

South Walton Connector PD&E Study

Walton County

PURPOSE AND NEED STATEMENT

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The proposed project would provide transportation network improvements by providing either a new two-lane roadway or adding additional capacity to an existing roadway from CR 30A to US 98 in Walton County, Florida.

The widening alternative proposes to widen CR 395 to four lanes, reconstruct the multi-use trail as necessary, and provide bicycle lanes. The portion of CR 395 south of Sandgrass Blvd. would be an urban typical section, and the northern portion would be a suburban typical section.

New roadway alternatives are also being evaluated east of CR 395 and west of Watersound Parkway, in place of widening CR 395. This new north-south facility would be a two-lane rural typical section with 11-foot travel lanes and a 12-foot multi-use path within 150 feet of right-of-way.

PURPOSE

The primary purpose of the proposed South Walton Connector project is to enhance the local transportation network connecting US 98 to CR 30A. Secondary purposes are to address congestion, improve emergency service and evacuation times, and improve the local multi-modal transportation network.

NEED

The need for the proposed action is based on several factors. The proposed South Walton Connector Road will address congestion, enhance connectivity in the area, and provide additional multimodal options. These are addressed in more detail below.

System Linkage

Connectivity and mobility for users is currently limited due to local traffic having to utilize either US 98 or CR 30A to travel eastward of CR 395 for approximately 6.2 miles before the next north-south route is available (Watersound Parkway).

Residents of these areas are frequently working in other parts of Walton and/or western Bay County along with the many tourists destined for western Bay County's attractions. The development of the residential areas and community features such as the new Deer Lake Elementary School and sports complex off US 98 also create new mobility needs and destinations within the study area.

Emergency Services and Evacuation

Most of the developed areas within the study area boundaries are located within Evacuation Zones A or B. Currently, evacuating traffic from the study area must travel CR 30A to CR 395 or to Watersound Parkway to reach US 98 from which traffic must travel either west to US 331 or east to SR 79 in Bay County to

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evacuate to the north. Also, congestion on both CR 395 and CR 30A causes delays in the delivery of fire, police, and other emergency services. The improvement in connectivity would measurably improve delivery of these services.

Modal Interrelationships

Existing CR 30A is identified in the Transportation Element of the Walton County Comprehensive Plan as a constrained roadway. Physical constraints prevent providing capacity through additional travel lanes, therefore, other transportation options, including multimodal will be needed. There are numerous pedestrian and bicycle facilities within and adjacent to the study area. However, except for bicycle and pedestrian facilities along existing roadways, many of these trails are primarily for recreational purposes and do not necessarily connect with other trails providing an alternative transportation mode.

Existing bicycle and pedestrian facilities on the principal roads in the project area include a variable width multi-use path along CR 30A from CR 395 to Watersound Parkway. This path is located on the north side of CR 30A from CR 395 to Camelia Street, then transitions to the south side from Camelia Street to Paradise by the Sea Boulevard. In addition to the multi-use path, sidewalks are present in portions of CR 30A. CR 395 also has an adjacent multi-use path that spans the entire roadway between CR 30A and US 98.

Recreational trails within and adjacent to the study area include: Eastern Lake Trail System and the Longleaf Greenway Trail both within the Point Washington State Forest. Other trails in the area that are present in whole or in part include: Great Northwest Coastal Trail Corridor, the West Bay Parkway Trail Corridor, and the Choctawhatchee Bay to Emerald Coast Trail System. A proposed trail through the Deer Lake State Park and Point Washington State Forest, identified as the Seacrest Connector, would connect CR 30A with US 98.

Improving the interconnectivity of the various types of trails would enhance the operation of the trail network. These multimodal facilities are a key element in the local active community. The South Walton Connector's multi-use path would complement the existing network and further improve the multimodal system within the project area.

Social Demands

Walton County is among the fastest growing counties in Florida, and according to the Bureau of Economic and Business Research is expected to have a population of 108,440 in 2045, an increase of 49 percent from the 2010 Census. In addition, South Walton County had a tourist population in 2018 of over 4,000,000 (a 4.1 percent increase over the 2017 tourist population which was up 10.2 percent over 2016). The projected population growth compounded by the tourist population puts additional demands on the transportation network.

Delivery of goods and services to local businesses is hampered by traffic network congestion, especially during tourist season, and by pedestrian traffic. Through trucks can avoid congestion by using longer alternate routes (US 98 specifically) but this option is not available to local delivery trucks, creating a reliability problem in the collection and/or delivery of goods and services.

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Project Status

The proposed South Walton Connector is consistent with Walton County's *Comprehensive Plan* (Transportation Element) goals, objectives, and policies as follows:

Goal T-1: Provide a safe cost-effective transportation system with adequate transportation facilities and services in place to mitigate impacts from development.

Objective T-1.4: The County shall develop a financially feasible Transportation Capital Improvements Schedule (CIS) to correct LOS deficiencies as identified in the County's Concurrency Management System and/or the Okaloosa-Walton Long Range Transportation Plan.

Objective T-1.9: Walton County shall strive to implement the Goals, Objectives, and Policies as outlined in the Scenic 30-A Corridor Management Plan for the preservation, maintenance, protection and promotion of those intrinsic resources within the corridor.

Goal T-2: Provide a multi-modal transportation system that serves to increase mobility, promote alternative transportation, and improve the quality of life for the citizens of Walton County.

Policy T-2.1.3: Walton County will promote the development of pedestrian ways and bikeways around the vicinity of schools and other facilities where opportunities exist to utilize utility rights-of-way, drainage easements, and the rights-of-way previously accepted by Walton County.

Policy T-2.1.5: Encourage non-motorized transportation facilities to link residential areas with recreational and commercial areas in a safe manner, in part by requiring the construction of sidewalks, bike lanes, multi-use paths, installation of signage, develop inter-connectivity, and/or striping of roadways to accommodate non-motorized transportation facilities

The proposed project is also identified as Project #44 in the Okaloosa-Walton TPO's *2040 Long Range Transportation Plan Needs Plan* adopted February 16, 2017.