
Hoagland Boulevard project to boost Kissimmee

(Jan 06, 2010 at 01:44 PM) -

By Juliana A. Torres
Staff Writer

Long-awaited state funds have been allocated for the realignment and widening of Hoagland Boulevard, a project deemed vital to the development and prosperity of the Kissimmee Gateway Airport and its surrounding area.

About \$15 million has been allotted in the Florida Department of Transportation five-year work plan for the first part of the road's construction, slated for the 2011-12 budget year. State Rep. Mike Horner, R-Kissimmee, came to the Kissimmee City Commission meeting Tuesday to announce the funding. The previously unfunded road project was the commission's top priority in the past year and has been a longtime goal for the city.

"I know this is something the city's been working on, something the county's been working on," Horner said. "It's a great project, that's why we got the money."

The city and Osceola County have taken up the realignment and widening of Hoagland Boulevard as a joint project. The design of the first segment of road is already completed, pending final federal approval, Dave Derrick, public works and engineering director for the city, said. The slated FDOT money would mean construction on Hoagland Boulevard would start in 2011.

However, Horner said that if the local governments could secure other funds, perhaps from federal or state stimulus money, construction could start a lot sooner than the FDOT's \$15 million contribution dictates.

"I'm looking at those dollars as kind of an insurance policy," he said. "We could get started even sooner, and take a million and put it into something else, maybe phase two."

The local governments already applied in September for a Federal Highway Administration TIGER discretionary grant. A TIGER, which stands for Transportation Improvements Generating Economic Recovery, grant involves funding slated for transportation projects as a part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

Local officials hope that Hoagland Boulevard will be attractive enough as a regional project to be awarded the federal grant because it's not identified as a major roadway in the regional strategic intermodal system, but also would be key to the development of Kissimmee Gateway Airport.

"It has a lot of factors that we hope will push it above the others it will be competing with," Derrick said.

Horner also said Tuesday that the federal stimulus funds allocated for projects within FDOT's district 5, which entails Central Florida including Osceola County, came \$90 million under budget due to lower construction costs in the recession. He said he hoped the Hoagland Boulevard project might be awarded some of those extra funds.

In any case, local officials said they are doing everything they can to be prepared to start construction on Hoagland Boulevard as soon as the money comes in. On Monday, the county awarded the engineering and design services for phase two of the project to St. Cloud-based Infrastructure Engineers, for an amount not to exceed \$1,250,855. The design process of the second part of the project will be expedited in order to attract the federal or state funds needed to complete the construction.

Derrick said he anticipated the design would be finished within a year.

“Normally it would take about 18 months, but we’re trying to get this under way,” he said. “Once (construction of) is finished, we can go right into phase two if the funding is there.”

The city is on track to acquire the necessary right of way for both phases of the project by April, Derrick said.

The engineering contract for segment two will come before the City Commission in an upcoming meeting, Derrick said. Whether the commission will have to approve its portion of the funding of the award separately or if the allocation is already legally covered under the existing interlocal agreement is yet to be determined, he said.