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BRICKELL

Brickell Avenue won't get black-top soon

A project to spruce up Brickell Avenue will address flooding issues as well as cracked cement slabs and sidewalks, but won't include asphalt.

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BY DAVID SMILEY
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Residents hoping for an all black-top Brickell Avenue couldn't help but feel a little miffed Tuesday when they saw the Florida Department of Transportation's preliminary plans to renovate the thoroughfare.

In a meeting at the Miami Museum of Science, 3280 S. Miami Ave., engineers unveiled a project that will replace poor drainage systems and renovate the road.

But a key change from the plans last described to residents after a department study -- the replacement and repairing of concrete slabs as opposed to layering them with asphalt -- left some feeling shortchanged.

"This becomes a completely different project," said Tory Jacobs, president of the Brickell Homeowners Association.

Jacobs and others were told after a department Project Development and Environmental study that the concrete slabs from Southwest 25 Road to Southwest Ninth Street would be cracked, reseated and covered in asphalt.

Jacobs, who says he found out inadvertently months before the meeting that FDOT had decided not to lay asphalt, said the checkerboard of gray-and-pale-beige slabs is ugly and makes for a noisy drive.

Brian Rick, an FDOT spokesman, said the asphalt option was a preliminary decision and was "not a promise of the next step."

The department changed its position after a reevaluation of the project based on funding and more specific engineering, which is a standard procedure before final design begins, Rick said.

When the department initially considered pavement as an option, it was discussed as a rehabilitation project that wouldn't require a complete overhaul of the street.

But Tuesday, engineering firm T.Y. Lin International's consultant Joe Gómez said simply coating concrete with asphalt would not be possible because the asphalt would raise the road by several inches, creating drainage problems and expensive construction to meet regulations.

To create an asphalt road, the concrete slabs would have to be completely removed and the storm water drains replaced, he said. That would be more like a reconstruction project, he said, and could take two years to complete.

"It came down to cost, infrastructure and impact," Gómez told the audience. "A lot of the concrete pavement on Brickell Avenue is still in good condition and we're trying to maximize our investment."

Jacobs said the department should have been more forthcoming with its change in plans and added that even with a higher cost and timetable, asphalt is the better option.

"Get it done and do it right," he said.

The criticism of the project isn't just about aesthetics. Many worried about the life of the concrete slabs. Only half the slabs placed on the street during a project in the mid-1990s - which replaced 20 percent of the concrete on Brickell Avenue -- are still structurally sound, Gómez told the audience.

"Everything seems to be Band-Aids," said Paul Cicurel, a Brickell resident.

But not everyone was upset about the removal of asphalt from the plans. Steve Greenberg, who lives in Brickell Harbour, said the patchwork of concrete isn't a big issue

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for him. "The bigger issue in all of this is flooding," he said.

The intersection of Southwest 15th Road and Brickell Avenue has been susceptible to flooding for years, he said. The lower Brickell Harbour parking garage floods so badly its elevators become soaked, he said.

Damaged storm water drains will be replaced and pipes will be unclogged.

The \$6.2 million project is expected to begin early 2010 and should be completed in nine months, Gómez said. The final plans should be completed by November 2008.

Gómez told the audience the concrete makes Brickell Avenue unique, saying ``This is one of the last concrete corridors in an urban area."

Jacobs finish Gómez' sentence. ``And one that is unwanted by the residents."

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