

SUMMARY

Background

Charlotte County hired Johnson Engineering to perform a feasibility study for providing access to service the barrier islands of Charlotte County. The study was to be completed in two phases with a budget of \$50,000. The first phase is to collect public input, which would direct the second phase feasibility study. The project is currently in the first phase.

There have been two public input meetings with the residents of the four barrier islands (Palm Island, Knight Island, Don Pedro Island, and Little Gasparilla Island). Surveys were conducted and the results have been analyzed. The first public input meeting was held in January 2024, with

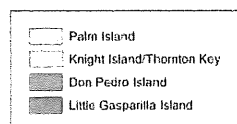


results indicating a need to separate input for residents associated with the northern or southern islands.

The second public input meeting was held in November 2024 with an additional survey offered. This report summarizes the results of those findings, as well as the overall key findings from both public input initiatives.

Conclusion

The surveys and public feedback clearly indicate that most residents favor the current transportation system and oppose infrastructure changes that would alter the islands' character. Satisfaction levels with existing ferry and goods transfer methods are acceptable, and a significant majority prefer to preserve the secluded nature of the islands. These findings provide compelling evidence that although there are concerns about the current ferry service and access for commercial and personal boats, additional access modes are not desired by most residents.





PUBLIC INPUT SURVEY SUMMARY

Property Identification & Usage:

- A majority of respondents (60%) identify with the northern portion of Don Pedro State Park.
- Property usage varies, with a large portion owning primary or secondary residences, while others use their properties for vacation rentals or investment purposes.

Accessibility Concerns:

- The ferry service (Palm Island Transit) is the primary means of transportation, and many respondents see challenges in having only one mode of access.
- Challenges with ferry service: Many respondents express concerns about relying solely on Palm Island Transit, citing high costs, lack of competition, and operational limitations (e.g., restricted hours and unpredictable service).

Suggested Alternative Access Methods:

- Some suggest additional ferry services or a government-regulated ferry system to reduce dependency on a single private operator.
- A water taxi or smaller ferry services for passengers only were also suggested.
- Some respondents worry about emergency accessibility and suggest a public fire department dock.

Funding Preferences for New Access Solutions:

- Those who support a bridge suggest financing it through tolls, state or county funds, or federal highway funds.
- Some believe private investment, or a nonprofit ferry organization could be solutions.
- Others strongly oppose any new infrastructure, citing concerns over preserving the island's secluded nature.

Parking Issues on the Mainland:

- Limited parking availability is a major concern, especially on Panama Blvd.
- Some suggest expanding parking lots, allowing diagonal parking, or building a multi-level parking facility.



KEY FINDINGS

Overall Public Sentiment

- Many respondents expressed satisfaction with existing transportation and goods transfer methods.
- There is significant opposition to additional modes of access, particularly bridges.

Key Findings Supporting the Conclusion

Satisfaction with Current Transportation (Exhibit A – BBI 1st Survey)

- Q4: 61.84% of respondents are “Definitely Satisfied” or “Satisfied Most of the Time” with the current transportation between the islands and the mainland.
- Q8: 60.78% of respondents are “Definitely Satisfied” or “Satisfied Most of the Time” with the method for transferring goods.

No Strong Demand for Additional Access (Exhibit A- BBI 1st Survey)

- Q5: 49.65% of respondents answered “Definitely Not” or “Probably Not” when asked if they felt additional access was needed.
- Q9: 47.7% responded “Definitely Not” or “Probably Not” regarding additional access for transferring goods.

Preference for Seclusion (Exhibit B - BBI 2nd Survey)

- Q7: 55% of respondents north of Don Pedro State Park want to maintain the island’s secluded state.
- Q14: 81% of respondents from Little Gasparilla Island (LGI) support keeping the island’s secluded character intact.

Comments from Public Meetings and Surveys

- Repeated statements against bridges:
 - "NO BRIDGES. NO WAY. NO HOW. NEVER. PRESERVE OLD FLORIDA".
 - "Leave the island alone! We do not need additional traffic on the island".
- Residents prefer golf cart use over additional vehicle access.