



What's ahead for Sanibel traffic?

There is widespread agreement that traffic congestion on Sanibel in the 2015 season caused much discontent. Since then, the Committee of the Islands (COTI) has been very involved in the public discussion of seasonal traffic. We publish this review to provide some perspective on what to expect in 2016.

Will traffic be worse in 2016 than 2015?



For several reasons the answer is "**probably yes**":

- Since 2006 the number of vehicles over the causeway has steadily increased.
- The traffic in September this year was up 7.8% over 2014 and for Thanksgiving up 9%.
- The Lee County Visitors and Convention Bureau has increased advertising to \$17.4 million annually using the theme (or brand name), "The Beaches of Fort Myers and Sanibel".
- In 2012 Arthur Frommer ranked Sanibel as his favorite place to visit in the world. Since then, Sanibel has received many other accolades and is now increasingly recognized nationally and internationally.
- Lee County population is projected to grow by 15,000 every year for the next 25 years.

What steps are we taking to mitigate these pressures?

First we commend our Mayor and City Council for their dedicated efforts to address the traffic issue. Kevin Ruane has repeatedly emphasized that there are no easy solutions and that the process may require several years of hard work and negotiation. Here are some of the useful actions taken by the City over recent months:



Mayor Kevin Ruane

- We can now receive vehicle counts from the toll booths on an hourly basis. This will provide real time data and allow projections of traffic conditions. Beach parking data is also being considered.
- Traffic messaging by sign boards on Summerlin, and by various digital options, is under review.
- Council has authorized a public relations company to create and disseminate messages. One initiative will focus on mainland hotels so they can inform their guests about Sanibel's traffic conditions.
- Council has also authorized a professional study to assess what impact traffic congestion is having on day visitors, residents and workers. Data like this will be essential for later discussions with Lee County.

- The Mayor has formed a "traffic working group" from Sanibel organizations which include the Chamber of Commerce, the Realtors Association, COTI, representatives from the hotel industry, and CASI (Condominium Associations of Sanibel, Inc.).

How effective will these actions be?

Hopefully, these actions will be helpful and lead to reduced traffic congestion. If this does not occur, then other options will need to be explored and tested. Realistically, however, Lee County owns the causeway and controls the flow of vehicles to Sanibel. We will need Lee County's help to find lasting solutions.

Please share your thoughts and concerns.

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