

Malabar officials to FDOT: Improve Malabar Road ASAP

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Cars drive east on Malabar Road past the Corey Road intersection.(Photo: RICK NEALE/FLORIDA TODAY)Buy Photo

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PALM BAY — Malabar officials have a message for the Florida Department of Transportation: Hurry up and improve Malabar Road before any more motorists get injured or killed on the 55 mph two-lane artery, which carries rush-hour traffic between Palm Bay and U.S. 1.

FDOT has studied Malabar Road upgrades since at least 2008, town records show. Engineers are designing a project focusing on the intersections of Weber and Corey roads, and crews will add turn lanes, mill and resurface pavement, upgrade guardrails, improve stormwater drainage and add signage.

But construction is not scheduled to start until fall 2019. Estimated completion date? Summer 2020.

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Last month, the Malabar Town Council adopted a resolution asking FDOT to "fast-track" Weber-Corey intersection improvements. In a letter to a FDOT engineer, Town Administrator Douglas Hoyt wrote that five people have been killed on Malabar Road since 2012, and another 78 traffic accidents have occurred.

Hoyt and about 50 fellow Malabar officials and residents discussed the upcoming project Wednesday during an FDOT open house at the Palm Bay Hospital auditorium.

The Weber-Corey upgrades will occur along a 1.4-mile stretch of Malabar Road. Corey Road will receive eastbound and westbound left turn lanes, while Weber Road will receive a westbound left turn lane.

"The project is going to improve safety at these intersections. This is done by preventing that blocking of traffic from people trying to make a left-hand turn. I've already heard from a lot of you that there is an issue with people trying to turn left — cars are going around them," Jeff Messenger, the project's public involvement coordinator, told the crowd.

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Estimated costs are \$1.1 million for construction, \$700,000 for design and \$600,000 for right-of-way purchases. Messenger said the right-of-way process typically takes 24 months.

"Right now, it's already been compressed to 18 months. So we're on a fast-track schedule. After the right-of-way is acquired, there's a little bit of design work that has to be done to finalize some things, and then it's let for construction," Messenger said.

"The current letting date is anticipated to be in the summer of 2019. So I know that's a ways off. But we do have some right-of-way that we have to acquire on the project," he said.

Malabar Mayor Phil Crews expressed skepticism after listening to the FDOT presentation.

"I don't see this project significantly improving the traffic fatality problem, unless they put traffic lights at Corey and Weber to slow the traffic down. We have a separate petition that's going around asking DOT to reduce the speed limit to 45," Crews said.

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"If you drive around the county, you don't find any other state roads that have 55 mph on them other than State Road 5, which is U.S. 1," he said.

Malabar Fire Chief Christopher Robinson said his firefighters have difficulty pulling onto Malabar Road from the fire station between 7 and 9 a.m. and 3 to 5 p.m. weekdays.

On a far larger scale, FDOT may widen portions of the 3.6-mile stretch of Malabar Road between U.S. 1 and Babcock Street from two to four lanes — a \$50 million proposition. Construction may not occur until 2025 to 2030.

In May 2015, Space Coast Transportation Planning Organization members — including the late Malabar Mayor Carl Beatty, Brevard County Commissioner Trudie Infantini, Palm Bay Mayor William Capote and Melbourne Mayor Kathy Meehan — voiced support for widening Malabar Road to four lanes, citing hurricane evacuations and other factors.

But in their June 6 resolution, Malabar Town Council members opposed widening Malabar Road to four lanes within town limits, citing negative impacts on future commercial growth and the town disc golf course, among other reasons.

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