

**TREASURE COAST**  
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**S.R. 60 safety is concern with remake**

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Downtown Vero Beach merchants are signing on reluctantly to a compromise plan to increase safety during the state Department of Transportation's remake of State Route 60.

In a decision last week, the DOT refused a request by the merchants to add more designated left-turn lanes and landscaped "bulb outs" to the westbound lanes of the Twin Pairs. The merchants want the additions as a way to slow traffic and make the downtown a destination rather than just an area to drive through.

As plans stand now, just one bulb out will be built in the southern most lane of westbound S.R. 60, near the intersection of 14th Avenue.

Vero Beach Public Works Director Monte Falls proposes an alternative: adding striping to the left lane from 14th through 16th avenues, where downtown stores are close to the highway. This would emphasize that it is a turn lane and close it to through-traffic speeders.

"It's a small step, but at least it's something," said Downtown Merchants Association President Randy Hagood, who, with his wife, owns the Tea and Chi tea store about a half-block from S.R. 60. "I was disappointed, but not surprised, by the DOT rejection."

Hagood had gathered signatures from downtown merchants on a petition he presented last week to Falls and to City Manager James M. Gabbard.

"The road affects all of us, it divides us," Hagood said. "We want to make the road more beautiful and pedestrian friendly."

Hagood said the effort points out the need for a full-time manager for Main Street Vero Beach, the larger organization for all those, not just merchants, connected with Vero Beach business. The recruitment effort is under way, according to Hagood, but such a person could have devoted much more time to improving the S.R. 60 project than the volunteers who had to carry the load in their spare time.

The remaking of S.R. 60 in downtown Vero Beach is to start this week with preparatory work, like curb and sidewalk repair, handicap ramps and shaft drilling for new traffic light poles, according to Jim Frye, project administrator for the DOT.

S.R. 60 will be repaved from 21st Street on the west to Mockingbird Drive on the east. Completion is expected by January 2009.

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