



Signs Will Give Bridge Traffic Status Reports

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Eastbound commuters wondering whether to wait out a backup on the Howard Frankland Bridge can skip the guesswork starting this summer.

The state Department of Transportation is installing four cameras and 12 radar devices on the bridge to detect backups and help motorists figure out whether to wait out the jam or take the Courtney Campbell Parkway or Gandy Bridge.

Starting in July, traffic information will be relayed to six massive, highway-spanning electronic signs on the Pinellas side of the Bay on Interstate 275 and one on Ulmerton Road.

"It will say, 'Traffic backup, 10-minute delay,' messages like that," said John McShaffrey, a transportation department spokesman. "The idea is to give motorists more choices."

Drivers heading to Pinellas won't have the luxury of traffic warnings, however, unless they take Kennedy Boulevard westbound, where one sign is planned.

I-275 in Tampa is supposed to be widened starting this summer, which means the sign program on the Tampa side has been pushed back at least five years.

Road Rangers Coming To Selmon

Breaking down on the Lee Roy Selmon Expressway is about to become less frustrating.

The Road Rangers, a motorist assistance program already operating on some area highways, will start patrolling the 15-mile toll road under a \$132,000 yearly contract to be signed this week. They will start rolling a week or two after that.

"Our customers pay a premium and deserve premium service," said Martin Stone, planning director for the Tampa-Hillsborough County Expressway Authority, which operates the expressway.

Equipped with pickups and tow trucks, the rangers patrol parts of Interstates 75, 275 and 4 and State Road 60 in Pinellas and Hillsborough counties.

Rangers offer jumps to stalled cars, help change flat tires, provide free cell phone calls, a gallon of gasoline and reflective cones and flares to divert traffic at accident scenes. In some cases, rangers tow cars to the side of the road and remove debris from highways.

The service is free to drivers. The rangers will patrol the expressway 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. weekdays.

Door-To-Door Buses To Debut

Hillsborough's transit agency has approved a new door-to-door bus service set to launch in three months.

The program, which charges usual bus rates of \$1.50 one way and 75 cents for seniors and the disabled, uses shuttles to carry passengers from homes to stores, jobs, schools and elsewhere.

The aim of the service, similar to a program in Jacksonville, is to encourage suburban residents to take the bus. It will be offered in parts of Town 'N Country, Carrollwood, Temple Terrace, Seffner and Brandon.

The governing board for Hillsborough Area Regional Transit was poised to give its blessing a month ago, but the union representing drivers for HART objected to plans to use a private company to manage the program.

HART selected the company after determining the union could not match its offer. The 30-month program will cost \$3.1 million. Visit www.hartline.org for details on the Hartflex program.

Got a gripe about your commute? Contact reporter Rich Shopes at rshopes@tampatrib.com or (813) 259-7633.

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