

Parkway Will Be Widened in '78

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CLEARWATER — The Pinellas County side of the Courtney Campbell Parkway will be widened next year.

Barring delays by environmental agencies, state Department of Transportation (DOT) engineers want to begin work on the \$4.8-million project early next summer and have it finished by late 1979.

The four narrow lanes will be widened to 12 feet each with the paired east- and west-bound lanes separated by a flat, 10-foot-wide painted median.

"If you were to drive on the Pinellas side you would see why we decided to go there first," said DOT district design engineer Mike Peterson. "It just isn't safe."

One of Clearwater's most spectacular and tragic auto accidents occurred on that stretch of road in late July. A visiting Ohio man was decapitated and his car cut in two when he sideswiped a car coming from Tampa.

Planning hasn't even begun for the Hillsborough County half of the 34-year-old cross-bay brainchild of the late Tampa entrepreneur Ben T. Davis. The public beach on the Tampa side of the causeway is named for him.

The Pinellas section begins at the southern tip of McMullen-Booth Road and runs past Clearwater Christian College 4.8 miles to the western approach of the main bridge. Peterson said work should take no longer than 550 calendar days.

"We have no intention of closing down that road for one day," Peterson said. "But to say there will be no delays is foolish. It can and will be built while still maintaining traffic."

A major change from the present road design is a plan for an 8- to 10-foot road shoulder. At least 4 feet of that shoulder will be paved to give errant motorists a chance to regain con-

trol of their car without zipping out into the bay.

The median strip, too, will be brightly marked to make sure you know not to intrude into oncoming traffic.

The catch to DOT plans that could keep construction from beginning on time is a series of environmental agency approvals needed from the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, the State Department of Environmental Regulation (DER), the Tampa Port Authority and the Pinellas Inland Water and Navigation Board (county commissioners).

The port authority applauded the plans yesterday and little opposition is expected from the Pinellas side. But snags are developing elsewhere.

DER officials dispatched a critical report of the parkway widening, questioning its impact on the recreational area along the parkway, wetlands and bay waters.

"The encroachment into 'productive' waters is something we've tried to keep to a minimum," said Peterson. "What we've proposed is already a compromise and it would have been irresponsible on our part to do more."

"We're even cramped ourselves in a few places," he added. DOT wants to widen the parkway in some places to its original width, long since eroded or scalloped by tidal action.

DER officials aren't sure that is best for the bay and have waved a caution flag before Corps officials. The Corps is in charge of all navigable waters and salt wetlands.

The permit process needed before DOT can hire out the work is expected to take until spring of 1978.

Money for the project comes from federal urban primary (road) cash reserves; in other words, some of the tax you pay when you gas up the family car. Costs will be shared on a 70 per cent federal/30 per cent state DOT split.