



NEWS | Release

Contact information:

Christopher Patton
Communications Coordinator
Office: (352) 343-9609; Cell: (352) 455-0445
cpatton@co.lake.fl.us

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Alternatives available for Picciola bridge construction

TAVARES – Preliminary plans to replace one of the older bridges in Lake County is underway as County officials and residents are weighing two alternatives to the construction process.

Picciola Road Bridge, just east of the City of Fruitland Park, crosses a small tributary to Lake Griffin. About 8,000 vehicles a day cross the 81-foot long bridge. As the only remaining bridge in the County to be supported with timber pilings, it is scheduled to be replaced under the Board of County Commissioners approved five-year capital project program.

“It’s a 50-year-old bridge that the Florida Department of Transportation has classified as functionally obsolete,” said Engineering Division Director Fred Schneider. “It doesn’t have shoulders for stalled vehicles or pedestrians, and it is a timber-supported bridge subject to wood rot. New bridges are constructed of pre-cast concrete pilings to withstand the elements.”

Current plans call for the width of the two-lane bridge to be doubled to 40 feet. Proposed construction would raise the bridge an additional 2 feet and provide a wider area between pilings to allow for an easier pass of boat traffic. Construction on the quarter-mile section of the bridge and adjoining roadway would also produce a smoother transition of a curve in the area providing a higher degree of safety for traffic negotiating the bridge.

A second public meeting on the project will be scheduled in October. At the first meeting this summer, some residents were concerned about the possibility of Picciola Road being closed during construction of the bridge. Two alternatives County officials and residents will need to consider for the Picciola Bridge project are:

- By closing the bridge, the project is estimated to cost \$750,000 and be completed in six months.
- To keep the bridge open it will cost about \$1.25 million and will take nearly 14 months to complete.

“Even if the alternative to keep the bridge open during construction is selected, there may be times and or days when vehicular traffic over the bridge is re-routed due to particular construction and or equipment mobilization needs,” said Juan Chan, Lake County project manager.

To ease concerns of the possibility of Picciola Road closing, County officials have talked to the Florida Department of Transportation about putting a traffic light and additional turn lanes at U.S. Highway 27 and Eagles Nest Road, a preferred detour for affected residents. The County is also looking to temporarily staff an unoccupied fire station located just north of the bridge during construction with fire department and EMS personnel and equipment.

After the public meeting in October, a public hearing will be held in a Lake County Board of County Commissioners meeting in either November or December. If approved by the Board, final engineering on the project could be completed in June 2005 with construction beginning by the end of the year.