



A proposal to replace the aging DeSoto Bridge with a new multi-lane flyover bridge is raising alarms in the community that would be most impacted, and many in the city of Bradenton agree. Tiffany Tompkins - Herald file photo

LOCAL

## Official says FDOT's DeSoto Bridge flyover concept is 'terrible project'

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BRADENTON — Whether it was at the public meeting in the heart of the community that would be most impacted or during Wednesday's Bradenton City Council meeting, the consensus was clear:

The Florida Department of Transportation's proposed flyover concept to replace the aging DeSoto Bridge would be a "terrible project."

It started with a resounding rejection of the concept on Tuesday as more than 100 residents and business owners attended FDOT's Central Manatee Network Alternative Analysis presentation.

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The spirited discussion at St. Mary's Church carried into the City Council meeting on Wednesday.

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In summing up the public meeting, Vice Mayor Patrick Roff said the flyover "was soundly rejected. No, noisily rejected."

City officials are frustrated because the flyover concept seems to change at each presentation. Early on, the project called for multiple exit points to ensure local traffic could get to First Street businesses while keeping the estimated 33 percent of traffic that doesn't stop in Bradenton moving through. But the latest concept shows one entrance point onto the flyover as far back as the 2700 block of First Street.

"You would have to decide at that point whether to get on the flyover, because you will not have an option to get off until you reach Palmetto," Roff said. "The one thing driving this for FDOT is that the DeSoto Bridge is rotting from the inside out. FDOT's bridge is FDOT's problem. If we have a sewer problem, we fix it. We take care of our problems. They have to replace that bridge because it's badly designed. It's their fault, their responsibility and their liability."

Brent Lacey, FDOT consultant and project manager, has described the flyover as an elevated bridge with lanes that will allow local traffic to get off, and those "just driving through" to keep right on going over an upper level away from downtown.

Planning and Community Development Director Catherine Hartley has also been unhappy with the consultant team's communications to residents. She said in October, "What concerns me are not the things they say, but what they don't say."

Hartley and Ward 5 Councilman Harold Byrd Jr. convinced FDOT officials to meet in the First Street community that would be most impacted. She said FDOT did so begrudgingly and that nothing has changed in regards to her frustration with the project.

"They did a limited road show (Tuesday) night," Hartley said. "People were frustrated that they didn't show all the options."

**1957:**

The year the DeSoto Bridge was built

**76.2:**

The health index of the DeSoto Bridge

**85:**

The minimum standard rating for a healthy bridge

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**54,000:** The average daily traffic across the DeSoto Bridge

**99,763:** Estimated future daily traffic by the year 2032

As part of the flyover concept, FDOT is looking at widening First Street to 10 lanes, but Hartley said that wouldn't work.

"Studies have shown for decades you can't pave your way out of congestion," Hartley said. "None of the options make sense. The 10 lanes on First Street would kill business. If you look at any project in Tampa or Pinellas County, these flyovers are business killers, community dividers and community segregators. It's a terrible project. Those folks are mad and they had a right to be."

Byrd said he has never seen that kind of public turnout at a FDOT meeting, and it was telling. "Let's continue to hear from the public and come up with viable alternatives that will work, because I do not like the flyover, either — and I've said that from the beginning," Byrd said.

Other locations are being considered, but the consultant team has argued they are not viable. They include the possibility of a new bridge at 15th Street East, Ninth Street East or 27th Street East. Brown said it's up to FDOT to get the whole story to the public.

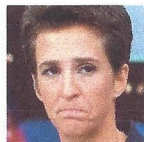
"They don't do a good job getting the information out there," he said. "I've seen it three times and seems to be different each time. Let's get the entire truth out there once and for all."

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