

Roundabout details gain momentum

Date: August 29, 2013

by: David Conway | News Editor

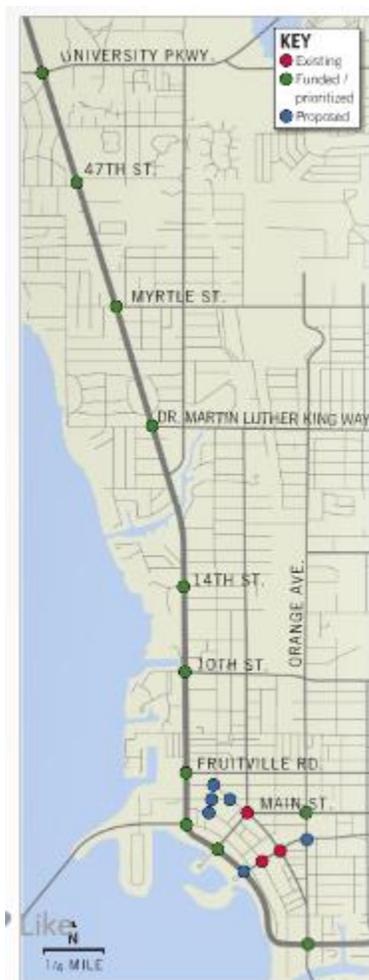
[View Sarasota Roundabouts in a larger map](#)

Sarasota Roundabouts

Red – Existing roundabouts

Green – Funded/prioritized roundabouts

Blue – Proposed roundabouts



Rod Warner’s passion for roundabouts is, at least partially, rooted in a simple concept: The John Ringling Causeway Bridge and the Bayfront are two of the city’s most significant icons.

Given that, he said, the road to those destinations should be vibrant — so impressive that it stands as an icon in its own right. Enter the roundabouts.

Or, more specifically, enter a 4-mile multimodal corridor along U.S. 41. The roundabouts, 11 in total, would punctuate the stretch from University Parkway to Orange Avenue, with statues in the center of each roundabout serving as iconic markers.

“Sarasota would have these three icons: the Bayfront, the bridge, and this grand boulevard from the airport,” Warner said. “That would be our new view. Now that would make an impression.”

Warner has been advocating for roundabouts for more than a decade, and, although there’s been considerable pushback over that time, the pieces now appear to be falling into place for his vision to become a reality. Today, all but of one of his proposed U.S. 41 roundabouts have funding in place or are prioritized on a list waiting to be built.

Warner points to a June 24 [Sarasota-Manatee Metropolitan Planning Organization](#) meeting as a key moment. At that meeting, the MPO prioritized the funding of the multimodal

corridor between 14th Street and University Parkway. That corridor includes four roundabout nodes, located at University Parkway, 47th Street, Myrtle Street and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Way.

After that, the focus on roundabouts in the city shifted to 10th and 14th streets. With funding already secured and general design completed, the finer details of these roundabouts are beginning to be hammered down.

Last week, the Sarasota City Commission made recommendations on appropriate landscaping for the center islands of the roundabouts. At the meeting, commissioners pointed to the roundabouts as a significant branding opportunity.

The roundabouts at 10th and 14th streets are due to be constructed in the [Florida Department of Transportation](#)'s (FDOT's) fiscal year 2016, which doesn't sit well with Warner. "(Construction in) 2016 is the normal sluggish flow through the system," Warner said. "We think they can do better."

In addition to compressing the timeline, Warner is lobbying FDOT to include three more roundabouts, at Fruitville Road, Gulfstream Avenue and Main Street, in the first round of construction. For that to be accomplished, he said, the city needs to demonstrate a wide interest in accelerating the timeline of those projects.

"The one thing I have learned from FDOT is that depth of community support for a project helps," Warner said. "A one-man band Rod Warner is no depth of community support."

When he started his work, he said, the resistance to roundabouts was intense. He spent years trying to change the public opinion, one community meeting at a time.

Two years ago, he realized he couldn't achieve his goals alone. He decided to form [U.S. 41 Momentum](#), a four-man team created to advocate for the multimodal corridor.

With funding prioritized for almost the entire corridor, it's fair to say the group's efforts have been effective. Although not everyone in Sarasota is on board with the roundabouts, many people have changed their stance.

City Commissioner Suzanne Atwell called the city's relationship with roundabouts a "love affair." She credited Warner with transforming that relationship from a more contentious one over the past decade. "He's just been kind of the leader in changing the entire dynamic of the city in such little time," Atwell said. "We owe him a debt of gratitude."

One of the most significant breakthroughs for Warner may have simply been the 2010 construction of the Five Points roundabout.

Warner said he remembered reading a letter from a man who said he would set up a lawn chair at the intersection to watch the accidents after the roundabout opened.

“I can’t remember that guy’s name, and I haven’t heard from him since,” Warner said. “The naysayers have kind of faded away.”

Three studies the nonprofit Insurance Institute for Highway Safety conducted showed how the presence of a roundabout can change a community’s attitude toward them. In all three studies, about one-third of the communities supported roundabouts; within a year, that support more than doubled across the board.

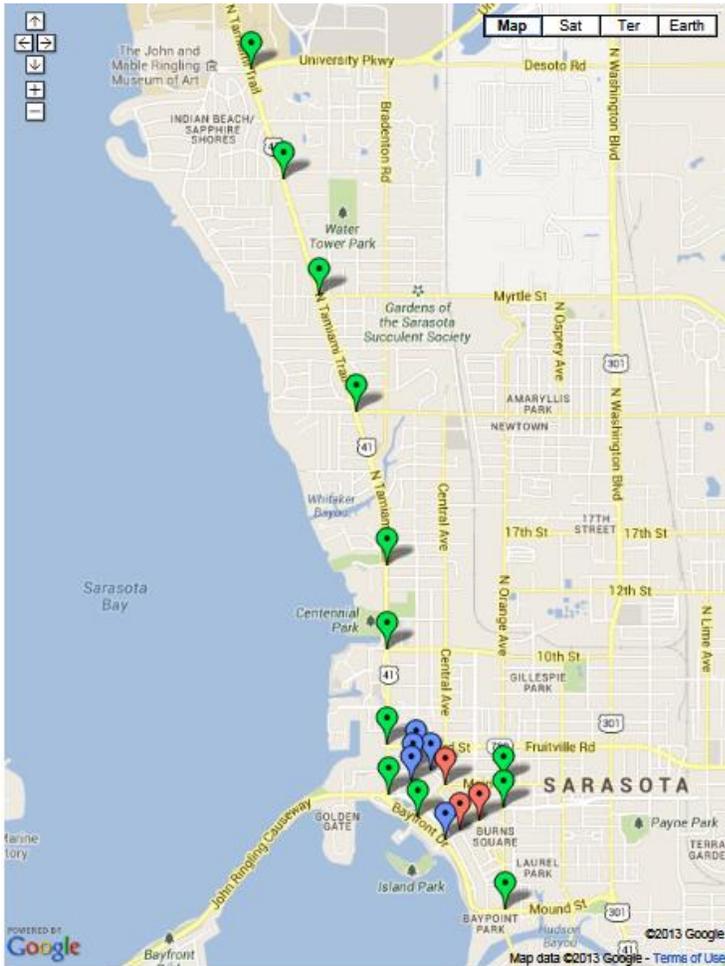
Still, Warner’s attempt to build a coalition isn’t complete. The next step, he said, is for community organizations to get involved and fund the artwork that would serve as centerpieces of the roundabouts on U.S. 41.

After the work he’s put in to transform the city’s attitude concerning roundabouts, Warner said he thinks of himself as a roundabout evangelist.

“I’m not an engineer; I can’t design anything,” Warner said. “I’m just a guy who saw the light and was saved.”

Contact David Conway dconway@youobserver.com.

View [Sarasota Roundabouts](#) in a larger map



Sarasota Roundabouts

Red – Existing roundabouts

Green – Funded/prioritized roundabouts

Blue – Proposed roundabouts