Gandy Connector (SR 600, US 92)

From the Gandy Bridge to the western
Terminus of the Selmon Expressway

Project Development & Environment (PD&E) Study

Final State Environmental Impact Report (SEIR)

With Supporting Documents

WPI Segment No: 255822-1
FAP No: N/A
Hillsborough County

Prepared for the
Tampa-Hillsborough County Expressway Authority (THEA)

Prepared by:
American Consulting Engineers of Florida, LLC

2818 Cypress Ridge Blvd, Suite 200 ▪ Wesley Chapel, FL ▪ 33544

May 2010

Tampa Hillsborough County Expressway Authority
FINAL STATE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

1. GENERAL INFORMATION

Project Name:	Gandy Connector Project Development and Environment (PD&E) Study
Project Limits:	From the Gandy Bridge to the western terminus of the Selmon Expressway in Hillsborough County
WPI Segment No.:	255822-1

2. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

a. Existing Conditions:

The existing Gandy Boulevard roadway is a 4-lane divided "rural" roadway west of Bridge Street and 4-lane divided "urban" east of Bridge Street, which is one block west of Westshore Boulevard. The rural segment includes 10-foot multiuse paths on both sides, 12-foot lanes, 5-foot outside paved shoulders and 2-foot and 4-foot inside paved shoulders with a minimum 30-foot depressed grassed median. Following the completion of the Florida Department of Transportation's (FDOT) reconstruction project in fall 2009 (WPI Seg. No. 255822-2), the urban section segment now includes a 30-foot raised median along Gandy Boulevard, 11-foot inside lanes, 12-foot outside lanes, and 6-foot sidewalks located at the back of the curbs. Additional auxiliary lanes are provided in the vicinity of the Selmon Expressway ramp intersections located between Church Avenue and Dale Mabry Highway. Signalized intersections are present at Westshore Boulevard, Manhattan Avenue, Lois Avenue, and Dale Mabry Highway. Auxiliary turn lanes are included at all signalized intersections. The existing right of way width is a minimum 100-foot., centered on the centerline of the roadway. The posted speed limit is 45 miles per hour in most areas. This corridor is designated as an emergency evacuation route and is designated on the FDOT's Strategic Intermodal System (SIS) and Florida Intrastate Highway System (FIHS).

b. Proposed Improvements:

Expected improvements include the construction of 2-way, 2-lane Elevated Express Lanes from west of Bridge Street to the western terminus of the Selmon Expressway near Dale Mabry Highway. Tolls would be collected for users of the Elevated Express Lanes. The bridge piers would be located within the median of existing Gandy Boulevard. Additional proposed improvements include ramp connections at the west end of the Elevated Express Lanes as the diverge/merge to Gandy Boulevard west of Bridge Street, surface street improvements at Bridge Street and the construction of ramps to/from Dale Mabry Highway in the vicinity of the Selmon Expressway terminus.

3. APPROVED FOR PUBLIC AVAILABILITY (Prior to Public Hearing)

Responsible Officer _____ Date 7/31/09

A Public Hearing was held on 8/25/2009

4. APPROVAL OF FINAL DOCUMENT (After Public Hearing)

_____ _____
Executive Director of
Tampa-Hillsborough County Expressway Authority Date

_____ _____
District Secretary or Designee
Florida Department of Transportation – District Seven Date

Tampa Hillsborough County Expressway Authority
FINAL STATE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

5. IMPACT EVALUATION

Topical Categories	S*	NS*	N*	NI*	Basis for Decision
A. SOCIAL IMPACTS					
1. Land Use Changes	[ ]	[ ]	[X]	[ ]	*See Section 1.1 of ETC**
2. Community Cohesion	[ ]	[ ]	[X]	[ ]	*See Section 1.2 of ETC**
3. Relocation Potential	[ ]	[X]	[ ]	[ ]	*See Section 1.3 of ETC**
4. Community Services	[ ]	[ ]	[X]	[ ]	*See Section 1.4 of ETC**
5. Title VI Consideration	[ ]	[ ]	[X]	[ ]	*See Section 1.5 of ETC**
6. Controversy Potential	[ ]	[X]	[ ]	[ ]	*See Section 1.6 of ETC**
7. Bicycles and Pedestrians	[ ]	[ ]	[X]	[ ]	*See Section 1.7 of ETC**
8. Utilities and Railroads	[ ]	[X]	[ ]	[ ]	*See Section 1.8 of ETC* and Sections 1.1.12 and 6.10 of PEA***
B. CULTURAL IMPACTS					
1. Historical Sites / Districts	[ ]	[ ]	[X]	[ ]	*See Section 2.1 of ETC**
2. Archaeological Sites	[ ]	[ ]	[X]	[ ]	*See Section 2.2 of ETC**
3. Recreation Sites	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[X]	
C. NATURAL ENVIRONMENT					
1. Wetlands	[ ]	[X]	[ ]	[ ]	*See Section 3.3 of ETC**
2. Aquatic Preserves	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[X]	
3. Water Quality	[ ]	[ ]	[X]	[ ]	*See Section 3.4 of ETC**
4. Outstanding Fla. Waters	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[X]	
5. Wild and Scenic Rivers	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[X]	
6. Floodplains	[ ]	[ ]	[X]	[ ]	*See Section 3.5 of ETC**
7. Coastal and Marine	[ ]	[ ]	[X]	[ ]	*See Section 3.6 of ETC**
8. Wildlife and Habitat	[ ]	[X]	[ ]	[ ]	*See Section 3.7 of ETC**
9. Farmlands	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[X]	
D. PHYSICAL IMPACTS					
1. Noise	[ ]	[X]	[ ]	[ ]	*See Section 4.1 of ETC**
2. Air	[ ]	[ ]	[X]	[ ]	*See Section 4.2 of ETC**
3. Construction	[ ]	[X]	[ ]	[ ]	*See Section 4.3 of ETC**
4. Contamination	[ ]	[X]	[ ]	[ ]	*See Section 4.4 of ETC**
5. Navigation	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[X]	

*S = Significant; NS = Not Significant; N = None; NI = No Involvement. Basis of decision will be a reference to the Project Development Summary Report following this checklist.

*ETC – Environmental Technical Compendium
**PEA – Preliminary Engineering Analysis

E. PERMITS REQUIRED

It is anticipated that the following permits may be required:

- Environmental Resource Permit – Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD)
- Dredge and Fill Permit – US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE).
- National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Permit – Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP).
- Environmental Protection Commission of Hillsborough County Permit.

6. AGENCY COORDINATION & PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

This segment of the Selmon Expressway was evaluated in the Programming Screen of the Efficient Transportation Decision Making (ETDM) process (project # 12216) in 2009. This process established the Class of Action as a State Environmental Impact Report (SEIR).

The THEA held approximately sixty (60) individual and small group meetings between June 30, 2008 and August 19, 2009 that included small businesses and neighborhood associations. A total of four (4) Project Advisory Group (PAG) meetings were held between September 30, 2008 and September 28, 2009. The THEA also gave presentations to the City of Tampa, the Hillsborough County Metropolitan Planning Organization, the Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce and the Hillsborough County Planning Commission. In addition, newsletters were distributed to announce the Public Information Workshop, held on April 14, 2009 and the Public Hearing, held on August 25, 2009.

At the Public Hearing, the THEA encouraged the public to ask questions and submit comments, either orally to the court reporter at the hearing, or written on a comment form to be submitted and recorded for the public hearing record. Twelve citizens gave oral statements during the public testimony period. A total of eighty-five (85) comments were received either prior to, during, or after the hearing. Of these comments, twenty-four (24) percent supported the Build Alternative, while the remaining seventy-six (76) percent were opposed to construction of the project. Of those opposed, most comments were in regards to the perceived negative impacts the build alternative would have on the community, local businesses, and property values.

7. COMMITMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following commitments have been made by the THEA and will be adhered to during the final design and construction phases:

1. To further study the need for a noise wall at the east end of the project limits.

2. To continue coordination with CSX railroad regarding the Gandy Boulevard crossing and the height of structures and warning gates.

3. Continue to coordinate with the City of Tampa on finding coordinated solutions for the project drainage requirements.

4. To continue the participation of the Project Advisory Group (PAG) and the community in the final design and construction process with specific focus on aesthetic features.

5. To warrant further environmental assessment to contamination sites ranked "Medium" risk pending the final roadway alignment; while the single contamination site ranked "High" risk (US Marine Corp) will warrant a further environmental investigation based on the results of the final roadway alignment and design.

6. Should the State Environmental Impact Report (SEIR) be accepted by the THEA Board of Directors, the Authority will then perform an Investment Grade Revenue and Toll Study for the feasibility to build the facility as a toll road.

7. Coordinate with communities of Regency Cove, Culbreath Key, and the City of Tampa on the final design and aesthetics details of the proposed shared access point opposite Bridge Street.

8. Additional analysis will be conducted during final design phase for the eastbound and westbound access ramps to and from the Elevated Express Lanes in the vicinity of Dale Mabry Highway.

9. The requirement during final design to define a project building system that would minimize roadway and driveway closures during peak hours during construction and minimize direct construction impacts to the existing Gandy Boulevard roadway, street lighting, traffic signalization and roadway signs.

10. To further evaluate the traffic operations at the eastbound loop ramp of the Elevated Express Lanes.

Recommendations

The Preferred Alternative is recommended. It consists of construction of the two-lane, two-way Elevated Express Lanes along existing Gandy Boulevard from the existing Gandy Bridge to the Selmon Expressway. Piers would be located in the center of the median of Gandy Boulevard. New ramps would be constructed near the intersection of Gandy Boulevard and Dale Mabry Highway to enter and exit the new Elevated Express Lanes, as well as an extension to Bridge Street to the north and reconfiguration and combination of Culbreath Key and Regency Cove development entrances. The Preferred Alternative also includes westbound and eastbound bus bays on Gandy Boulevard just east of Manhattan Avenue.

SEIR ATTACHMENT

INTRODUCTION

Project Description

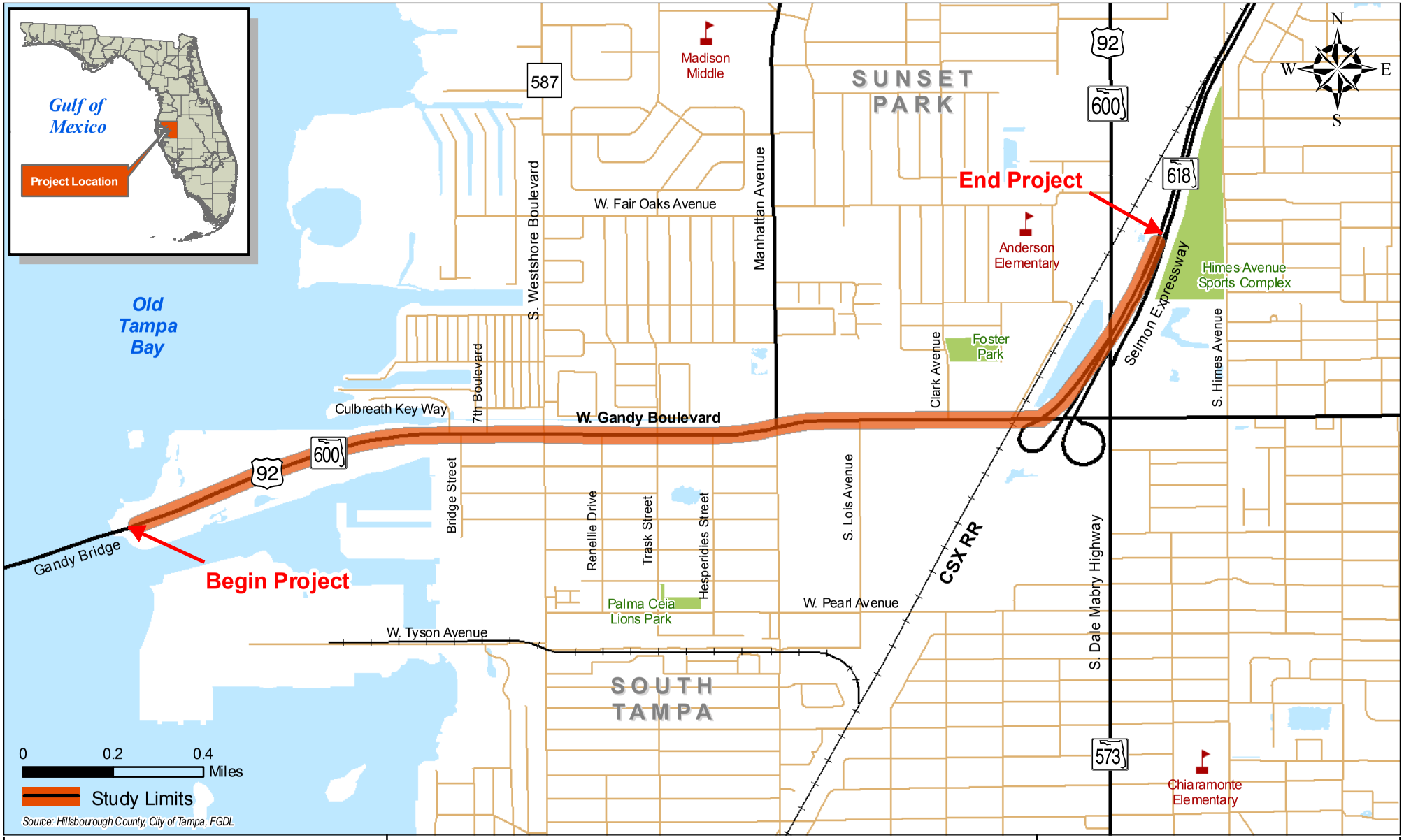
The Tampa-Hillsborough County Expressway Authority (THEA) conducted a Project Development and Environment (PD&E) study to evaluate possible alternate improvements to the Gandy Boulevard (SR 600, US 92) corridor from the Gandy Bridge to the western termini of the Selmon Expressway in Hillsborough County. The total length of the proposed project is approximately 2.5 miles. A study location map is shown in **Figure 1** along with a study area aerial map in **Figure 2**.

The sections, townships and ranges where the project is located are summarized in **Table 1**.

TABLE 1: SECTIONS, TOWNSHIPS, RANGES

Sections	Townships	Ranges
Hillsborough County		
04,05,08,09	30S	18E
21	31S	19E

The purpose of this report is to document the engineering and environmental analyses performed to support decisions related to project alternatives. In addition, it summarizes existing conditions, documents the purpose of and need for the project, and documents other data related to preliminary design concepts. These preliminary design concepts establish the functional or conceptual requirements that will be the starting point for the final design phase.

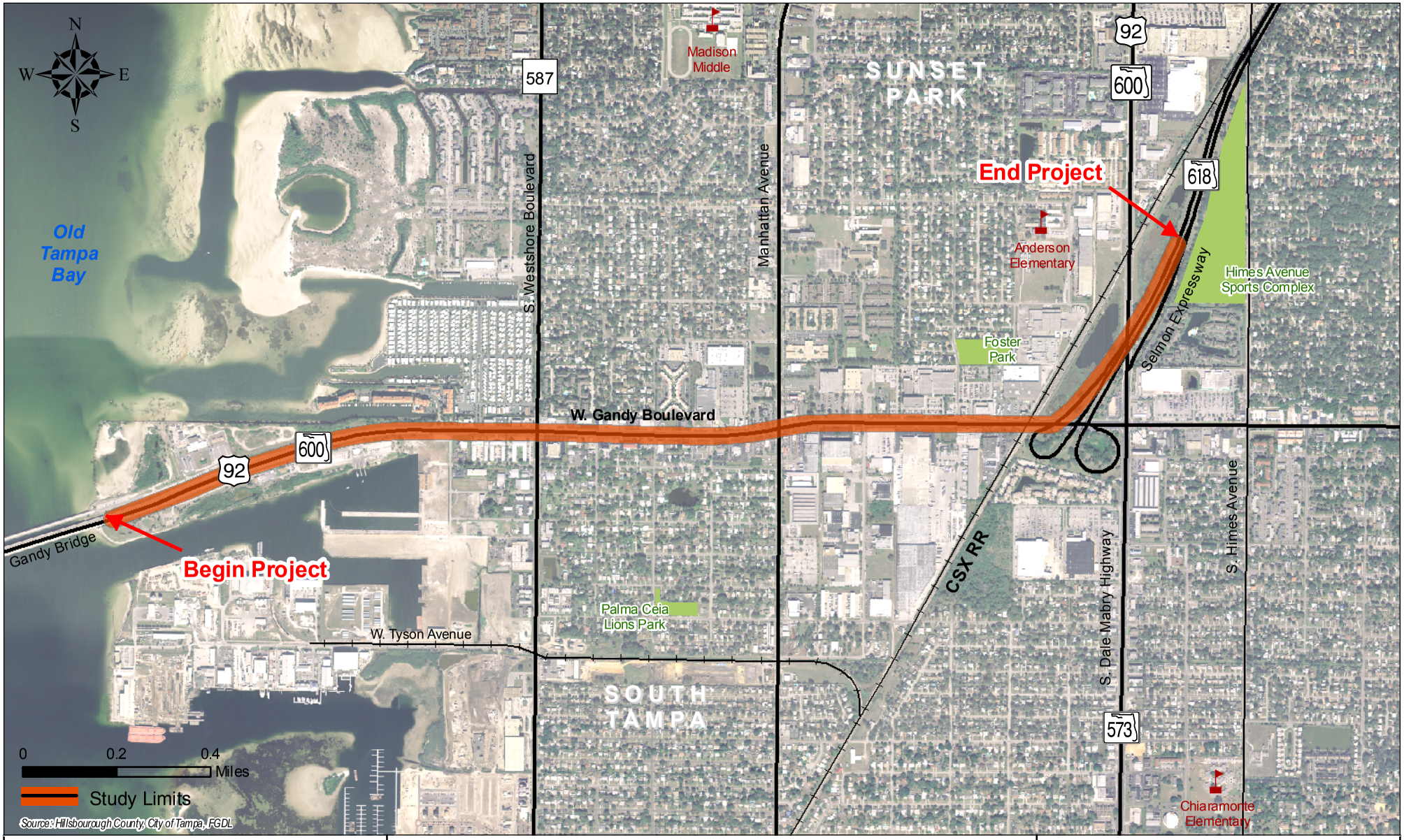


Gandy Connector PD&E Study

from Gandy Bridge to the western termini of the Selmon Expressway
Hillsborough County, Florida

Figure 1: Project Location Map

TAMPA-HILLSBOROUGH EXPRESSWAY AUTHORITY



Gandy Connector PD&E Study

from Gandy Bridge to the western termini of the Selmon Expressway
Hillsborough County, Florida

Figure 2: Study Area Aerial Map

TAMPA-HILLSBOROUGH EXPRESSWAY AUTHORITY

Purpose and Need for Project

The purpose and need for the proposed project includes the following items:

- To provide **additional highway capacity** along the Gandy Boulevard corridor (between the Gandy Bridge and the Selmon Expressway) to meet future traffic demands while **separating regional** and **local** traffic
- To improve operations for local traffic on Gandy Boulevard by removing regional traffic from the surface facility
- To **safely accommodate** future vehicle traffic as well as non-motorized users and transit
- To provide improved **hurricane/emergency evacuation** for portions of south Pinellas County and south Tampa
- To provide improvements **consistent with local transportation plans** while obtaining **community support** and **minimizing community impacts**
- To develop a transportation solution that is **financially feasible** for THEA to build, operate and maintain

Additional factors are discussed below.

The Regional Network and FIHS/SIS Requirements

The Gandy Connector project would provide an important link in the regional transportation network. It would provide a limited-access connection between Pinellas County and downtown Tampa and eastern Hillsborough County, with connections to I-4 and I-75 via the Selmon Expressway.

Gandy Boulevard is part of the Florida Intrastate Highway System (FIHS), an interconnected statewide system of limited-access and controlled-access facilities with established standards and criteria. Its purpose is to serve high-speed and high-volume traffic movements and access to abutting land is subordinate to movement of traffic. Gandy Boulevard does not currently meet FIHS standards with respect to access management, level of service (LOS), and design speed. The FIHS is a subset of the state's Strategic Intermodal System (SIS), which includes other modes and major facilities (e.g. seaports and airports) in addition to highways.

Transportation Demand and Levels of Service

Estimated annual average daily traffic (AADT) volumes on Gandy Boulevard in 2008 ranged from 33,500 vehicles per day (VPD) west of Westshore Boulevard to 45,000 VPD west of Dale Mabry Highway, based on the Florida Department of Transportation's (FDOT) traffic estimates. Future traffic projections and LOS are shown below in **Table 2**. The basis for the future traffic projections is explained in the *Design Traffic Technical Memorandum* (HNTB, October 2009).

TABLE 2: ANNUAL AVERAGE DAILY TRAFFIC (AADT) AND LEVEL OF SERVICE (LOS)

	2008		**2035 (Design Year)**	
Alternative	**AADT**	**LOS**	**AADT**	**LOS**
Existing and Future No Build	45,000+/-	F	55,000+/-	F
Future Build Alternative (Scenario #2 with 25-cent toll)				
Ground Level			41,600	F
Elevated Portion			23,500	B

The existing overall arterial currently operates at LOS F between Westshore Boulevard and Dale Mabry Highway. With the Build Alternative in place (including the Elevated Express Lanes), the expected LOS for the at-grade highway will still be LOS F; however overall average delays at the signalized intersections are expected to be reduced an average of 45 percent during peak travel hours. Without this proposed project, the traffic congestion is expected to become more severe and could hinder economic growth in the areas served by this corridor.

Emergency Evacuation

The Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council has developed a hurricane evacuation plan for the region and has designated Gandy Boulevard as the evacuation route for portions of south Pinellas County and south Tampa. As the population grows in these areas, this existing route's capability to provide a satisfactory LOS for emergency evacuation will continue to decrease. Minimizing delays along this route is critical as the area is generally low, flat and prone to

flooding due to its close proximity to the bay. Also, there are no emergency shelters located along this route nor in nearby surrounding areas.

The Build Alternative for this project includes the ability to operate a contraflow lane during emergency evacuations on the Elevated Express Lane bridge, which would yield two outbound (eastbound) lanes with a total hourly capacity of approximately 4,000 vehicles on the elevated structure. The bridge would carry traffic from the Gandy Bridge (from Pinellas County) while the surface Gandy Boulevard would serve evacuation traffic from south Tampa. This would facilitate quicker evacuation of the area.

Other Transportation Modes

Removing regional traffic from the surface facility could potentially improve conditions for pedestrians and bicyclists on Gandy Boulevard as well as bus transit users, by reducing the peak-hour traffic congestion. Several options associated with the Build Alternative include construction of bus bays and shelters.

Safety

Separating the regional traffic from the local traffic would be expected to result in a safer overall facility, because:

- Limited access facilities have lower traffic crash rates than non limited access facilities
- Congestion on the surface Gandy Boulevard facility would be reduced, which would be expected to lower the rate of rear-end collisions, which are typically correlated with congestion

Consistency with Transportation Plans

The Hillsborough County Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) 2035 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), adopted on December 9, 2009, includes intersection improvements along Gandy Boulevard between the Gandy Bridge and Dale Mabry Highway, which are included in the "Aesthetic Enhancements and Operational Improvements" project that is presently underway. For future laneage on Gandy Boulevard, the LRTP Cost Affordable Plan

indicates the need for an additional two lanes from the Gandy Bridge to the Selmon Expressway by year 2015 for right-of-way and 2015 through 2020 for construction.

The FDOT's SIS Eligible Multi-Modal Unfunded Needs Plan dated May 2006 shows the need for this facility by year 2015. Because the proposed project would provide a facility that meets the design standards required for FIHS facilities, the proposed action is consistent with the SIS Strategic Plan (revised July 20, 2008) as well as the Statewide Transportation Plan.

Gandy Boulevard is also listed in the City of Tampa's Comprehensive Plan, adopted May 1, 2009, as a potential "Gateway" corridor, meaning this facility has been identified as potentially being suitable for additional landscaping and street tree plantings. Many enhancements consistent with this were constructed as part of FDOT's WPI Segment No.: 255822-2.

In order to provide the needed financing for the project, the City of Tampa and FDOT are partnering with the THEA to consider evaluating whether new lanes could be operated as a toll facility. These lanes would essentially be ramp connections from the current western terminus of the Selmon Expressway westward to the existing Gandy Bridge. A study is currently being conducted by THEA's toll and revenue consultant and will be completed in 2010 to forecast total system-wide gross toll revenue related to this improvement.

SEIR ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A – Conceptual Design Plans for Preferred Build Alternative

Attachment B – Preliminary Engineering Analysis (PEA)

Attachment C – Environmental Technical Compendium (ETC)