

North Port Fire Rescue District

Office of the Fire Chief

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Memorandum

To: Julie Bellia, Public Works Director
From: William J. Taaffe, Fire Chief 
Date: April 4, 2017
Re: Fire Rescue Response and Safety on Price Blvd.

I am responding to your request for information regarding Fire Rescue response and operations on Price Blvd. and what if any changes will the widening of Price Blvd. bring.

Background:

There is limited East-West access within the City of North Port and because of this Fire Rescue aligns its response patterns to emergencies to address this situation. There are three short segmented East – West roadways, Tropicare Blvd. a two-lane road near the North border of the City and U.S -- 41 a four-lane signalized divided roadway, and Hillsborough Blvd. a two-lane road on the South border of the City. There are two central roadways, Interstate 75 which has limited access/egress, and Price Blvd., a two-lane signalized road which extends the full length of the City.

Presently, four of the five City Fire Stations are located within proximity of Price Blvd. and the other is located within proximity and central to U.S.- 41. These locations provide optimum response and protection to the community utilizing the road network described above and additional collector and local streets.

Because of the geographic limitations of East-West road corridors and the North-South collector roadway network, most emergency responses utilize Price Blvd.

Present Price Blvd. Conditions and Emergency Response

- The roadway lacks stabilized shoulders, has multiple obstructions such as mailboxes and elevated driveways that impact the ability of private vehicles to pull off the roadway and yield to responding emergency apparatus.
- Certain segments of the road are subject to long traffic cues several times a day. Those times include morning and evening commute times and school opening/closing times. These cues increase the response times as apparatus must maneuver the long lines very carefully.
- Each time an emergency occurs on Price Blvd., even a medical call at a home, our vehicles must park on the roadway blocking one lane of the two-lane road. This requires North Port Police to respond to safely direct alternating lane movement of traffic.
- Turning radius at many of the cross streets and or signalized intersections do not meet the requirements for the emergency apparatus or are at minimums.

- There is not sufficient road width to turn an emergency vehicle around on Price Blvd. and therefore our vehicles must continue some distance to a location with a side street that loops back to Price Blvd. or a business parking lot where they can complete a turn.
- There are limited to no fire hydrants on Price Blvd. for firefighting purposes.
- The present traffic signals on Price Blvd. are older and do not support the Emergency Vehicle Traffic Preemption System for safe and efficient movement of responding emergency vehicles through intersections.

Proposed Price Blvd. Improvements and Emergency Response

- A new four-lane divided roadway will allow private vehicles to pull safely to the right lane, which also includes several feet of dedicated bike lane, and stop to yield to approaching emergency vehicles. This will allow the emergency vehicle to respond unimpeded in open lane of the roadway.
- The new roadway will include improved smart traffic signals that will adjust to increased traffic to reduce traffic cues. Should the roadway become congested, private vehicles would have the option to pull to the right lane or even into the turning lanes in the median.
- When an emergency occurs on Price Blvd. our vehicles would continue to park in the roadway, however because of the added lane in each direction, private vehicle traffic can continue to flow unobstructed without the aid of Police traffic direction.
- The widened roadway and improved intersections will provide additional turning radius for the larger emergency vehicles.
- The additional lanes and median cuts will allow for emergency vehicles to make U-turns when required.
- The addition of water lines and fire hydrants on both sides of the roadway will improve firefighting capability on Price Blvd. and will further allow the expansion of City water and hydrants into the adjacent neighborhoods should the community support such initiatives.
- The new traffic signals at the intersections on Price Blvd. will be equipped with Emergency Vehicle Traffic Preemption for the safety of our citizens and our first responders.

Conclusion

We believe that the above points provide some of the present challenges that Price Blvd. presents to the provision of emergency services by Fire Rescue. Likewise, we have outlined what we believe some of the positive impacts of an improved Price Blvd. road corridor may be on the provision of Fire Rescue services. While we presently meet the response criteria that has allowed us to achieve our ISO Class 1 community rating for fire protection, increased growth and the lack of an efficient East-West road corridor may impact the response capabilities of Fire Rescue and effect that rating and the reduced insurance premiums our community enjoys.

I hope this document correctly presents our support for the improvement of Price Blvd. as the primary East-West corridor within the City of North Port. If I can be of additional assistance, please feel free to contact me.