



PROJECT GATEWAY INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS UNDERWAY IN BONIFAY

Significant construction is underway along State Road 79 at Project Gateway in Bonifay. While much of the public discussion surrounding the property has centered on the future Busy Bee development, the work taking place today is a broader public infrastructure project that has been in planning and development for approximately five years.

The current Project Gateway improvements are intended to provide the roadway, water, sewer, stormwater and transportation infrastructure necessary to support development of the entire property west of SR 79 at Interstate 10. The construction contract is approximately \$5.27 million and includes underground utilities, stormwater improvements, a new roadway connection, work along SR 79 and a new signalized intersection.

Funding for the project has been assembled through several sources, including approximately \$3.3 million in Community Development Block Grant economic-development funding and approximately \$1.87 million in Rural Infrastructure funding administered through FloridaCommerce. Together, those sources represent roughly \$5.17 million in grant funding toward the current construction project. The effort has required coordination among Holmes County, the City of Bonifay, FloridaCommerce, the Holmes County Development Commission, Busy Bee and other project partners.

The July 31 construction update showed the project continuing to advance, with clearing and grubbing complete, approximately 65 percent of the stormwater utilities installed, and both the water main and gravity sewer systems approximately 70 percent complete.

One of the most important parts of the current project is the drainage work south of Interstate 10. This improvement is directly connected to the drainage improvements recently completed by the City of Bonifay north of I-10.

The drainage system serving south Bonifay is interconnected. Stormwater from the Hightower Avenue and Jernigan Avenue areas moves south through St. Johns Road and Interstate 10 before ultimately discharging south of I-10. Previous engineering studies identified several restrictions along that route that contributed to recurring flooding in the area.

One of the most significant downstream restrictions was an existing embankment south of I-10 with only a 30-inch outlet pipe. That pipe served as the primary outlet for an upstream drainage basin of approximately 1.5 square miles. During large storm events, the limited outlet capacity contributed to water backing up through the system and raising water levels north of Interstate 10.

That condition was especially apparent during Hurricane Sally in 2020, when portions of the existing drainage system were overwhelmed and significant flooding occurred along the SR 79 corridor and in the Hightower and Jernigan Avenue areas.

The City of Bonifay's recently completed Southside Drainage Improvements addressed several of the upstream restrictions, including improvements at Hightower Avenue, St. Johns Road, Jernigan Avenue and Clifford Street. Those improvements and the downstream work now being completed at Project Gateway were developed as complementary pieces of the same overall drainage solution.

As part of the current Gateway project, the old 30-inch downstream outlet is being removed and replaced with a new 6-foot-by-6-foot concrete box culvert. Once completed, the larger culvert will substantially increase the available outlet capacity at this critical location and allow stormwater to move through the system more efficiently. Reducing this downstream restriction is expected to help reduce the backup of water that has historically contributed to flooding north of Interstate 10 and will allow the recently completed upstream improvements to function more effectively as part of the overall system.

The project also includes an important transportation improvement along SR 79. The new roadway serving Project Gateway is being constructed directly opposite Thomas Drive, creating a properly aligned four-way intersection. A new traffic signal will be installed at the intersection as part of the project.

The signal will provide access to future development on the west side of SR 79, but it will also benefit existing traffic on Thomas Drive. Motorists leaving Doctors Memorial Hospital and the other facilities along Thomas Drive currently enter SR 79 at an unsignalized intersection. When the project is complete, those motorists will have a signalized connection to SR 79, while the new roadway will provide access to the Gateway property on the west side.

Busy Bee has identified Bonifay as an expansion location and from the outset to complete its development in Ellisville along I-75 south of Lake City before beginning construction in Bonifay. The Ellisville project has required extensive off-site roadway and infrastructure improvements in coordination with FDOT and local agencies, including major improvements around the I-75 interchange and supporting local roadways and utilities.

That Ellisville project has now moved into construction and is progressing. As work continues there, the infrastructure improvements underway in Bonifay are preparing the Gateway property with the drainage, roadway, water, sewer and transportation systems needed to support Busy Bee and additional future development.

Project Gateway is the result of several projects and funding efforts that have developed over multiple years. The City of Bonifay's drainage improvements north of Interstate 10, Holmes County's current Gateway infrastructure project south of I-10, the new roadway and signalized intersection at Thomas Drive, and future private development of the property have each required separate planning, design, funding and coordination.

The work now underway is bringing those efforts together. In addition to preparing the Gateway property for future development, the project is completing an important downstream drainage improvement that will benefit the broader south Bonifay area once construction is complete.

About the author: Brent E. Melvin, P.E., is a professional engineer with David H. Melvin, Inc. (DHM), which has provided engineering services associated with the Project Gateway and Bonifay drainage improvements.

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