

Stephanie Garcia

From: Howard Tipton
Sent: Thursday, March 19, 2026 3:12 PM
To: Trish Shinkle; Stephanie Garcia
Cc: Isaac Brownman; Charlie Mopps
Subject: FW: My Opposition Letter Regarding FDOT's Longboat Pass Bridge PD&E Study

FYI



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From: steveellissrq <steveellissrq@yahoo.com>
Sent: Thursday, March 19, 2026 2:34 PM
To: David.Turley@dot.state.fl.us
Cc: Howard Tipton <htipton@longboatkey.org>
Subject: My Opposition Letter Regarding FDOT's Longboat Pass Bridge PD&E Study

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Dear Mr. Turley,

I am writing as a Longboat Key resident and daily user of the SR-789 Longboat Pass Bridge to register my strong opposition to the high-level fixed-span alternative that the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) has been promoting for the Longboat Pass Bridge PD&E study.

The high-rise proposal is out of scale and unnecessary

FDOT's own public-hearing materials confirm that the 1957 drawbridge connecting Bradenton Beach and Longboat Key has a 24-foot vertical clearance and is nearing 70 years old. During the March 12 public hearing at Christ Church of Longboat Key, your team explained that FDOT is evaluating three bridge designs— a 24-foot low-level bascule bridge, a mid-level bascule bridge with 35 feet of clearance, and a 78-foot high fixed-span bridge, along with a no-build option. According to FDOT's projections, the high-level fixed bridge would stretch almost three-quarters of a mile and require about 1,700 feet of approach on each side to climb to 78 feet at a roughly 4.5 % grade, which may improve drivability for motorists but would lengthen the bridge footprint and place the bridge close to nearby homes. By contrast, a bascule option would fit within the existing right-of-way and maintain the scale and character of our barrier islands.

Longboat Key Mayor Ken Schneier recently told The Islander that cost appears to be the primary reason FDOT favors a high-rise bridge. FDOT estimates the high-span option at about \$137.8 million, whereas the bascule alternatives range from \$176 million to \$183.8 million. Cost alone should not dictate a solution that will permanently alter the character of Longboat Pass and push an imposing concrete structure on our community. The PD&E documents show that the project limits only extend from North Shore Road on Longboat Key to Coquina Park in Bradenton Beach; this 1,000-foot-wide pass does not warrant a bridge that would rank among the tallest in Florida.

Traffic problems are north of the bridge, not on the bascule

Proponents of the high-level bridge argue that eliminating drawbridge openings will relieve congestion. However, FDOT's own traffic studies tell a different story. During a joint Longboat Key/Manatee County meeting on April 30 2024, Longboat Key Public Works Director Isaac Brownman presented findings from a Sarasota/Manatee Metropolitan Planning Organization study. He explained that the 1.7-mile stretch of Gulf Drive between the Longboat Pass Bridge and Cortez Road is “one of the most unpredictable” and most congested segments in our region, with vehicle queues and delays varying widely. Brownman urged county commissioners to focus on Gulf Drive and Cortez Road, noting that this segment—not the drawbridge—is responsible for the backups Longboat Key residents face. These findings align with my own experience: the bascule bridge opens infrequently, and even when it does the lost time is easily recovered in the traffic jam on Gulf Drive approaching the Cortez Bridge.

Unless the road network north of Longboat Pass and the Cortez Bridge capacity are addressed, replacing our modest drawbridge with a gigantic high-rise will not solve the congestion problem. We will simply have a taller bridge feeding into the same bottleneck.

Community impacts and quality of life

Longboat Key is a barrier island known for its low-scale, scenic environment. A 78-foot high-span bridge would tower over the pass, dominating the shoreline and creating a permanent visual and noise barrier. FDOT's public-hearing materials show that the high-rise alternative would extend nearly a mile and bring the structure close to residential properties. In addition, the steep approaches—roughly equivalent to walking up an eight-story building—will make walking or cycling across the bridge impractical for residents and visitors. The existing drawbridge provides an inviting, low-speed environment for fishing, strolling and accessing Coquina Beach; a high-rise would eliminate these qualities.

I am also concerned that the PD&E materials downplay the social impacts. According to demographic data presented at the workshops, a majority of the population within 500 feet of the bridge corridor is over 65, meaning many residents would find the 4.5 % grade difficult to traverse. FDOT should not ignore the needs of seniors who rely on the bridge for mobility and recreation.

Request

FDOT's own data demonstrate that traffic congestion is caused by the Gulf Drive/Cortez Road corridor, not by occasional drawbridge openings. In light of the significant environmental, visual and social impacts of a 78-foot fixed bridge, I respectfully request that FDOT reject the high-level fixed bridge alternative and instead pursue a bascule bridge replacement. A modern bascule bridge can provide adequate clearance for marine traffic, maintain the human scale of Longboat Pass, and avoid constructing a massive concrete structure that will forever change our island. Investing in road improvements north of the bridge, including improvements to Gulf Drive and a replacement of the aging Cortez Bridge, will provide far greater relief to motorists than a high-rise over the pass.

Please include this letter in the official record for the SR-789 Longboat Key PD&E study. Thank you for considering the concerns of Longboat Key residents. I appreciate the opportunity to provide input and urge FDOT to select a bridge alternative that respects the character of our community while addressing the true causes of congestion.

Sincerely,

Stephen Ellis

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&

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