

Editorials of the Sun

A long-overdue barrier along the parkway

Man was not very bright on the day he came up with the idea of allowing hundreds of two-ton devices made of steel, rubber and glass to travel 70 miles per hour (and more) at each other with only a few feet of space separating the lanes of opposing traffic.

Man has paid dearly for such illogic (for which, read "stupidity"). Locally, the not-so-gentle art of the head-on collision and other forms of sudden death by motor vehicle have been lifted to impressive heights on the Courtney Campbell Parkway. Between 1980 and 1984, 25 traffic fatalities occurred on the parkway, compared to seven on the Howard Frankland Bridge and five on the Gandy Bridge.

The Frankland and Gandy bridges have barriers that separate opposing traffic flows. The Courtney Campbell Parkway does not. The connection between these facts and the respective fatality totals will not escape the observant reader.

But after the dark night comes the dawn. A few days ago the Florida Department of Transportation announced that in 1986 a concrete barrier will be built down the middle of the 10-mile parkway. The wall will cost \$6.6 million.

The concrete separator could have been erected before this, but the DOT people were afraid it would act as a dam and cause flooding during hurricane tides. But now, in what must be regarded as an engineering breakthrough of enormous proportions, the DOT says a way has been found to let the high water slosh underneath the median barrier.

We hope that while the barrier is going up the DOT will also resurface certain sections of the roadway, principally near Sam Davis Beach, on the Tampa side. It is dangerous to travel roads that rough and worn.

Not many years ago a trip from Clearwater to Tampa via the parkway was a one-hour rustic holiday along a two-lane road lined on either side by a variety of trees and flowering shrubs.

Time and Florida's unofficial state motto ("Asphalt, si, nature, no") have changed all that. Now the journey to Tampa is accomplished in a 20-minute blur, punctuated every few weeks by the screech of tires and the sound of cars slamming into each other.

The new barrier should reduce the frequency of these sickening sounds. It's about time.