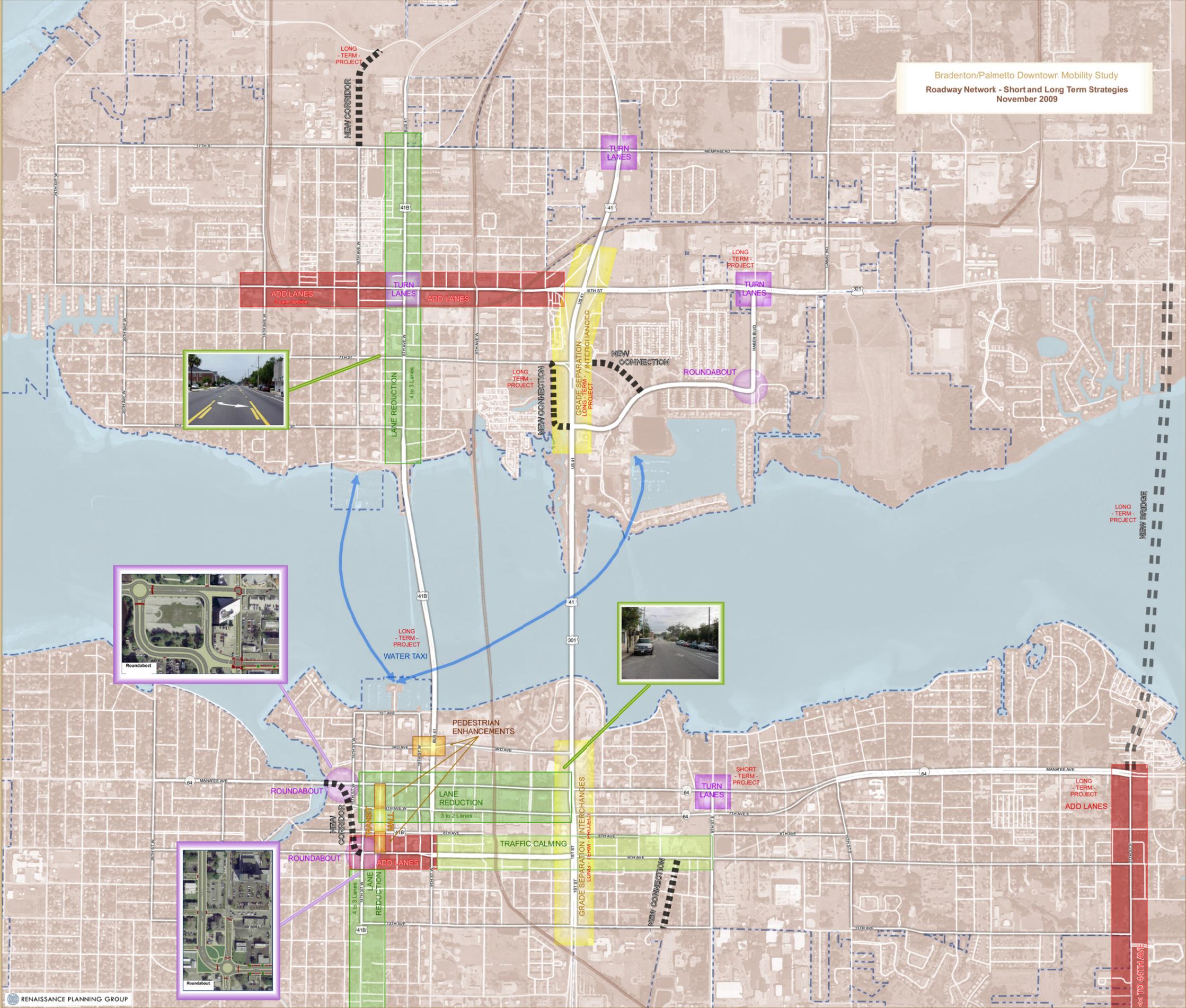


Figure ES-2



TABLE ES – 1 SHORT AND MID-TERM PROJECT COSTS

	LOCATION	FROM	TO	DESCRIPTION	MUNICIPALITY	MAINTENANCE	COST
SHORT-TERM	2nd Street East	Riverfront Blvd	Manatee Ave	Enhance pedestrian facilities	Bradenton	Bradenton	\$170,000
	9th (MLK Jr.) Avenue	9th St W	9th St E	Reduce outside lane widths, add on-street parking, and enhance pedestrian facilities	Bradenton	Bradenton	\$1,240,000
	6th St Ct E	11th Ave E	13th Ave E	Construct 2 lane undivided road	Bradenton	Bradenton	\$810,000
	Manatee Avenue	26th St W	15th St W	Add bicycle lane signage and pavement markings	Bradenton	FDOT	\$10,000
	Manatee Avenue and 9th Street E			Add left turn lane westbound	Bradenton	FDOT	\$330,000
	9th St E	Manatee Ave	US Hwy 301	Add bicycle lane signage and pavement markings	Bradenton	FDOT/Bradenton	\$10,000
	River Ride	9th St W	1st St (US 41)	Add multi-use trail adjacent to Riverwalk	Bradenton	Bradenton	\$100,000
	9th St W and 3rd Ave			Enhance pedestrian facilities	Bradenton	Bradenton	\$30,000
	Green Bridge Trail	Bradenton	Palmetto	Add multi-use trail	Bradenton	FDOT	\$550,000
	13th Street Transit Station	6th Ave	8th Ave	Transit station transfer facility	Bradenton	MCAT	\$2,040,000
	10th Street	15th Ave W	8th Ave W	Add continuous center turn lane	Palmetto	Palmetto	\$2,210,000
	10th Street	8th Ave W	5th Ave W	Add one eastbound lane, bicycle lanes, add signage, and pavement markings	Palmetto	FDOT	\$1,620,000
	10th Street	24th Ave W	8th Ave W	Fill bicycle lane gaps, add signage, and pavement markings	Palmetto	Palmetto	\$520,000
	4th Street and 20th Avenue	8th Ave W	10th St W	Add share the road signage, and pavement markings	Palmetto	Palmetto	\$10,000
	Manatee Avenue and 15th St W			Intersection improvements	Bradenton	FDOT	\$170,000
	Haben Blvd and Rivera Dunes			Roundabout	Palmetto	Palmetto	\$370,000
	Willow-Ellenton Trail	10th St W	Canal Rd	Add multi-use trail within railroad ROW	Palmetto	Palmetto	\$930,000
Short-term total							\$11,120,000



	LOCATION	FROM	TO	DESCRIPTION	MUNICIPALITY	MAINTENANCE	COST
MID-TERM	Manatee Avenue	15th St W	9th St W	Modify continuous left turn lane into a series of left turn lanes with curb extensions to prevent through movement, maintain two through lanes, and enhance pedestrian facilities.	Bradenton	FDOT	\$2,320,000
	6th Avenue	15th St W	9th St W	Reduce from 3 lane to 2 lane, enhance pedestrian facilities, and add multi-use path	Bradenton	FDOT	\$2,350,000
	14th Street West	8th Ave	26th Ave	Reduce from 4 lane undivided to 3 lane with center turn lane, enhance pedestrian facilities, and add multi-use path	Bradenton	FDOT	\$8,100,000
	9th (MLK Jr.) Avenue	15th St W	9th St W	Widen from 3 lane undivided to 4 lane divided with enhance pedestrian facilities	Bradenton	Bradenton	\$2,110,000
	15th Street West	Manatee Ave	9th Ave	Widen from 2 lane undivided to 4 lane divided with enhance pedestrian facilities	Bradenton	Bradenton	\$2,610,000
	Manatee Avenue	15th St E	27th St E	Reduce outside lane widths and add bicycle lanes	Bradenton	FDOT	\$880,000
	Rails with Trails	Riverwalk	13th Ave	Add multi-use trail within the railroad ROW	Bradenton	Bradenton	\$990,000
	Manatee Ave Roundabout	Manatee Ave	15th St W	Roundabout	Bradenton	FDOT	\$1,190,000
	9th Ave Roundabout	15th St W	9th Ave	Roundabout	Bradenton	FDOT	\$570,000
	Bradenton Circulator			Capital cost and 5 year operating cost to provide downtown transit circulator	Bradenton	MCAT	\$6,640,000
	US Hwy 41 and 17th Street			Add right turn lanes northbound and southbound and left turn lanes eastbound and westbound	Palmetto	FDOT/County	\$760,000
	US Hwy 301 and Haben Blvd			Reconstruct northbound right turn to channelized with merge	Palmetto	FDOT	\$330,000
Haben Blvd and 10th Street E (US Hwy 301)			Reconstruct northbound right turn	Palmetto	Palmetto	\$330,000	



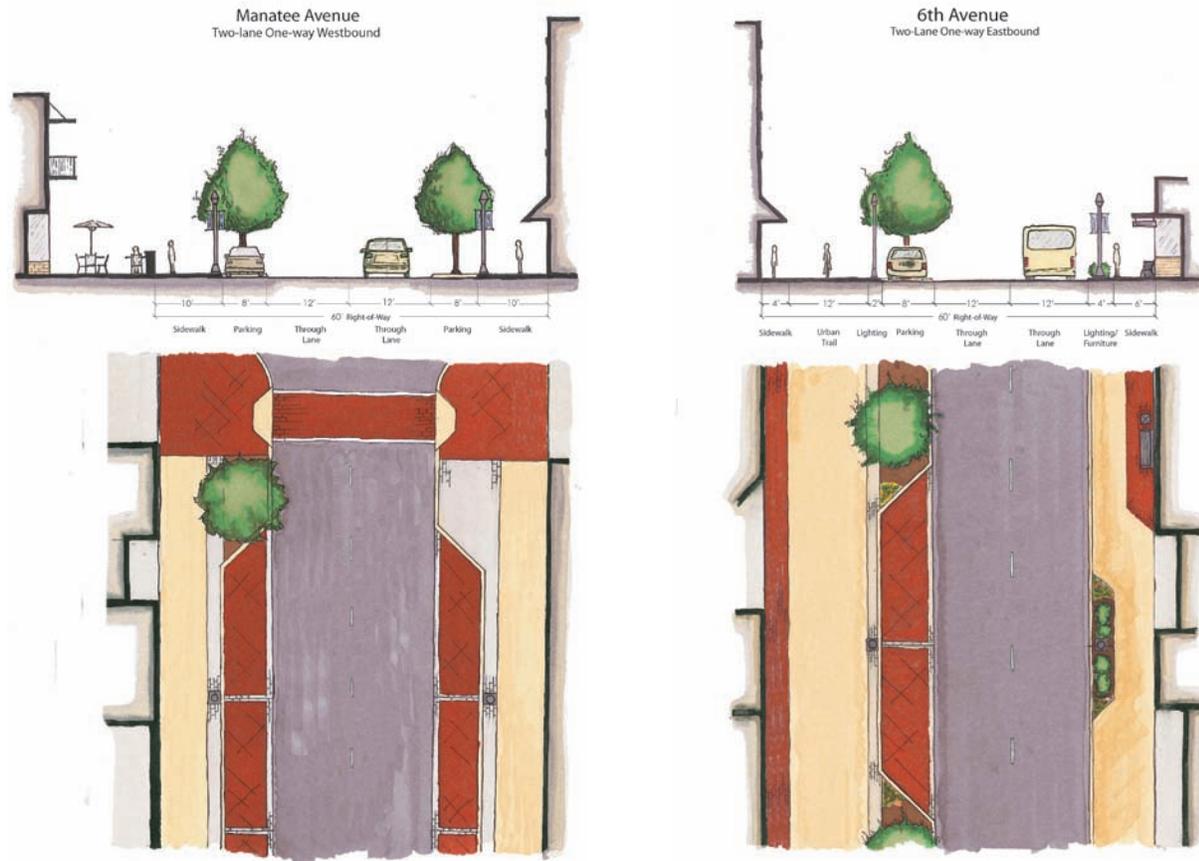
	LOCATION	FROM	TO	DESCRIPTION	MUNICIPALITY	MAINTENANCE	COST
	8th Avenue West (Bus 41)	17th St	Green Bridge	Reduce from 4 lane undivided to 3 lane with center turn lane, bicycle lanes, and enhanced pedestrian facilities	Palmetto	FDOT	\$9,060,000
	8th Avenue W and 10th St W			Add left turn lane westbound and right turn lane northbound	Palmetto	FDOT	\$810,000
	7th St Connection	Haben Blvd	7th St W	Construct 2 lane undivided	Palmetto	Palmetto	\$3,110,000
	10th Avenue W	17th St	Terra Ceia Bay Blvd	Construct 2 lane undivided	Palmetto	Palmetto	\$3,060,000
	14th Street Trail	10th St W	Blackstone Park	Add multi-use trail within road ROW	Palmetto	Palmetto	\$530,000
	Downtown Palmetto Trail	Green Bridge	10th St W	Add multi-use trail	Palmetto	Palmetto	\$1,090,000
	Palmetto Downtown Circulator			Capital cost and 5 year operating cost to increase service on MCAT Route 13	Palmetto	MCAT	\$6,290,000
	Mid-term Total						
GRAND TOTAL							\$64,250,000

TABLE ES – 2 LONG TERM PROJECTS AND ESTIMATED COSTS

	LOCATION	FROM	TO	DESCRIPTION	MUNICIPALITY	MAINTENANCE	COST
LONG	Option 1						
	US 41/301 Interchanges	9th Ave	Manatee Ave	Interchange Series	Bradenton	FDOT	\$150,000,000
	Option 2						
	New Bridge	US Hwy 301	Manatee Ave	New 4 lane bridge	Bradenton/ Palmetto	FDOT	\$150,000,000
	27th Street East	New Bridge	US Hwy 301	Widen from 2 lane undivided to 4 lane divided	Bradenton	FDOT	\$14,720,000

There are three “signature” projects in the short-term recommendations. First is the relatively minimal road diet or lane reduction on Manatee Avenue and 6th Avenue through downtown Bradenton, as shown in Figure ES-3. This improves pedestrian accessibility, helps to overcome a major barrier between the downtown core and adjacent commercial and residential areas to better unify downtown, and, with strategic improvements to MLK, Jr. Avenue and other surrounding locations, maintains traffic flow for non-local traffic. Two roundabouts at Manatee Avenue and 15th Street, and MLK, Jr. Avenue and 14th Street support this recommendation in the mid-term horizon, but are not essential to the proposed modification of Manatee and 6th Avenues. The study recommends a short-term trial of the lane reduction using traffic cones prior to actual construction.

FIGURE ES – 3: MANATEE & 6YH CONCEPTUAL DESIGNS

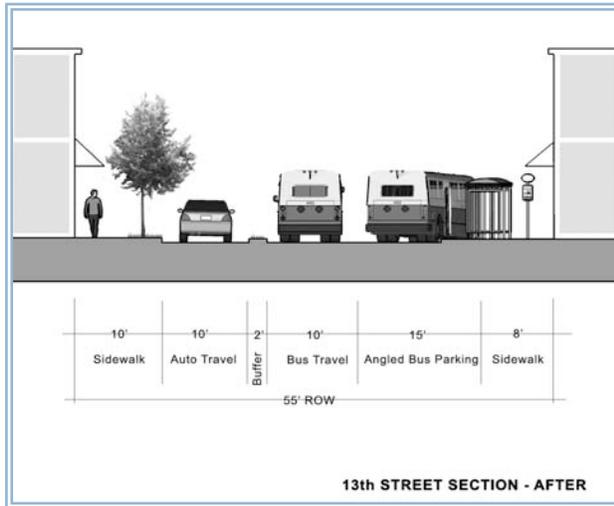


The second signature project is the modification of the Green Bridge/Tamiami Trail to enhance the multimodal environment for this designated Scenic Highway. By relocating the existing barrier and other minor modifications to create a 10' multi-use path as shown in Figure ES-4, the Green Bridge can become the backbone of an outstanding bicycle and pedestrian network serving the two cities. This is a very low cost medication with the potential to increase use of non-auto modes for transportation purposes and draw many visitors to help market the downtown area.

FIGURE ES – 4: RECOMMENDED GREEN BRIDGE DESIGN MODIFICATION



FIGURE ES – 5: DESIGN CONCEPT FOR THE 13TH STREET TRANSIT MALL



The third major project is the construction of a Transit Mall for Manatee County Area Transit on 13th Street West in downtown Bradenton. Funded with a federal grant, the project entails conversion of the existing roadway to allow both waiting buses and cars to share the road with a much-enhanced pedestrian environment that improves north-south connectivity. As identified in Figure ES-5, this provides a dedicated transit staging / transfer area that is controlled and policed by MCAT. A downtown transit circulator route would provide improved transit connectivity between local origins and destinations to this transfer point. In the longer

term, Bus Rapid Transit linkages to Sarasota and express bus or even passenger rail service to Tampa and St. Petersburg will help anchor Palmetto and Bradenton as highly accessible and economically vital destinations.

A key interim step for longer-term strategies includes conducting a Project Development and Environmental (PD&E) Study to fully evaluate the potential grade separation of US 41/301 at Haben Boulevard, as well as alternative ways to improve connectivity and access in this area. This should be examined as a key element of the “Regional US 41” concept to improve north-south traffic flow in the study area. The long-term alternative to the Regional 41 concept is to construct a third bridge across the Manatee River. This new bridge found much support from key stakeholders during the course of the Downtown Mobility Study.

Finally, because the Downtown Mobility Study is a multi-year, multi-phase effort, establishing benchmarks and targets is an effective way to measure progress toward plan implementation and keep the study fresh. The study recommends that the cities initiate a monitoring program in partnership with the Sarasota/Manatee MPO and Florida Department of Transportation to document progress toward achieving the mobility goals outlined in this study. A monitoring report would fit within the MPO’s established Congestion Management Process, and should include three main categories: 1) Local Government Mobility Strategy Actions, 2) Land Development Activity, and 3) Transportation Characteristics, Trends and Patterns, consistent with performance measures used in this study.



KEY SUPPORTING FINDINGS

Origin-Destination Study

A key data collection effort entailed an identification of how many travelers in the study area were making a local stop or merely traveling through to reach a destination elsewhere. The results were surprising. From a license plate survey conducted in the spring of 2008 at the study area's main entry and exit points, about one-third (35 percent) of traffic on the major roadways was traveling through without a destination stop in the two downtowns. Of perhaps even greater interest, only about 11 percent of traffic on SR 64 (Manatee Avenue and 6th Avenue) from the eastbound or westbound directions travels through the study area. The origin-destination study revealed possible ways to redirect non-local traffic to use other corridors, such as 9th Street East in Bradenton, and also provided information supporting multimodal transportation and parking strategies to make local travel more efficient.

Traffic Conditions

Traffic volumes have remained relatively flat on downtown area roadways over the last decade, despite the growth boom in Manatee County of the early to mid- 2000s. The outcomes of this recommended plan result in improved mobility and access for the downtown areas without sacrificing the mobility of through travelers and regional needs. Even with the lane reductions on Manatee Avenue and 6th Avenue, average delay changes by only 15 seconds and the peak congestion period lasts less than an hour with 2013 traffic, which is only a minor increase from current conditions. While the bridges and access points on either side of the river experience congestion today, the sections of Manatee Avenue and 6th Avenue in the downtown core of Bradenton are not congested today. Using current traffic levels, the duration of congestion with the lane reduction and projected growth through 2013 would be less than 15 minutes, occurring during one or two cycle lengths at the most. This is well below what most cities would argue is an acceptable level of congestion for a thriving, economically healthy downtown.

Multimodal Quality of Service

The existing environment for bicyclists, pedestrians and transit users, with the exception of isolated facilities along a few roadways in both cities, is generally poor. There is a lack of facilities, poor connectivity and limited buffer areas between vulnerable road users and passing traffic. Crossing streets on foot can be a challenge. The recommended plan, with the addition of a downtown transit circulator in Bradenton and a better network supporting non-auto travel, raises the quality of service for all modes and provides a foundation for growth in recreational and transportation trips using multimodal facilities and services. The Green Bridge, 13th Street Transit Mall, the MLK, Jr. Avenue traffic calming, and other strategies create improved connections within the downtown area and its linkages to surrounding neighborhoods and other parts of Manatee County.



Public Participation

The community played a significant role in shaping the study recommendations. Three public workshops, multiple steering committee and stakeholder meetings, neighborhood briefings and other activities helped to define areas of consensus or agreement. Initial scenarios or project concepts were rejected or refined based on public input. Recommendations that did not generate sufficient consensus to move into the near-term list of strategies were deferred to later years and further discussion. Examples include potential grade separations on US 41/301 south of the Manatee River, a third bridge, and lane reductions for increased pedestrian safety, convenience and comfort to 8th Avenue in Palmetto and 14th Street in Bradenton. Of particular interest was how initial study recommendations for MLK, Jr. Avenue in Bradenton affected the south/central Bradenton neighborhood located along that corridor. After consultation with neighborhood residents and leaders, a modified plan was developed that addressed their concerns over traffic speeds and pedestrian safety, and include improved pedestrian crossing areas and street network connections to improve access in this area.

PLAN ACTIONS AND OUTCOMES

The Downtown Mobility Study recommended plan is a win-win for personal mobility and economic development in Manatee County, and represents many hours of hard work by the community stakeholders and their representatives to develop a cohesive transportation strategy that supports the visions of both communities and the region. The input of FDOT, MCAT and other agency partners helped to improve the plan and make it more achievable.

As a result, this is not an idealistic or grand vision plan with mere hopes of becoming reality. Rather, from the input of many agency and public stakeholders, along with extensive and thorough technical analysis, it is a mobility plan that is firmly grounded in the achievable. Initial ideas imagined the “what if” possibilities to tame traffic and create walkable downtown districts, while moving traffic efficiently and captivating large numbers of people willing to ride transit, ride their bikes and stroll to their destinations. From those initial ideas, the project moved quickly into a process of defining workable, realistic and financially attainable solutions that helped create a great destination while ensuring safe, convenient and balanced transportation options.

Key implementation actions include amending both cities’ comprehensive plans to incorporate the recommendations of this study into their required SB 360 mobility plans; moving forward on improved wayfinding and signage, both within the downtown and connecting to it; revising parking policies and practices to provide incentives for non-auto travel while improving the urban character; establishing a more robust Transportation Demand Management program to reduce peak period automobile travel, and accomplishing projects as part of coordinated project development, such as for street resurfacing and drainage improvements.



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