

Building and Maintaining the Road to Success

By Robert T. Halfhill, Charlotte County Public Works Director

A road is an identifiable route or path that is typically smoothed, paved, or otherwise prepared to allow easy travel. Road building and maintenance is an area of economic activity that remains dominated by the public sector, though often through private contractors. Except for those on private property, roads are typically paid for by taxes which are often raised through levies on fuel. Some public roads, especially freeways, are funded by tolls.

Maintenance

In unincorporated Charlotte County, the interconnected roadway system is maintained by the Public Works department. The department concentrates on construction, maintenance, renovation and resurfacing. Maintenance crews work throughout Charlotte County maintaining public roads. Maintenance includes shoulder repair, pothole patching, sign and stripe renewal, signal repair, surveying, bridge repair and right of way trimming and mowing.

Public Works employees take road maintenance seriously. When you are traveling about Charlotte County and hit a bump in the road you usually dismiss it as simply a bump. When a Public Works employee hits a bump in the road the next thought is usually "I need to fix that."

Projects

Cochran Boulevard at the Lake View intersection was a major widening and intersection improvement project to eliminate a three-way stop. The project was completed about three years ago and provides a connection between Veterans Boulevard and the US 41 corridor, which greatly improves traffic flow and relieves congestion.

Road construction projects in recent times include Veterans Boulevard, Carmalita Street and Toledo Blade Boulevard. These roads have been widened, rebuilt and redesigned to improve safety, rideability and restore pavement endurance. Veterans Boulevard and Toledo Blade Boulevard serve as major thoroughfares crossing mid-county in its entirety. They also serve as "gateways" which enhance access from I-75 and are vital links between US 41 and I-75.

Bridges

The Public Works staff is currently reviewing maintenance of all bridges in Charlotte County. This review includes structural integrity, painting, striping, guardrails, driving surface approaches and other items. The goal of this review is to verify the condition of each of the 122 bridges in the County and schedule maintenance to correct deficiencies. Every bridge is inspected every two years by the Florida Department of Transportation and a report is then released on the status of all bridges. No bridges in Charlotte County have been rated as deficient or unsafe.

Stimulus

The State and Federal Governments are administering the President's Stimulus program. This provides funds to state and local governments for construction projects. While providing a positive impetus for completing construction projects, the stimulus program is highly competitive with strict requirements that must be met by the applicants. Charlotte County has been successful in obtaining approximately \$3 Million in stimulus funds. This money was applied to

the replacement of the Cape Haze bridge, intersection improvements at Murdock Circle and various other locations throughout the County.

Traffic Control

The Public Works department has constructed innovative traffic control features such as the roundabout at Burnt Store Lakes. This low-impact feature is designed to improve traffic flow and reduce or eliminate vehicle wait time. Several such roundabouts are included in the Edgewater Drive widening project currently in the design phase. Roundabouts significantly reduce construction and maintenance costs.

Future

Currently planned is the widening and relocating of Piper Road which will serve as a major route, enhancing transportation facilities west of I-75 including Charlotte County Airport and surrounding commercial areas. Widening Burnt Store Road will provide access through South County into Lee County and will serve as a major evacuation route. If you have concerns or questions about the road system in Charlotte County please call the Public Works Department at 941.575.3600.