

# Busch Blvd. may get makeover

**Locals like the beautification plan, but not closure of median openings.**

By Mike Brassfield Times Staff Writer

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TAMPA - Busch Boulevard isn't a pretty sight, and locals have long complained that it gives tourists bound for Busch Gardens an unflattering view of the city.

On Thursday night, state transportation officials unveiled the latest version of a plan to transform 4 miles of the boulevard east of Interstate 275 into a safer, better-landscaped drive.

A major new element of the plan is to close 21 openings in the boulevard's median to prevent left turns into side streets, a move that will displease some business owners and neighborhood residents.

"On any road project where we make a change to people's access, people are emotional about it," said Kris Carson of the Florida Department of Transportation. "We're having similar issues on Hillsborough Avenue," where the state is replacing a continuous left-turn lane with a raised concrete median.

Many of the openings in Busch's medians will be closed off to improve safety, said Transportation Department consultant John Novak. Instead of turning left in front of oncoming traffic on the busy road, cars will have to wait until they reach turn lanes at stoplights.

"They can either make a U-turn, or they can make a turn there and go back through the grid system of streets behind the boulevard," Novak said.

People who want to contest a closing should call Transportation Department officials. See accompanying box.

Mike Hudson, who owns an allergy relief store called Healthy Home at 4211 E Busch Blvd., wants the state to reconsider closing the median near his store. He wants customers to have easy access to his parking lot. But he also thinks the boulevard's beautification is long past due.

"When tourists pull off the interstate, it looks like they're going to an industrial park, not Busch Gardens. It doesn't make a good first impression," said Hudson, one of a few dozen people at a public forum Thursday.

Construction is scheduled to start in the spring on the \$12.5-million project along the 4-mile stretch from Florida Avenue to 56th Street, and much of the work will be done at night.

The state will do several things to make Busch Boulevard more visually appealing:

- Repave the road.

- Put in decorative crosswalks on all side streets.

-Landscape the medians with a mix of tall palm trees, shorter crepe myrtles and shrubs.

-Upgrade seven traffic signals, including adding "countdowns" to the walk/don't walk signs in pedestrian crossings, like those in downtown Tampa.

-Add decorative lighting and brick pavers along a short stretch in Temple Terrace, between 52nd Street and Overlook Drive.

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## **FAST FACTS:**

### **Busch median openings to be closed**

Elmer, 9th, 11th, 16th, 18th, 19th, 21st, 27th, 29th, 33rd, 37th and 52nd streets; Temple and Pawnee avenues; Wick, Renfrew and Tangerine places; and median openings to Big Lots, Red Roof Inn and Broadmoor and Palm Grove apartments

Questions? Call Judith Smith at FDOT, (813) 975-6263.

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