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County OKs \$6.9 million in projects Englewood roads, bridges and beaches will be improved

By [Darla McFarland](#)

CHARLOTTE COUNTY -- Millions of dollars in roads, bridge and beach work for the Englewood area got the green light from the county Tuesday, initiating a season of heavy construction for West County.

The County Commission approved five projects totaling about \$6.925 million. The projects include repaving in large portions of Rotonda West; renovation of the Tom Adams Bridge; a stabilization project at Stump Pass; safety improvements on Gasparilla Road; and the final property acquisitions for the Winchester Boulevard extension.

"This is a continuation of what we have been doing for the past three years," said Commissioner Mac Horton of Englewood. "We have put an emphasis on the west county to address many years of previous neglect."

The Rotonda West paving project will include all roads in the Oakland Hills, Pebble Beach, Broadmoor and Pinehurst sections. About 42 miles of road will be repaved at a cost of about \$2.5 million.

Earle Simpson is chairman of the Municipal Service Benefit Unit in the Long Meadow section of Rotonda. The MSBUs collect assessments to pay for road and drainage projects.

"Some of the roads here are 20 years old or more and have never been resurfaced," Simpson said. "It is starting to deteriorate somewhat."

Property owners will pay an assessment ranging from \$106 to \$148 a year for 10 years. The amount of assessment will depend on the actual road condition and work needed in each MSBU district.

The Long Meadow, White Marsh and Pine Valley sections of Rotonda are scheduled for repaving in 2005.

Work is expected to begin late this month and continue through May, said county Public Works Director Tom O'Kane. The Rotonda project is included in the larger West County paving initiative, which is projected to cost about \$13 million through 2005.

In the past, the county has employed a "pay as you go" system, O'Kane said. The MSBU districts collected all the money for a project before it was contracted.

"That approach just did not appear to be viable any longer," O'Kane said. "We had roads that were continuing to worsen waiting for funds while, at the same time, construction

costs were going up."

For the West County project, the county is borrowing the funds and assessing the MSBUs over an extended time period. Several areas were completed in 2003, including Lemon Bay and portions of South Gulf Cove. After the Rotonda West project, Grove City and the remainder of South Gulf Cove are due for repaving.

Also Tuesday, the county approved \$1.85 million to renovate the Tom Adams Bridge on Beach Road. The draw bridge, which spans a part of Lemon Bay, was constructed in the 1960s.

"It needs some major repairs, including the replacement of some pilings and a rehabilitation of the lift mechanism," O'Kane said.

The work will close the bridge to automobile traffic for 30 to 45 days this fall, O'Kane said. It will remain open to water traffic.

The county expects to spend up to \$8 million for the total rehabilitation of the bridge over the next five years. O'Kane estimated that it would cost \$30 million to completely replace the bridge.

The bridge work will be done in conjunction with the installation of sidewalks and a traffic circle at Beach Road and Gulf Boulevard, near Englewood Beach. That work is expected to begin this spring and last up to eight months.

The Winchester Boulevard extension is not expected to reach construction until 2006, but the county needs to acquire another 68 lots to clear the way for the road. The board on Tuesday authorized up to \$2 million to buy that property.

"We have acquired about 100 lots over the last three years from those owners that wanted to sell out voluntarily," said Paul Payette, manager of Charlotte County Real Property Services. "There may be one or two homes still remaining among the unacquired lots, but for the most part it is vacant land."

Winchester has been designated as the future hurricane evacuation route for the Englewood-Cape Haze peninsula. Funds for the extension are coming from the 1 percent sales tax extension passed by voters in November 2002.

The land needed comprises about 40 acres scattered throughout the path of the road, Payette said. The extension will begin at South McCall Road and join an existing portion of roadway on the east side of Oyster Creek Golf Club. It will veer west from there and join with Placida Road on the south side of St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church.

Payette said the county will seek an eminent domain ruling on the remaining lots. The owners will still have an opportunity to sell voluntarily before any land-taking proceedings are initiated, he said.

Horton said he had not heard specifically from any land owners opposed to the project.

"I think the property owners out there have been expecting this for years," he said.

Work is expected to begin almost immediately on a project aimed to stabilize sand shifting at Stump Pass. The county approved about \$388,000 for the project. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection is contributing about \$628,000.

The project involves installing a series of sand-filled tubes along the beach shelf of the Stump Pass State Recreation Area on the south end of Manasota Key. The partially buried tubes are expected to slow the rate of sand migration down the beach and into the newly dredged Stump Pass.

State officials are reviewing the project's details, including a plan to monitor the results. Once the state approves the scope of the work, a contract could be issued as soon as February. The county wants to complete the project before the start of turtle nesting season in May.

The final project approved Tuesday is the addition of left turn and deceleration lanes at Gasparilla Road and Briggs Circle North. Residents had expressed concerns about safety at the busy intersection, O'Kane said.

"We reviewed the situation and agreed that there are some sight-distance problems and other dangers there," O'Kane said.

The \$286,000 project is expected to coincide with a scheduled repaving of Gasparilla Road in the next few weeks.
