

# CHAPTER 3

*CITY OF NORTH PORT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN*

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## **TRANSPORTATION**

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## **TRANSPORTATION ELEMENT**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The goal of the transportation element is to develop an effective multi-modal transportation system which optimizes safety, convenience, cost, and pollution reduction practices by establishing internal and external transportation linkages between residential neighborhoods and activity centers.

The City of North Port is a relatively young city having been incorporated in 1959. Of note is the fact that North Port is one of Florida's "platted lands" communities wherein the original developer assembled a large amount of acreage, platted thousands of individual lots, put in a rudimentary street network to "serve" the thousands of lots, and put in very little other major infrastructure. In North Port's case, after starting from a small core area on US 41, the City through a series of annexations over years has resulted in a community of over 70,000 platted lots. The Future Land Use Element includes graphics that show the City's geographic growth over the years.

With thousands of lots available, usually at reasonable prices, the lots sell and eventually the community grows. North Port grew slowly, but steadily, through the period ranging from the 1960's through the early 1990's. From 1990 through the year 2007, the City grew from 12,000 residents to over 50,000 residents, with most of that growth occurring since the year 2000. The challenges generated by this rapid growth are evident today, with transportation being one of the major issues, as evidenced during the recent Evaluation and Appraisal Report (EAR) process.

As noted above, to access the many platted lots, the original developers of the City put into place a massive system of local roads, most of which would be defined as substandard in quality. Along with the local roads, an arterial and collector system was put into place to funnel traffic into the local neighborhoods. Besides US 41, which is a state highway, there is only one east/west arterial in the City - Price Boulevard. The other arterials are Toledo Blade Boulevard and Sumter Boulevard. As originally built, these arterials were two-lane roadways. In the case of Toledo Blade and Sumter Boulevards, rights-of-way were set aside for the eventual widening of these roads. This was not the case for Price Boulevard, which today witnesses hundreds of homes and driveways directly accessing this two-lane arterial. A series of collector roadways was also put into place, again with two lanes on each. The majority of the collector roadways run north/south with limited rights-of-way for future expansion, if necessary. Any widening to the collector system would have to take into account the impact upon the individual neighborhoods.

The other major roadway traversing North Port is Interstate 75. This highway was completed in Sarasota County in the mid-1980's. The construction of I-75 actually "split" the City of North Port and its road system with most of the north/south collectors ending at "dead ends" next to the interstate. Interchanges were built at the intersections of I-75 and Sumter Boulevard, and I-75 at Toledo Blade Boulevard. Ponce De Leon Boulevard, Yorkshire Street, and Raintree Boulevard were the only collector roadways that either cross over, or under, the interstate. Although I-75 was intended to function as a limited access facility providing for inter-regional and interstate

travel to and through Sarasota County and North Port, as time has passed and growth has occurred, its function has often resorted to being a very large, higher speed, local road. In North Port's case, the lack of areas for employment has forced a large majority of its residents to use I-75, and US 41, to travel to jobs and services at points generally north or south of the City. One of the primary goals of the City since the adoption of the 1997 Comprehensive Plan has been to annex land to allow for more areas for jobs/tax base diversification in North Port, which will keep residents in the City and, thus, lessen the reliance on the Interstate to get residents to and from work in other areas – making North Port a more sustainable community.

When discussing mobility in North Port, it is also important to discuss the impact of the large drainage system in the City. Over 84 miles of major canals and even more minor ditch and swale systems greatly divide the City and creates a transportation network that is not well linked, especially on the local/neighborhood scale. You may be able to see your neighbor across the canal, but to visit, you have to generally travel miles north or south on a collector, take an arterial east or west, and then head back north or south down another collector to see that neighbor “just across” the canal. The City must examine linkage during this comprehensive planning period.

Transit service in North Port over time has been minimal. Sarasota County Area Transit (SCAT) has provided service, primarily along the US 41 corridor, for many years. However, internal routes have been hard to come by. The citizens of North Port and City officials have pushed hard since 1997 to have service expanded, with some success. As the population growth in North Port has surged, transit service has been expanded up Sumter Boulevard to the City Center complex and up Toledo Blade Boulevard to near the interchange with I-75 (routes are shown on the Future Transportation Circulation Map). As the City grows, it is inevitable that transit will play a major role in moving citizens from place to place. City staff anticipates the growth in service and routinely has developers plan for transit stops and shelters as part of their development approvals.

Sidewalks and bikeways are also available in North Port, although they are often not linked, and are more likely to be found in the newer developments as opposed to the older platted lots. There are currently no “blueways” in North Port, although the opportunity exists, on a limited scale, via the canal network, the Myakkahatchee Creek, and the Myakka River. The City will be developing a greenway corridor along the Myakkahatchee Creek in the future, and it is hoped that eventually linkages can be made with existing County and regional trail systems to the north.

The transportation challenges in North Port and all of Southwest Florida are great, and as noted above, this element will continue to guide the City as it strives to address the challenges in order to maintain and improve upon the overall quality of life in the community.

## **TRANSPORTATION ISSUES IDENTIFIED IN THE EVALUATION AND APPRAISAL REPORT**

According to the 2005 Evaluation and Appraisal Report, transportation and connectivity are critical to the quality of life in North Port. This is evidenced by the fact that transportation was identified as one of the City's “major issues,” which further consisted of 5 major sub-issues

under the “transportation” banner. Since approval of the EAR, the City has taken great strides to address each of these issues. Following is a summary of each transportation-related major issue from the EAR, and a brief discussion of actions taken since approval of the EAR:

- 1. Widen Toledo Blade Boulevard** – Toledo Blade Boulevard is a north/south arterial that runs from Charlotte County northward through the City, links the City to I-75 via an interchange, and proceeds northward (under the name of Choctaw Boulevard) to the City’s northern boundary. Toledo Blade Boulevard is also a designated hurricane evacuation route. This roadway not only serves thousands of North Port and Charlotte County residents, it also has several large unplatted areas along it that the City has designated as “Activity Centers” in order to promote economic development and community sustainability. The City of North Port took over jurisdiction of Toledo Blade from Sarasota County in the late 1990’s. At the time of the writing of the EAR, Toledo Blade was a two-lane arterial from I-75 to Charlotte County, with one wider section at the intersection with US 41 in Charlotte County. As the City grew the level of service on this road started to decrease substantially, not only impacting travel time and safety for residents and visitors, but also potentially hurting the City’s economic development goals. The City attempted to gain funding for additional capacity through the Sarasota-Manatee Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for years, but because of commitments of funding to other major projects throughout the two-county MPO jurisdiction, the City was unable to attain the necessary funding through this body.

Since the EAR, the City has worked with a major developer on Toledo Blade and has developed a public/private partnership that will result in the imminent widening of Toledo Blade from two to four lanes from I-75 to the Charlotte County line. Charlotte County also plans to four-lane their section all the way to US 41. The North Port portion of the project is anticipated for completion during FY 09/10.

- 2. Purchase rights-of-way, design, and widen Price Boulevard** – Besides US 41, Price Boulevard is the only east/west arterial in North Port. It is primarily a two-lane roadway today with the exception of some turn lanes and improvements at major intersections. A plethora of residential driveways directly access this major road thus exacerbating the traffic congestion and falling level-of-service on the road. The Citizens Advisory Committees made it very clear that this road needed improvement and therefore called for the identification of rights-of way needs, the purchase of rights-of-way, design, and construction of a widened Price Boulevard. Since the EAR, City staff has hired a consulting team and is currently conducting a “Price Boulevard Corridor Study,” which will examine the corridor, identify the needs and improvements, identify costs, and recommend alternatives to the widening of the road. This is the necessary first step toward achieving capacity improvements and enhanced mobility on and around this corridor.
- 3. Complete Sumter Boulevard** – Sumter Boulevard is the other north/south arterial that is maintained by the City. For years Sumter was a two-lane road that ran from Charlotte County all of the way north into the Agriculture, Estates section of the City. Prior to the adoption of the 1997 Comprehensive Plan, the City had completed the four-laning and

elevating of a portion of the road, including aesthetic enhancements and a beautiful gateway feature. In late 2007, the City began construction to widen Sumter from US 41 northward to near the entrance of the Heron Creek development. This project includes aesthetic enhancements and frontage road sections in certain residential areas to keep residential driveways from directly accessing the widened roadway. When this section is completed, there will still remain a  $\pm 2$  mile link of two-lane roadway to complete. The CIP indicates that this link will be complete by FY2010/11.

4. **Mass Transit** – During the EAR process, each of the Citizens Advisory Committees were adamant in stating that the City needed more and better transit service. Since the EAR was approved the County’s transit provider, Sarasota County Area transit (SCAT), has added service in North Port with new routes reaching the new City Center Complex on Sumter Boulevard, and new service reaching far up Toledo Blade Boulevard to the Riley Chase Apartments and the North Port Park of Commerce, providing service to workers and residents alike.
5. **Repair the existing road network** – As noted in the introduction to this element, the City’s original developers put in place a very large local road network in order to serve the thousands of platted lots in North Port. As time has passed the condition of the roads has degraded substantially in many areas, reflecting the minimal standards that the original roads were built to. Age, weather, traffic by heavy trucks and machinery have been making some of these roads practically impassable. As a result, the City funded the repaving of miles of local roadway. According to the Public Works Department in FY 2005/06, the City repaved over 18 miles of local roadways. This program continues into 2008, with  $\pm 100$  miles anticipated for completion this year.

## **FUNCTIONAL CLASSIFICATION OF ROADS**

The State of Florida utilizes the highway classification system as adopted by the U.S. Department of Transportation, but local governments are allowed to adopt their own standards for roadway classification. Following is the classification system utilized by the City of North Port:

- **Principal Arterial** – a principal arterial is a controlled access facility with grade separated intersections providing for interregional and/or interstate travel at high operating speeds. Principal arterials typically accommodate high volumes of traffic. Interstate 75 is a principal arterial.
- **Arterial** – an arterial is a roadway which facilitates relatively long trip lengths at moderate to high operating speeds with somewhat limited access to adjacent properties. Arterials generally serve major centers of activity and have the highest traffic volume corridors. Policy 1.6 of this element lists the roadways currently designated as arterials in North Port.
- **Collector** - collector roads collect and distribute moderate to high amounts of traffic between arterials and local roads at moderate to low operating speeds. Collectors provide

- **Local Roads** – local roads generally provide access to abutting properties. Local roads possess relatively low traffic volumes, operating speeds, trip lengths, and through traffic movement.

Table 3-1 below summarizes the City’s roadway system in terms of the number of miles of roadway and the percentage of roadway in each functional classification indicated above. The *Existing Roadway Classification Map* found at the end of this element shows the existing road network for the City of North Port. The majority of roads are two-lane local roads. The collector roads in North Port are generally only two lanes, although turn lanes add an additional lane at certain intersections. As discussed in the EAR section above, the City is striving to widen its arterial roadways to increase capacity, facilitate better traffic movement, and to enhance evacuation timing. Currently, Price Boulevard is a two-lane arterial facility which widens only at major intersections. The City is currently undertaking a study of this corridor, as well as a general analysis of city-wide traffic patterns. Toledo Blade Boulevard is an arterial which has been a two-lane facility that the City has attempted to gain funding for capacity increases for years. The City and a major developer have entered into a public/private partnership to widen this road to 4 lanes. Sumter Boulevard is the other City-maintained arterial. It too has been a primarily two-lane facility. A segment near I-75 was widened and enhanced prior to the 1997 Comprehensive Plan’s adoption. Currently a major section from US 41 northward is being widened to four lanes along with other enhancements. It is expected that the final link to be four-laned will occur after 2010.

Table 3-1  
Existing Roadway Classification

Classification	Miles	Percentage of Total
Principal Arterial	14	1
Arterial	44	5
Collector	77	9
Local Road	757	85
<b>Total</b>	<b>893</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: City of North Port  
\* Totals Rounded

### Roadway Laneage

Since the majority of the City’s road network consists of local roads, most of which are the result of the City’s original platting, the majority of the network consists of two-lane facilities. The arterial and collector system are also primarily two-lane facilities, although as noted in this element, the City is currently widening the southern segment of Sumter Boulevard, has broken ground on a public/private partnership to widen Toledo Blade Boulevard to four lanes, and a corridor analysis is underway to examine the capacity needs and alternatives for Price Boulevard. The generalized Table 3-2 below indicates the existing number of travel lanes within the City’s roadway system.

Table 3-2  
Existing Roadway Lanes

Lanes	Miles	Percentage of Total
4 Lanes	29	3%
2 Lanes	864	97%
<b>Total</b>	<b>893</b>	

Source: City of North Port  
\* Totals Rounded

## STRATEGIC INTERMODAL SYSTEM

Florida’s Strategic Intermodal System (SIS) was established in 2003 to enhance Florida’s economic competitiveness by focusing limited state resources on those transportation facilities that are critical to Florida’s economy and quality of life. SIS facilities include interstates, major airports, and major ports. Interstate 75 is the only SIS facility in North Port

## ROADWAY JURISDICTION AND MAINTENANCE

Section 335.01 of the Florida Statutes directs the FDOT to functionally classify all public roads based on current usage and assigns each road to one of four systems: State Highway System, State Park Road System, County Road System, or City Street System. The assignment of a road to a particular classification determines primary maintenance responsibilities for that road.

Maintenance and operation of roads in North Port is currently divided among three jurisdictions – the State (I-75 & U.S. 41), Sarasota County (River Road), and the City of North Port. Charlotte County jointly maintains Hillsborough Boulevard with the City through an interlocal agreement. Table 3-3 below indicates the general jurisdictional maintenance responsibilities for North Port’s road network.

Table 3-3  
Existing Roadway Jurisdiction

Road Jurisdiction	Miles
City	856
County	11
State	26

Source: City of North Port  
\* Totals Rounded

## PARKING FACILITIES

The City does not currently have any public parking facilities. Individual developments are required to meet all parking standards as outlined in the City’s Unified Land Development Code, as amended. The 1997 Comprehensive Plan included an objective and supporting policies to analyze the need for public parking facilities along the U.S. 41 corridor. The City conducted and adopted a U.S. 41 Corridor Master Plan (Boyle Engineering, 2002) as part of a failed CRA initiative with Sarasota County. However, the City still utilizes the Master Plan to guide development on the corridor as it runs through North Port. The Master Plan does address

parking and recommends that the City consider parallel parking along the business side of the frontage roads that line U.S. 41 through parts of the corridor. The Master Plan also recommends that the City consider “Pod Parking” at certain yet to be determined locations, possibly near future transit or trolley stops.

## **TRAFFIC GENERATORS**

Factors such as family income levels, the number of cars per household, employment, school enrollment, and recreational facilities influence the amount of traffic generated in any particular area. Also influencing traffic are certain destinations which generate traffic such as major commercial centers, schools, medical facilities, and industrial parks.

The platted nature of North Port certainly has influence on traffic generation. On a large scale employment destinations north and south of the City greatly influence traffic generation and patterns as a majority of North Porters still have to travel elsewhere each day for employment. This causes a large amount of morning and afternoon traffic on both I-75 and on U.S. 41. As the City grows and development of the Activity Centers, both old and new, continues it can be expected that more citizens will be able to live and work in North Port and, thusly, some current traffic patterns may change as a result.

On a more local scale, the young age of the City combined with the large residential component in North Port have traditionally resulted in North Port residents having to conduct most of their business, shopping, and medical activities in Charlotte County, Venice, and Sarasota. However, as the City has grown past 50,000 residents, new facilities are being developed which will be traffic generators in the future. This includes the new medical facility on Toledo Blade Boulevard slated to open in 2009, continued new development in Activity Center #5 and development of a regional mall at Toledo Blade Boulevard and I-75 (currently in the DRI sufficiency phase).

Some of the most significant traffic generators in the City today are (please see the map at the end of the element):

- Activity Center #1 (U.S. 41 corridor)
- Activity Center #2 (including the City Center Complex)
- Butler Park
- Price Boulevard school campuses and North Port Performing Arts Center
- Dallas White Park and skate park
- All schools
- Social service campus off Pan American Boulevard
- Manatee Community College/University of South Florida (Thomas Ranch)
- Warm Mineral Springs complex
- Heron Creek Golf facility
- Sabal Trace Golf Course
- Bobcat Trail Golf Course

## **TRAFFIC COUNTS**

The traffic count table located at the end of this element shows the estimated volume of traffic on the major roads in the City for 2007. The Annual Average Daily Traffic Counts (AADT) data represents the total volume of traffic on a roadway segment for one year, divided by the number of days in a year. The most heavily traveled City-maintained roadways are Toledo Blade Boulevard, Price Boulevard from Toledo Blade Boulevard westward, and Sumter Boulevard. U.S. 41 and I-75 carry substantially higher levels of traffic.

## **INTERSECTION DEFICIENCIES**

As the City has grown in population, traffic levels have also increased. Because of the layout of North Port with the platted lots and miles of canals, traffic is typically forced onto the collector roadway system which eventually leads to the limited (in number and capacity) arterial system. It has been found that the intersections of the collectors and arterials are overall deficient. The City has been working to improve many of the intersections since 1997 via the use of turn lanes and traffic signalization. Several of these projects have been funded through Congestion Management funds awarded through the Sarasota-Manatee Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). As the arterial network is widened to increase capacity, more intersection improvements will also occur. Traffic accidents can also be an indicator of intersection deficiencies. In 2007, the North Port Police Department registered 860 accidents on City roadways, most of which occurred at or near major intersections.

## **ROADWAY LEVELS OF SERVICE**

The determination as to whether the existing roadway can adequately serve the existing and future demands is predicated on the ability to estimate the maximum amount of traffic a roadway can safely accommodate. The establishment of threshold standards for roadway types or levels of service (LOS) are used to identify needed system improvements, either by expansion of existing roadways, constructing new roadways, creating parallel roadways, or the use of alternative modes of travel.

The principal objective of capacity analysis is to estimate the amount of traffic that can be accommodated by a given roadway. However, capacity analysis is best used to estimate the traffic-carrying ability of a given roadway over a range of defined operational conditions, using level of service criteria. Roadways do not operate well at capacity because they are not designed to that optimal standard.

The concept of level of service is defined as a qualitative measure describing operational conditions within a stream of traffic and the perception of those conditions by motorists and passengers. A level of service category generally describes these conditions in terms of speed and travel time, freedom to maneuver, traffic interruptions, comfort and convenience, and safety. There are six levels of service – with LOS “A” representing the best operating condition and LOS “F” the worst. Operating conditions under these LOS standards (as defined in the Highway Capacity manual 2000) are:

- **LOS A:** Motorists are unaffected by the presence of others in the stream of traffic. Freedom to travel at desired speeds and to maneuver within the stream of traffic is extremely high. The general level of comfort and convenience is excellent.
- **LOS B:** Freedom to travel at desired speeds is relatively unaffected, but there is a reduction in the freedom to maneuver within the stream of traffic. The level of comfort and convenience is less, because of the presence of others in the stream of traffic begins to affect individual motorist behavior.
- **LOS C:** Motorists become significantly affected by the interactions with others within the stream of traffic. Traveling at the desired rate of speed is affected and maneuvering within the stream of traffic requires substantial effort on the part of the motorist. Comfort and convenience decline noticeably at this level.
- **LOS D:** Speed and freedom to maneuver are severely restricted, and a poor level of comfort and convenience is experienced by the motorist. Minimal increases in traffic will generally cause operational problems at this level.
- **LOS E:** Operating conditions are at or near capacity. All speeds are significantly reduced. Freedom to maneuver is difficult. Comfort and convenience are extremely poor and motorist frustration is generally high.
- **LOS F:** Operating conditions at this level are forced or have broken down. This condition exists wherever the amount of traffic approaching a point exceeds the amount that can traverse the point. Queues typically form at such locations. Operations are characterized by stop-and-go waves; vehicles may proceed at reasonable speeds for short distances and then be required to stop in a cyclical fashion. Comfort and convenience are extremely poor and frustration is high.

These definitions are general and apply primarily to roadways having uninterrupted traffic flows, such as freeways. For each type of roadway facility, levels of service activities are based on one or more operational parameters or “measures of effectiveness.” Basic measures of effectiveness used to define levels of service for different types of roadways include: (a) average travel speed; (b) density; (c) delay; and (d) volume.

### **State Highway System Levels of Service**

In March 1992, the FDOT adopted revised level of service (LOS) standards for roads on the State Highway System. These standards are used by FDOT to determine system deficiencies, assist in determining work program priorities, review local government and metropolitan planning organization comprehensive transportation plans, and review traffic circulation impacts related to Developments of Regional Impact (DRI's) and other development affecting the State Highway System.

The 1992 State Highway System LOS standards are intended to further the overall concept of growth management. Relative to the previous level of service standards, these standards (along with the service or “capacity” volumes associated with the

various LOS designations) promote or encourage development in existing urban areas, the use of public transit, bicycling, or other alternative modes of transportation, and the efficient use of existing highways. These standards more clearly recognize the importance of the different functions (i.e. mobility versus access) provided by roads on the State Highway System, and the importance of exclusive transit facilities within the State Highway System. The 1992 standards recognize or acknowledge the acceptance of some highway congestion as a trade-off for other urban area amenities and the fact that necessary improvements to many roads on the State Highway System are constrained due to physical or policy barriers or are backlogged beyond current 5-Year Work Programs.

Due to the complexity of the 1992 LOS standards, minimum LOS for roads on the State Highway System cannot be characterized by a single LOS designation (such as LOS “C”). Under these standards, LOS for roads on the State Highway System are determined based upon a number of factors, including: the location of the road in relation to the general character of adjacent land use development (i.e. rural vs. urban); whether or not the road is designated on the Florida Intrastate Highway System (FIHS); the degree to which property access to the road is limited or controlled; number of lanes; whether or not the road includes or parallels an exclusive transit facility; whether or not the road is located within a designated Transportation Concurrency Management Area (TCMA); and finally, whether or not improvements to the road are constrained or backlogged.

Notwithstanding the above considerations, when applied to State roads located in rural or “urbanizing” areas or communities, these LOS standards are generally more stringent (i.e. have a higher LOS) than the standards for similar roads located in urban communities and municipalities. Under the 1992 standards, the minimum LOS for multilane roads in rural areas is LOS “B”. Two lane highways have a minimum LOS “C”. The minimum LOS for all roads in urbanized or “transition” areas is LOS “C”. The minimum LOS for roads designated on the FIHS in urbanized areas with a population under 500,000 is LOS “C” and LOS “D” for non-intrastate roads in such areas. The minimum LOS for all roads that include or are parallel to exclusive transit facilities (generally located in urbanized areas with a population over 500,000) is LOS “E”.

Traffic Concurrency Management Areas (TCMA) are urbanized areas where intensive development is allowed and higher levels of traffic congestion are accepted. TCMA's are designed to promote urban amenities and mixed-use areas. The minimum LOS for roads located in designated TCMA's is LOS “E.” The minimum LOS for all roads with backlogged or constrained conditions is the current LOS with minimal degradation. Backlogged improvements are not funded in FDOT's 5-Year Work Program. Constrained conditions exist when improvements are prohibited due to physical or other policy limitations.

### **Existing Level of Service Standards**

In Florida, LOS analysis is based on a theoretical 100th highest hour—i.e. the traffic conditions in the 100th hour if all hours of traffic in a year were ranked from highest to lowest. The first 29 hours are generally considered “event related” traffic. This could be

Memorial Day or 4th of July peak on a road serving the beaches. For another part of the network, it could be unusually high traffic redirected to surface streets due to a crash on I-75. The 30th highest hour is considered the highest “normal” traffic, equivalent to the heaviest PM peak hour traffic during peak season. This is often used for road design.

In the State LOS Rule, the 100th highest hour is specified as the planning analysis hour, and it is used in the State’s LOS analysis procedures. For consistency, Sarasota County, the City of Venice, and the City of North Port have adopted the 100th highest hourly volume design for LOS determination. The 100th highest hour is roughly equivalent to an average PM peak hour during peak season.

The achievement of the above standard would provide an acceptable compromise between economic efficiency and the availability of adequate service levels. This factor takes into account the unique nature of the region’s seasonal population fluctuations and the resulting peak periods of traffic volumes. It represents a community tolerance level which equates to accepting deficient conditions for approximately two hours per day: (a) every Friday afternoon throughout the year; and (b) every Wednesday through Friday afternoons during the winter season at urbanized locations.

The LOS standard described above provides an overall goal toward which the City and County can strive. However, the adoption of a LOS “C” peak hour for constrained and backlogged roadways would not be financially feasible based on a 100th hour design criteria. Constrained roadways are defined as exhibiting a LOS lower than the adopted standard and not being able to attain the adopted standard, because prohibitive cost or environmental limitations prevent the construction of at least two additional through lanes. Backlogged roadways are defined as roadways operating below the adopted standard which do not have prohibitive financial or environmental constraints but are not scheduled for major capacity improvements in the Five-Year Schedule of Capital Improvements. The LOS for constrained roadways (i.e. prohibited due to physical or other policy limitations) or backlogged roadways (i.e. currently un-funded in the Five-Year Schedule of Capital Improvements) is to maintain the current LOS with minimal degradation.

The adoption of a LOS standard for State roadways must consider the standard adopted by FDOT. If the City were to adopt a higher LOS standard on State roadways, the burden would rest on the City to prove that such a LOS could be maintained. The City’s acceptance of constrained and backlogged roadways on the State and County, and City systems, presumes an additional responsibility on the part of the City in its review and approval of development orders. The City’s determination is based upon the need to maintain the existing LOS of such roadways and to not allow the existing operating conditions to be substantially degraded.

The analysis of existing LOS (see Traffic Count Table and LOS Map at the end of this element) for major roads in North Port indicates that it is the City’s arterial road system that has significant links operating at an LOS less than the LOS “C” standard. Toledo Blade Boulevard is shown to operate at an LOS of “D” or “E” for most of its length. This issue will be rectified as

the City, through a public/private partnership, is widening Toledo Blade to 4 lanes from I-75 to the Charlotte County line with estimated completion around FY 2010. The southern links of Sumter Boulevard were shown to be below the LOS “C” standard, however, a major portion of the “problem link” is currently being widened to 4 lanes and also includes a frontage road for residents. This would leave only a short section of the road that would still need to be widened. The CIP indicates that this section could be complete by FY 2011. Price Boulevard also exhibits a failing level of service between Sumter Boulevard and Toledo Blade Boulevard. This east-west arterial is currently undergoing a corridor analysis to examine the corridor, identify the needs and improvements, identify costs, and recommend alternatives to the widening of the road. This is the necessary first step toward achieving capacity improvements and enhanced mobility on and around this corridor. Price Boulevard will be considered as a “backlogged roadway” as part of this Comprehensive Plan. Two collector roads exhibit below average LOS for certain segments, Salford Boulevard and Chamberlain Boulevard. It is proposed as part of this plan that these road links be considered “constrained” as the widening of such roads would bring about major disruption to developed residential neighborhoods. Alternatives to major road widening on the collectors include but are not limited to turn lanes, traffic calming, mass transit. Neighborhood linkage via bridging of canals will be considered to maintain or enhance traffic flow on these roads. This comprehensive plan will propose that the City undertake a City-wide multi-modal transportation study to identify future transportation needs and alternatives for addressing those needs.

In the western part of the City, near Thomas Ranch, River Road continues to operate at LOS “D” and “E.” This is a County-maintained facility that also serves as an evacuation route for the Englewood area and Cape Haze peninsula. This roadway is designated as an “urban arterial by Sarasota County, and it is highly important that the City, Sarasota County, and the West Villages Improvement District work together to obtain the funding necessary to eventually widen this roadway/evacuation route.

Table 3-4

<b><u>Backlogged &amp; Constrained Roadways</u></b>	
<b><u>A. Backlogged Roadways</u></b>	<b><u>Segments</u></b>
<u>Price Boulevard</u>	<u>Sumter Boulevard to Toledo Blade Boulevard</u>
<b><u>B. Constrained Roadways</u></b>	
<u>Salford Boulevard</u>	<u>Price Boulevard to U.S. 41</u>
<u>Sumter Boulevard</u>	<u>Heron Creek Boulevard to Price Boulevard</u>
<u>Chamberlain Boulevard</u>	<u>Allegheny Lane to Hillsborough Boulevard</u>
<u>Hillsborough Boulevard</u>	<u>Chamberlain Blvd. to Cranberry Blvd.</u>

**Concurrency Management**

In 1990, the City adopted a Concurrency Management Ordinance (90-28) as part of its Unified Land Development Code. The ordinance implements the LOS requirements established by the City’s Comprehensive Plan, as amended. The intent of the Concurrency Management Ordinance is to ensure that development orders issued by the City do not result in a reduction in any of the

City's adopted level of service standards (in this case for roads) as adopted in the Comprehensive Plan.

### **Proportionate Fair Share**

In November 2007, the City adopted a Proportionate Fair Share Ordinance (Ordinance # 07-38). The objectives of this ordinance are:

- Provide a method by which impacts of development on transportation facilities can be mitigated by cooperative efforts of the public and private sectors;
- Allow developers to proceed under certain conditions, notwithstanding the failure of transportation concurrency, by contributing their proportionate fair share of the cost of a transportation facility;
- Contribute to the provision of adequate public facilities for future growth and promote a strong commitment to comprehensive facilities planning, thereby reducing the potential for moratoria or unacceptable levels of traffic congestion;
- Maximize the use of public funds for adequate transportation facilities to serve future growth, and in certain circumstances, allow the City to expedite transportation improvements by supplementing funds currently allocated for transportation improvements in the capital improvement element.

The proportionate fair-share program is applicable to all developments that impact a road segment in the City Concurrency Management System and have been notified of a failure to achieve transportation concurrency on a roadway segment or segments. The Proportionate Fair Share program does not apply to DRI's using proportionate fair share under 163.3180(12), Florida Statutes, developments meeting the *de minimis* standards under 163.3180(6), Florida Statutes, or to developments exempted from concurrency per Ordinance No. 07-38.

### **Access Management Strategies**

Through its development review process, implementation of the Comprehensive Plan and Unified Land Development Code, the City strives to incorporate access management strategies to reduce traffic and pedestrian impacts by incorporating good design principals. Strategies include but are not limited to cross access easement, use of frontage roads and alleyway systems, eliminating or minimizing the number of road cuts accessing major roads (arterials/collectors), mass transit and related facilities, sidewalks, bike lanes, pedestrian bridges, traffic and/or pedestrian bridges linking neighborhoods to other neighborhoods or activity centers, and the use of crosswalks and pavers.

### **U.S. 41 Corridor Master Plan**

In 2002, the City, with Boyle Engineering, created and adopted a U.S. 41 Corridor Master Plan to help guide development along this important corridor. The master plan addressed issues

including urban design and landscaping, utilities, drainage and stormwater and various components relating to transportation facilities. Transportation-related initiatives recommended in the Master Plan include completion of the U.S. 41 frontage road system and the reconfiguring of the system to make it more business-friendly by moving the roads closer to businesses and allowing parallel parking adjacent to the businesses; creation of “pod parking” areas at various locations to serve businesses and to complement transit or a future trolley system; analyzing the feasibility of developing a U.S. 41 trolley system with crossover bridges and eventual connections from U.S. 41 to other City Activity Centers and, possibly, other nearby communities.

The U.S. 41 Corridor Master Plan was originally intended as a supplement to a CRA Plan (North Port Planning Department, 2002) for the corridor. However, the Sarasota County Board of County Commissioners, who had the ultimate authority to create a CRA since Sarasota County, is a “home rule” county, decided not to establish the corridor as a formal CRA. The City, however, does continue to utilize the master plan when reviewing development proposals in order to implement as much of the plan as is feasible without TIF funding.

## **TRANSPORTATION AND DISASTER MANAGEMENT**

The City’s two main evacuation routes to Interstate Highway 75, Sumter Boulevard and Toledo Blade Boulevard, are currently being improved. A map at the end of this element shows the City’s current evacuation routes and shelter locations.

**Toledo Blade Boulevard** from U.S. 41 to I-75 is currently being widened from two lanes to four lanes, which will greatly improve evacuation time.

**Sumter Boulevard** is currently being widened from two lanes to four lanes from U.S. 41 northward to Heron Creek Boulevard. An existing segment of Sumter Boulevard from Sylvania to I-75 is four lanes wide, leaving a two-lane central segment approximately 2 miles long. The City is keenly aware that the central two-lane segment of Sumter Boulevard will constrict and slow the flow of evacuation traffic to I-75, and therefore it must be widened as soon as funding is available.

A third evacuation route for North Port communities west of the Myakka River is **River Road** in unincorporated Sarasota County outside the City’s jurisdiction. The County is identifying funding for a design to widen River Road from two to four lanes, and the West Villages Improvement District (Thomas Ranch) may contribute to the design study. Development of West Villages is limited to a maximum at 15,000 units, but currently the area is essentially unpopulated. However, its future development will significantly affect evacuation times on River Road, which presently is a two-lane road with limited capacity that also serves as an evacuation route for East Venice, Englewood and other Charlotte County communities.

As Thomas Ranch is developed, other roads will be extended to hopefully aid the process. Pine Street will be extended north as “West Villages Parkway,” eventually linking with River Road north of U.S. Highway 41. Manasota Beach Road will be extended east into Thomas Ranch/West Villages to River Road, which should help to move evacuation traffic more quickly to River Road and I-75.

The State, and particularly the southwestern region of Florida that includes North Port, experienced a surge in population growth throughout the 1990s and in the first decade of the 21st century. The level of service of **Interstate Highway 75** has perceptibly and significantly declined along with this growth. Consequently, the ability of I-75 to handle a mass or even a partial evacuation has been called into question, even with planned future widening.

The 2001 Hurricane Evacuation Study for Sarasota County prepared by the Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council is the most current source of information available to determine evacuation times. The study utilizes two primary factors to determine evacuation times: (1) the number of vehicles leaving a zone, and (2) the capacity of route(s) and the storm category, the longer the time it will take to evacuate.

Evacuation times are expressed in the number of hours needed to move cars (and people) past a given point. [Table 3-5](#) below shows the 2001 Time to Clear Landfalling Storms in and near North Port (this includes portions of the Englewood and Cape haze area as broken up in the Study).

Table 3-5

Time to Clear Landfalling Storm for Evacuation Zones in and near North Port (2001 estimates)							
Evacuation Zone	Restricting Points	July			October		
		Slow	Intermediate	Quick	Slow	Intermediate	Quick
East Venice	North River Road	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.5	0.4	0.3
Englewood South River Road	South River Road	2.5	2.0	1.9	2.8	2.2	2.1
North Port Myakka	U.S. 41/Jacaranda Blvd. to Charlotte County	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
East Venice	North River Road	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.6	0.5	0.4
North Englewood	SR 776/Jacaranda Boulevard to Circlewoods Drive	2.5	2.0	1.9	2.8	2.2	2.0
Englewood South River Road	South River Road	7.0	5.6	5.2	7.7	6.2	5.7
North Port Myakka	U.S. 41/Jacaranda Blvd. to Charlotte County	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.1	1.1	1.1
Warm Mineral Springs	U.S. 41/Jacaranda Blvd. to Charlotte County	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.1	1.1	1.1
East Venice	North River Road	2.1	1.7	1.5	2.5	2.0	1.8
North Englewood	SR 776/Jacaranda Boulevard to Circlewoods Drive	4.5	3.6	3.3	4.9	3.9	3.6
Englewood South River Road	South River Road	9.5	7.6	7.1	10.4	8.4	7.7
Warm Mineral Springs	U.S. 41/Jacaranda Blvd. to Charlotte County	2.3	2.3	2.3	2.5	2.5	2.5
North Port Myakka	U.S. 41/Jacaranda Blvd. to Charlotte County	2.3	2.3	2.3	2.5	2.5	2.5
North Port	U.S. 41 to Char. And Sumter Blvd./I-75 to U.S. 41	2.1	2.0	2.0	2.3	2.2	2.1
East Venice	U.S. 41 (U.S. 41 Bypass N. to Colonia Ln.) & Jacaranda	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.5	6.5	6.5
North Englewood	SR 776/Jacaranda Boulevard to Circlewoods Drive	5.9	4.7	4.4	6.3	5.1	4.7
Warm Mineral Springs	U.S. 41/Jacaranda Blvd. to Charlotte County	3.3	3.3	3.3	3.6	3.6	3.6
North Port	U.S. 41/Jacar. to Char. and Sumter Blvd./I-75 to U.S. 41	3.6	3.4	3.4	3.9	3.7	3.7

Source: Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council

## FUTURE GROWTH AND TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENTS

As noted earlier in the “laneage” section of this element, the City has over 800 square miles of roads. Since transportation and specific road improvements were identified in the “Major Issues” portion of the EAR, most of the City’s future roadway improvements focus on Toledo Blade Boulevard, Sumter Boulevard, and Price Boulevard. Also, the City is repairing and repaving miles of local roads in order to enhance the quality of life for the traveling public. Since these improvements have been discussed at length earlier in this and other elements of the Comprehensive Plan, this section will focus on other potential improvements.

**Interchanges** – As identified in back-up data found in the Activity Center Report (North Port Planning Department, 2008), the City is proposing a new Activity Center at Yorkshire Street and I-75. This location will eventually need an interchange to serve the industrial, commercial, office, residential, and park uses that are proposed. This is consistent with the 1997 Comprehensive Plan, which called for a future interchange in the vicinity of Yorkshire Street or Raintree Boulevard. Staff believes that the spacing of this interchange is appropriate as it is essentially equidistant between the interchange at Toledo Blade Boulevard in North Port and the Kings Highway interchange in Charlotte County. The Activity Center Report discusses anticipated costs and possible funding sources for this future interchange. This interchange is not currently programmed by FDOT, which means that the City will have to coordinate planning activities with FDOT to address the needs, costs, and funding associated with this future interchange (see Policy 2.6.9 of the Future Land Use Element).

In the future, the City should examine the feasibility of another interchange to serve the western parts of the original City at Ponce De Leon Boulevard because, as this area continues to grow, there will be a substantial population that this interchange could serve. With no interchange, drivers will be forced to travel very long distances, which will add to the traffic on other City roads and impact their level of service, in order to reach one of the existing interchanges at Sumter Boulevard or farther west via U.S. 41 to reach River Road and its northern interchange. This potential interchange should be examined as part of the transportation study that is called for as part of this Comprehensive Plan.

**Connectivity** – One of the existing problems concerning the ability to move around North Port is the impact that the major canal system has on the transportation network. These water bodies create barriers and force even more traffic onto the collector to arterial “funnel” that is prevalent in North Port today. The City should encourage linkages from neighborhood to neighborhood and from neighborhoods to activity centers and town centers. Such connectivity/linkage will offer alternate routes for residents, could aid in maintaining acceptable levels of service on certain roadways, better access and make it easier for Fire/EMS and police to respond to calls. Connectivity/linkages could include pedestrian bridges, traffic bridges, or a combination of both.

### **Sidewalks/Pedestrian Paths/Bike Lanes/Greenways/Trails/Blueways**

Sidewalks in the City are more prevalent in the newer developments as the City’s original developers did not focus on such systems, although there are areas where they actually did put

facilities in place. The Unified Land Development Code requires sidewalks with all new developments. The development review process ensures that the facilities are included in the new developments. The City annually attempts to provide more sidewalk facilities and has taken advantage of various grants to increase the size of the system to enhance linkage. Connections to schools, including pedestrian bridges across drainage features, are highly important.

Designated bike paths are found along U.S. 41 and several collector roads. As arterial roads have been widened or are planned to be widened, multi-purpose paths are included in the design – a prime example being Sumter Boulevard.

Pathways are encouraged in new developments to provide recreational opportunities, or places to unwind from a hectic day of shopping. Pathways are being placed around retention areas and ponds along with other aesthetic and pedestrian amenities that will make the walk more pleasant. Paths and trails will be an important component of the Myakkahatchee Greenway project that is discussed in depth in other elements of this Comprehensive Plan. A linkage to the Sarasota County trail system on the Carlton reserve is encouraged.

No blueway systems currently exist in North Port, but with its many canals, the Myakkahatchee Creek and the Myakka River being accessible in North Port, this is a concept that should be considered in the future as part of a multi-modal transportation study.

### **Sarasota/Manatee Metropolitan Planning Organization**

The Sarasota/Manatee Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) was established in 1978 following the passage of the Federal Highway Act of 1974. The MPO's purpose is to guide local decision making on transportation issues by establishing regional transportation priorities, policies, and plans. The MPO policy board is comprised of local elected officials from Sarasota and Manatee Counties, local municipalities, Port Manatee, and the Sarasota-Bradenton Airport Authority.

The principle responsibilities of the MPO include the development of (1) a 20-year Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) (Renaissance Planning Group, 2005), (2) a Congestion Management System (CMS), (3) a five-year Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), and (4) related planning studies and projects deemed necessary to address transportation issues within their jurisdiction. Local transportation needs are re-evaluated annually.

By Federal and State law, all multi-modal transportation improvement projects must be included in and consistent with the TIP in order to be eligible for Federal and State funding. This requirement makes the TIP the primary plan that guides all State and Federally funded transportation improvements in the bi-county area.

Every five years the MPO updates the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), with the current 2030 LRTP adopted on November 28, 2005. The plan defines strategic transportation projects linked with growth and important community objectives along with the ability to meet long-term mobility needs with projected funding. The 2030 Highway Needs System Plan for South Sarasota County (Figure 5-8 of 2030 LRTP) indicates several improvements needed for the future in the North Port Area, including:

- Four-laning of River Road.
- Four-laning Toledo Blade Boulevard (currently underway).

- Complete the four-laning of Sumter Boulevard (segment is currently under construction).
- Extending Manasota Beach Road eastward to River Road (indicated on Future Transportation Circulation Map).
- Pine Street extension (indicated as “West Villages Parkway” on the Future transportation Circulation Map).
- Four laning of Price Boulevard (corridor analysis is underway).
- Keyway Road extension to Pine Street (indicated on Future Transportation Circulation Map).

## **ALTERNATIVE MODES OF TRANSPORTATION**

### **Mass Transit**

Sarasota County Area Transit (SCAT) provides public transit and paratransit services throughout the County, including the City of North Port. SCAT updates the Sarasota County Transit Development Plan (TDP) annually. The TDP recommends how the bus system can respond to the public transit needs of the County over five-year periods. Through the annual update of the Sarasota County Transportation Disadvantaged Plan, SCAT plans for complementary paratransit services.

Since 1997, the City has continually expressed its desire for enhanced transit service to better serve the needs of City residents. In fact, this was one of the major issues identified in the Evaluation and Appraisal Report (EAR). Since the EAR was adopted and approved, SCAT has increased service to North Port. The current SCAT bus routes are indicated on the Future Transportation Circulation Map.

The City continues to plan for expanded transit service by requiring developers to plan for stops and shelters in their developments. Shelters are also an issue of concern, especially in the U.S. 41 corridor, where only one shelter currently exists. There are other areas with bus stops that also need shelters. The City must continue to coordinate with SCAT to identify and place shelters at the most used locations in the City. It is also likely that in the future, as service levels increase, the City will need a site for a transfer facility for multiple buses/transfers. Connections to major employers such as PGT in Venice and airports such as Sarasota-Bradenton International Airport should also be considered.

North Port also has a number of taxicab and limousine companies that provide door-to-door service throughout the area. Additionally, there are nursing homes, medical facilities, and social service agencies that provide services to residents and clients.

### **Air Service**

North Port does not have an airport within its boundaries. However, the City’s growing population has several options for both commercial and private service within a few hours driving time. The closest commercial airports are Sarasota-Bradenton International Airport and the Charlotte County Airport near Punta Gorda. Sarasota-Bradenton International Airport is served by a number of national and international carriers (mainly seasonal), and the Charlotte

County Airport just witnessed the initiation of service from a low fare carrier. The City should support initiatives that enhance air service at these airports with fare structures amenable to residents' financial abilities. More commercial service is available at both the Southwest Florida International Airport near Fort Myers, Tampa International Airport, and St. Petersburg/Clearwater Airport.

Non-commercial airports for private pilots and charter service are available at the Charlotte County Airport, Venice Airport, and Buchan Airport near Englewood.

## **INTERGOVERNMENTAL COORDINATION**

The City coordinates with several governmental entities to ensure an appropriate management of transportation needs. The main agencies are:

- Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) coordinates federal and state funding for roadways and improvements with the recommendations of the Metropolitan Planning Organization.
- Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council assists the City with technical transportation information to ensure that local and regional transportation concerns, safety, and other issues are met to address growth as it relates to transportation needs.
- Sarasota/Manatee Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) prepares the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) containing strategies and projected transportation needs and roadway projects within a 25-year frame. The MPO assists FDOT by preparing and prioritizing the financially feasible roadway projects listed in the 5-year Transportation Improvement Program that is utilized by FDOT for funding projects.
- Sarasota County Area Transit System (SCAT) provides countywide transit services. Coordination for bus route services and transit stops is vital to the City.
- Sarasota County coordinates with the City on all roadway needs concerning the County's roadway system.

The City continues to participate as a member of the Sarasota-Manatee MPO. The most recent LRTP Framework 2030 from the Sarasota-Manatee MPO set a number of transportation goals for the City:

- Provide mobility on area roadways and enhance intermodal connectivity.
- Strengthen the multimodal transportation system.
- Coordinate land use and protect the environment.
- Enhance system management and operations.
- Ensure financial feasibility.
- Involve public in transportation decision making.