



April 17, 2008

City of Tallahassee to take control of Gaines Street

By Julian Pecquet
DEMOCRAT STAFF WRITER

Tallahassee city officials gained the power to transform Gaines Street on Wednesday, but disagreed on how fast to do it.

By approving the transfer of Gaines Street from the state to the city, commissioners made it possible for the city to narrow the four-lane thoroughfare into a two-lane, pedestrian-friendly street that they hope will help create an "18-hour downtown" of shops and restaurants.

But they've yet to agree on a timeline for the changes, and asked staff to come back with more recommendations within 90 days.

Some commissioners pressed staff to move forward with the narrowing sooner rather than later, even before alternative roads — such as a link between Lake Bradford Road and Stadium Drive and the western extension of FAMU Way — are built to handle the diverted traffic. They want to keep going the momentum that's been created by several developments that have been proposed for the area over the past few months.

"You can't wait until every set of perfect circumstances is in place before moving forward," Commissioner Debbie Lightsey said. "The people (driving) will find a way, just like water."

But others worried that gridlock could ensue.

"What I would hate to see happen is, in our zeal to make something happen, flip the switch but have hordes of screaming people," Commissioner Mark Mustian said.

Along with Gaines Street between Stadium Drive and Monroe Street, the transfer gives the city: Stadium Drive between Gaines and Pensacola streets; Woodward Avenue from Gaines Street to the Florida State campus; St. Augustine and Madison streets from Monroe Street to Stadium Drive; and Pensacola and Jefferson streets between Monroe Street and Stadium Drive.

Along with the roadways, the state is giving the city money for maintenance and \$7.3 million that had been set aside for improvements on Gaines Street. The transfer now involves only administrative formalities and should be over by the summer, public works director Gabe Menendez said.