

North Port Connector

A Link in the Proposed East/West Recreational Trail Corridor Between North
Port and the Legacy/VWP Trail

Steve Christian January 2, 2012

The North Port Connector

The North Port Connector Idea

Currently the only way for bicyclists to get to and from the coastal region of Sarasota County to North Port is via Highway 41 from Venice or 776 from Englewood. Both of these alternatives require cyclists to ride in a bike lane on a busy multi-lane highway. The North Port Connector would provide a much safer, shorter and more scenic alternative for bicyclists. The North Port Connector could ultimately serve as an east/west link in a recreational transportation corridor between the Legacy Trail/VWP and the North Port trail system. The North Port Connector would also provide bicycle, pedestrian and equestrian access to Deer Prairie Creek Preserve from North Port.

Location of the North Port Connector

Depending on the route selected, the proposed North Port Connector would traverse a significant section of both the Deer Prairie Creek Preserve (co-managed by Sarasota County and the SWFWMD) and/or the Schewe Preserve (SWFWMD).

Map 1 shows the corridor between the Legacy Trail and the North Port Connector.

The west end of the North Port Connector would be accessed by following Border Road east to South Moon Drive to Forbes Trail. Forbes Trail is closed to motorized vehicles at the border of Deer Prairie Creek Preserve but it continues 2.0 miles into the preserve as a paved road.

The distance from the Legacy Trail to proposed North Port Connector is 10.75 miles. With the exception of a 1 mile section of Edmonson Road, the route from the Legacy Trail consists of streets with bike lanes or roads with very little traffic.

The location of the east end of the North Port Connector would depend on which option is selected for implementation.

From the end of the Forbes Trail pavement to the closest paved streets in North Port is only 2.0 miles. One of the functions of the North Port Connector would be to bridge that gap. Depending on the route selected, the length of the North Port Connector would be longer than the straight line distance of 2.0 miles.

North Port Connector Specifics

Original Idea

The original North Port Connector idea was inspired by the desire to have a paved trail that would allow all weather use as well as a provide a surface suitable for “narrow-tired” road bicycles. The west end would be accessed from the end of Forbes Trail. In the original idea, the east end would be accessed via a residential neighborhood at Botwick St. and Chorley St. off of N. Biscayne Drive in North Port. See Figures 1 and 2 for an overview of that neighborhood.

Original Idea Continued

That route would require:

1. A bike/hiker bridge across Deer Prairie Creek.
2. Cooperation from SWFWMD since it crosses the Schewe property and from Sarasota County because they have a cooperative management agreement for Deer Creek Prairie Preserve.
3. Managed access in North Port where a public street that abuts public property is more readily available.
4. A bridge across the drainage canal on the eastern border of the preserve.
5. 2 miles of paving.

The original idea was presented to Jonathan Lewis, North Port's City Manager, North Port Commissioner, Michael Treubert and Allan Lane, North Port Economic Development Manager. Their concern was that the eastern terminus of the proposed trail would be accessed via a residential neighborhood off of N. Biscayne Blvd.

As a result of the input and ideas from the North Port officials and others, several options have emerged for the North Port Connector. The original idea called for a paved path to make the trail accessible to "narrow-tired" road bikes. That is still the optimum solution and the one that would allow maximum usage. However, a land management plan was developed for the preserves after their purchase and acts as a guide for the management of both the ecological components and the public use. At the present time the plan does not include the building of a paved trail through the preserves. With this as a constraint, a trail with a hard packed gravel surface is a viable alternative.

Options 1, 2, and 3 are described in the following. They are shown on Map 2.

Option 1

In Option 1, the proposed trail would parallel the Schewe border with I75 for 2 miles. It would then continue south along the eastern border of Deer Prairie Creek Preserve. It would terminate at the west end of W. Price Blvd. This option would have a total length 3.4 miles. See Map 2 and Figure 3 for an overview of Option 1.

North Port Fire Station Number 85 is currently located at the west end of W. Price Blvd at Calera St. The fire station is scheduled to be relocated to a new facility at a nearby location. When the fire station is moved, a trailhead parking lot could be located on this North Port property. In order to access Deer Prairie Creek Preserve from this location, a bridge would have to be constructed over the drainage canal. In addition, to providing North Port with pedestrian, bicycle and equestrian access to Deer Prairie Creek Preserve, the bridge could also provide emergency vehicle access to the preserve. An overview of the proposed Price Trailhead location is shown in Figure 4.

Option 1 Requirements

1. A bike/hiker bridge across Deer Prairie Creek.
2. Cooperation from SWFWMD since it crosses the Schewe property and from Sarasota County because they have a cooperative management agreement for Deer Creek Prairie Preserve.
3. A bridge across the drainage canal at the end of W. Price Blvd.
4. A trailhead parking area at the end of W. Price Blvd.
5. Hardening of approximately 1.0 miles of the trail where the route traverses soft sand.

Option 2

The route for Option 2 would go south for 1.4 miles from the end of the paved Forbes Trail, Then it would go east to the Deer Prairie Creek Preserve boundary at the end of W. Price Blvd. See Map 2 for the route of Option 2. An advantage of Option 2 may be that it is entirely in the co-managed Deer Prairie Creek Preserve. Another advantage is that the crossing over Deer Prairie Creek would be located where the creek banks are steeper, thus allowing a shorter bridge. A disadvantage is that a shorter distance of the proposed route is on an existing hardened surfaced road.

Option 2 Requirements

1. A bike/hiker bridge across Deer Prairie Creek.
2. The route is entirely thru the co-managed Deer Creek Prairie Preserve.
3. A bridge across the drainage canal.
4. A trailhead parking lot at the end of W. Price Blvd.
5. Hardening of approximately 2.0 miles of the trail where the route traverses soft sand.

Option 3

The route for option 3 would go south for 3.7 miles from the end of the paved Forbes Trail. The trail would come out at the current Highway 41 entrance into Deer Prairie Creek Preserve. The big disadvantage for this Option is that the North Port end is not centrally located. It would require access off of Highway 41 which the original North Port Connector idea was intended to circumvent. A trail along the south border of Deer Prairie Creek Preserve to an access onto De Miranda Street could mitigate this problem. An advantage is that the entire distance of the trail would be on a route with a surface that is already hardened. Another advantage is that a bridge over the drainage canal would not be required

Option 3 Requirements

1. A bike/hiker bridge across Deer Prairie Creek.
2. The route is entirely thru the co-managed Deer Creek Prairie Preserve.
3. A trail along the south border of Deer Prairie Creek Preserve to access De Miranda St.

Additional Options

In the past, there have been discussions of building a bridge across the Estates Blvd canal from North Port into Mabry Carlton Reserve. There is also interest in some kind of connection for hikers/bikers/equestrians to cross from Myakkahatchee Creek Park into the newly purchased Carlton Ranch parcel. Both of these connections would make it possible for North Port residents to access large open space areas. Neither of these options would provide the central connection that the North Port Connector would offer.

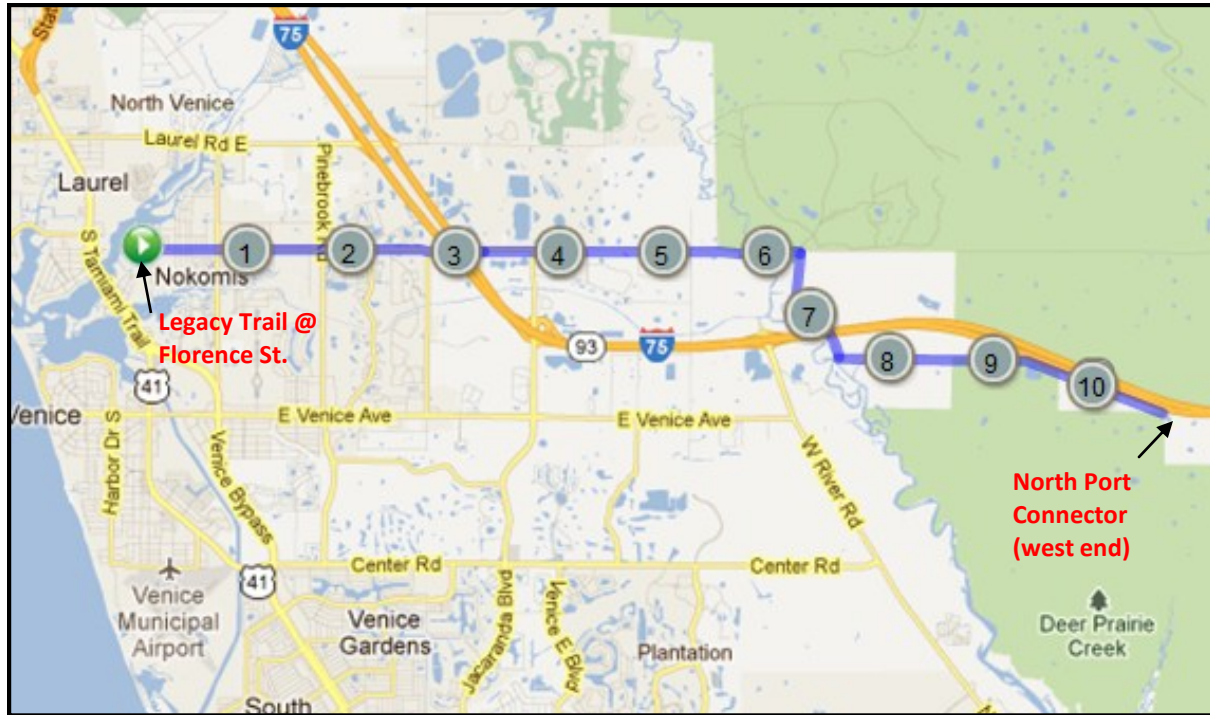
Summary

The North Port Connector would be a valuable link in a county-wide trail system. It would connect two large areas of Sarasota County via a recreational corridor. Ultimately it could be part of a link between the North Port trail system and the Legacy/VWP trail. The popularity and usability of the Legacy/VWP trail system has been greatly enhanced by the completion of the overpass over Highway 41. The trail's popularity will continue to increase as will the number of users. We need to continue to work on providing additional places to bike and walk.

The corridor from the Legacy Trail to the proposed North Port Connector currently provides a very good place for cyclists to ride. The roads for much of the route include bike lanes. The east end of Border Road, S. Moon Drive and Forbes Trail are virtually roads to nowhere. The North Port Connector would serve to enhance this corridor. It could also provide an option for residents that might consider cycling as a viable transportation option.

The overall reaction to the North Port Connector idea has been very positive. There are many logistical problems to address but the first thing that nearly everyone asks is, "How soon can we do it?" Of course, two key questions are how much will it cost and how are we going to pay for it. If we can get everyone to agree to do this project, we can solve those problems.

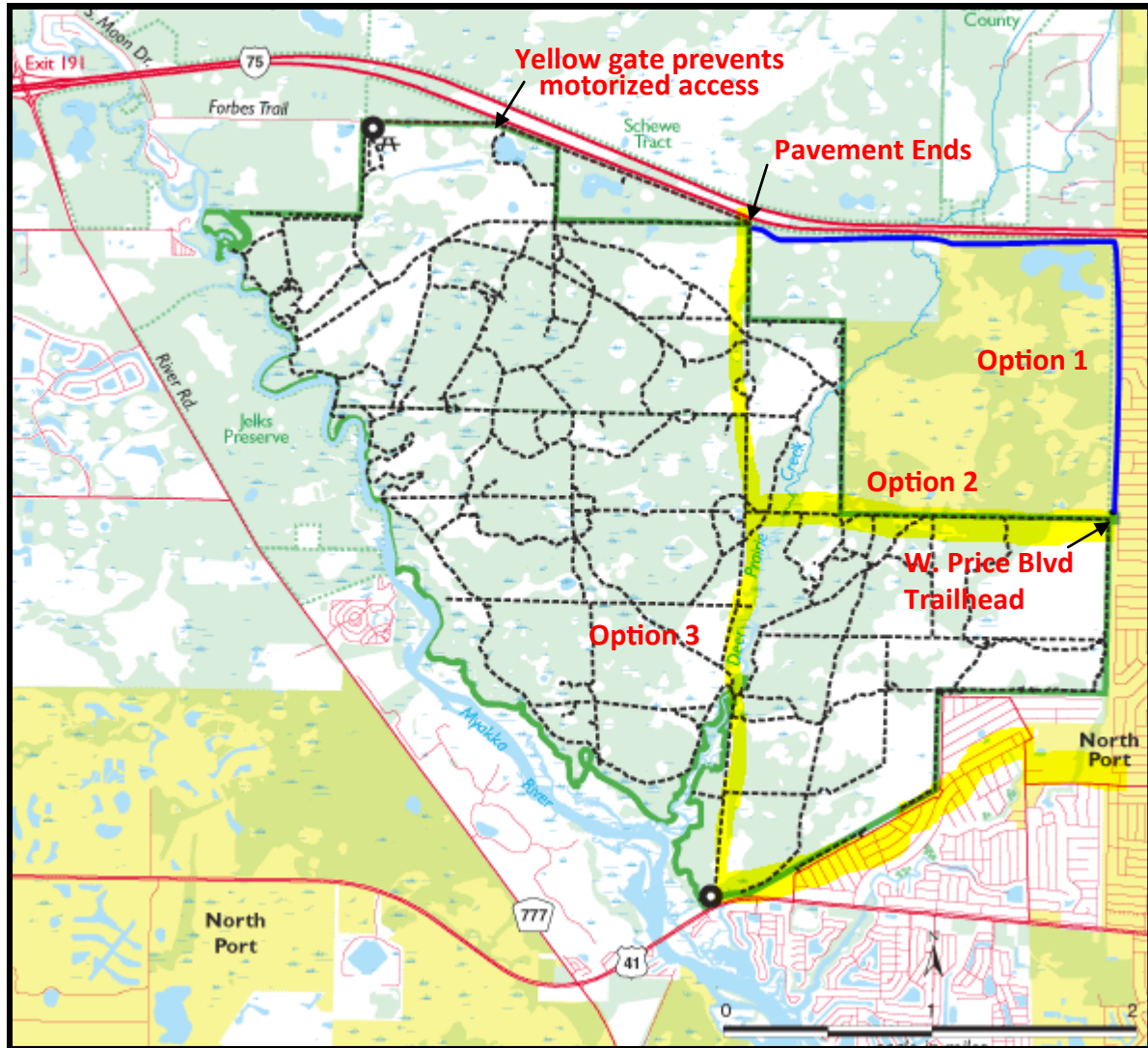
Route from the Legacy Trail to the North Port Connector



The distance from the Legacy Trail to the beginning of the North Port Connector in Deer Prairie Creek Preserve is 10.75 miles. To get to the west end of the North Port Connector, go east from the Legacy Trail using Florence Street, Edmonson Road, and Border Road. Then, go south on S. Moon Drive to Forbes. Then go east on Forbes Trail to the Deer Prairie Creek Preserve parking area. A yellow gate prevents vehicular access into Deer Prairie Creek Preserve but the paved section of Forbes Trail continues for an additional 2 miles.

Map 1

Deer Prairie Creek Preserve/Schewe Parcel



North Port Connector Route Options

Route Option 1— Blue Line. East for 2 miles from the end of Forbes Trail to the east boundary of the Preserve. Access from there via a residential neighbor. Then south for 1.4 miles along the eastern boundary to the west end of W. Price Blvd. Requires a bridge over Deer Prairie Creek and a bridge over the drainage canal along the eastern boundary of Deer Prairie Creek Preserve.

Route Option 2— South for 1.4 miles. Then east for 2 miles. Requires a bridge over Deer Prairie Creek and a bridge over the drainage canal along the eastern boundary of Deer Prairie Creek Preserve.

Route Option 3— South for 3.7 miles. East for .4 miles along the south border to access point onto De Miranda Ave. Requires a bridge over Deer Prairie Creek at location of current low water crossing point and site of a small overflow dam.

Map 2

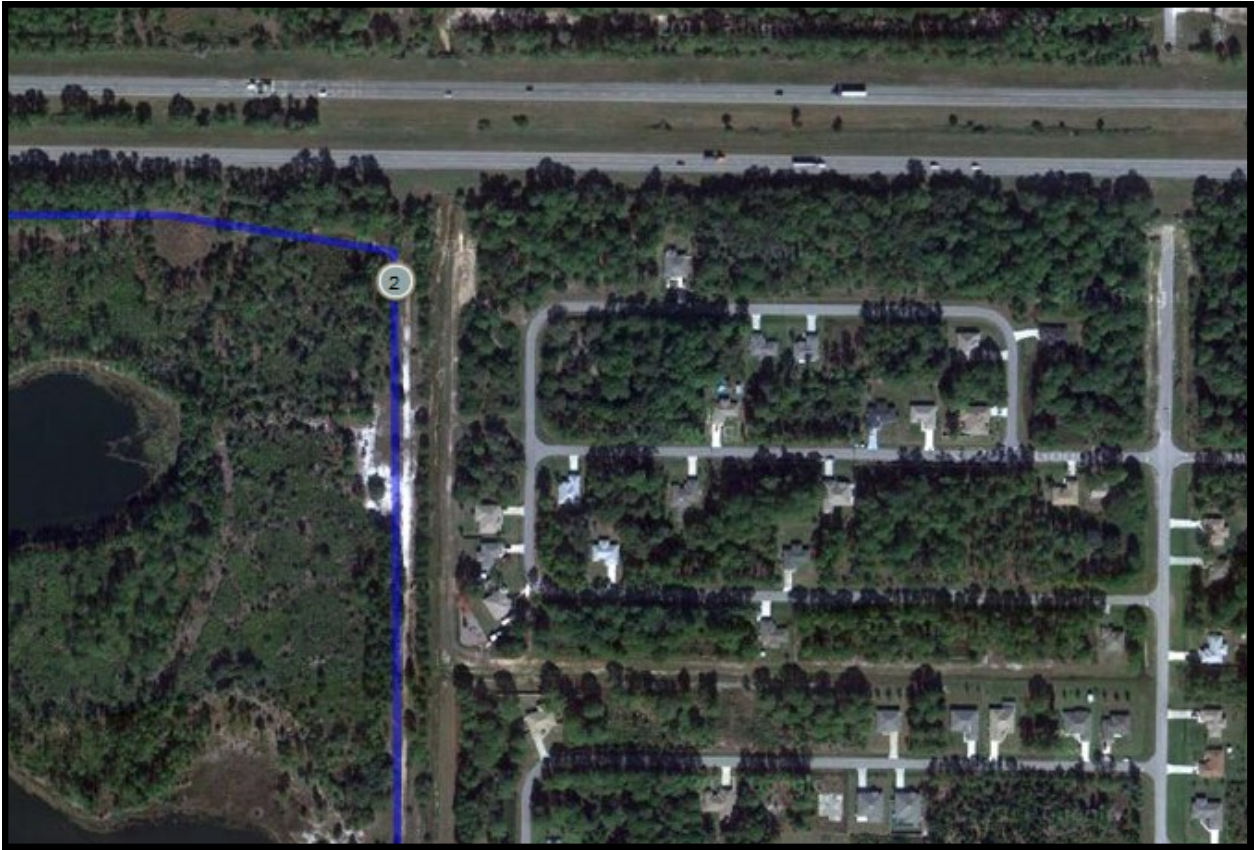


Figure 1 - View of residential neighborhood at Chorley and Botwick Streets



Figure 2 - View of potential cross-over point at north end of drainage canal

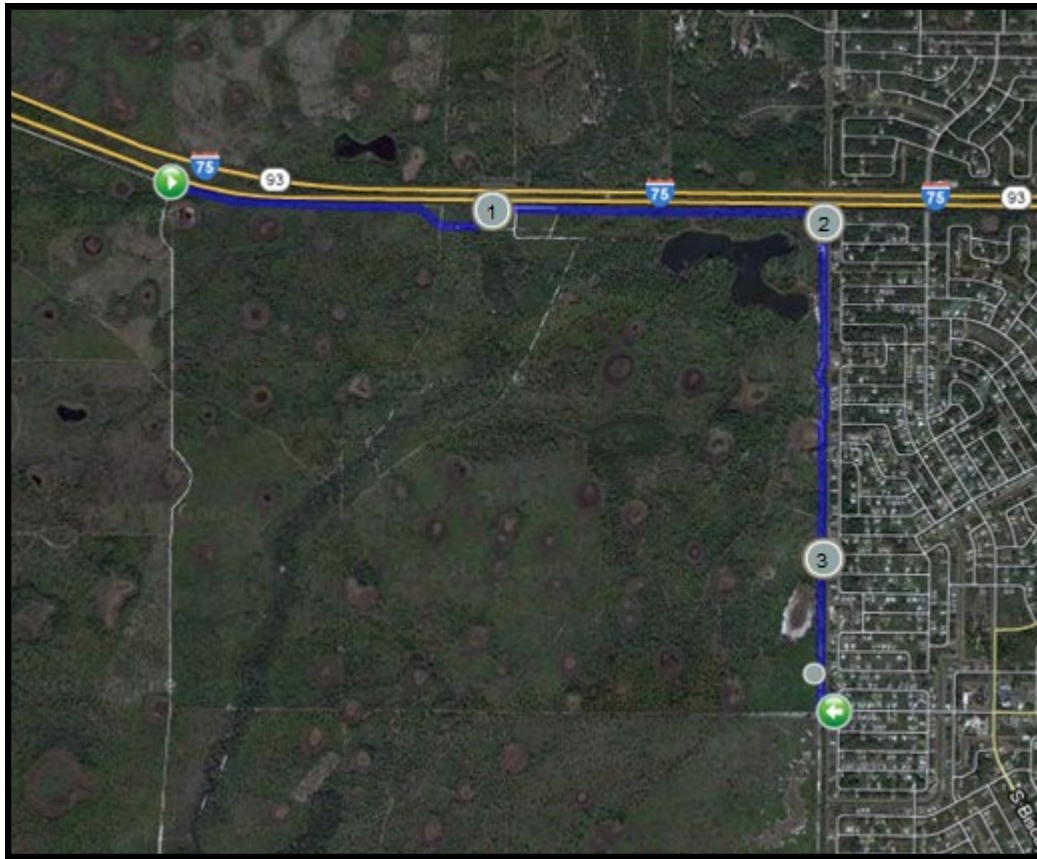


Figure 3-Overview of Option 1



Figure 4—View of Proposed Trailhead Parking at W. Price Blvd