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Former FGCU president says school should still push for Coconut Road exit in Estero

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Former Florida Gulf Coast University President William Merwin said today that FGCU pushed for the Coconut Road interchange then, and it should still be pushing for it today.

"It's a matter of public safety," Merwin said.

Coconut Road, which stops just west of Interstate 75, would be extended further inland and connected with a long-proposed northern extension of Collier County Road 951. That extension would run behind campus, thus providing a back entrance — and emergency exit — near FGCU's new housing complex or Alico Arena. The university has two entranceways, but both connect with the same road, Ben Hill Griffin Parkway.

Merwin met Congressman Don Young, R-Alaska, at a town hall meeting held at FGCU in February 2005. It was there that Joe Shepard, vice president for administrative services, pitched a proposal to create a transportation management center either at the interchange or on campus.

"Congressman Young really liked it," Merwin said.

After the U.S. representative, who was the chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure committee from 2000 to 2006, left Southwest Florida, "We continued to lobby Congressman Young for funding," Merwin recalled. "Quite frankly, we would have gotten it if Republicans hadn't been ousted from Congress."