

BRADENTON HERALD

Betsy Benac: DeSoto Bridge repairs should be made funding priority

By Claire Aronson
May 24, 2016

Replacing the DeSoto Bridge, which is at the end of its service life, should be made a funding priority with a regional transportation agency, according to a Manatee County commissioner.

During Tuesday's meeting, Betsy Benac asked fellow commissioners to consider pursuing adding the DeSoto Bridge to the Tampa Bay Area Regional Transportation Authority's Long Range Transportation List. The commission didn't take any formal action but is expected to do so prior to the next Sarasota/Manatee Metropolitan Planning Organization meeting in June.

"That bridge is functionally obsolete," Benac said Tuesday. "We know we've got to move something forward."

Other projects for Manatee County on the TBARTA priority list are already funded, Benac said.

Florida Department of Transportation is now conducting a [Central Manatee Network Alternatives Analysis](#) to "address local and regional travel needs while supporting broader economic development goals," according to study materials.

A third bridge could still be a recommendation from the study, Benac said.

"It's got to get rebuilt," Benac said. "We are talking about expediting the replacement. It just kind of puts this priority front and center."

The conversation about a third bridge needs to happen, Commissioner Charles Smith said.

"We got to have a serious debate on the third bridge," he said.

Commissioner John Chappie thanked Benac for bringing the topic up.

"We have a lot of need out there," Chappie said.

Something has to be done, Commission Chairwoman Vanessa Baugh said.

"The lifespan on the DeSoto Bridge is gone," she said. "We got to fix that one, work with that one and get it straight. ... We know we have an area where we got to do something."