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Disneyland neighbors have a bad feeling about park's new parking, bridge project

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1 COMMENT

ANAHEIM – Some businesses along a one-block stretch of Harbor Boulevard have raised serious concerns over [Disneyland's Eastern Gateway Project](#), a massive proposal that would dramatically change how visitors coming from the east get into the theme park.

With “Star Wars” land well under construction, Disney plans to develop a 23-acre parcel behind several motels and restaurants that line Harbor Boulevard. Plans include a seven-story parking structure with 6,901 slots and a security checkpoint welcoming those about to cross a 15-foot-high pedestrian bridge over Harbor leading into Disneyland and Disney California Adventure.

To clear the way, Disney has spent more than \$100 million to buy property in the area, part of a \$1 billion-plus push to create “Star Wars” land and the gateway.

But this project, which Disney will present during a Planning Commission meeting at City Hall at 5 p.m. Monday and hopes to complete in 2019, has fast-food restaurants, hotels and other businesses worried that it would choke off their business.

Now, the businesses' customers and guests just cross Harbor to get to the theme parks and can easily break away from the parks for a meal in their restaurants before returning.

In Disney's plans, the route could be more complex: Guests would loop around behind the Harbor businesses to enter the pedestrian bridge, going through security first. There would be no direct access to the bridge from Harbor.

The current Harbor entrance to Disneyland isn't slated to be closed; Disney has said it will be kept open with a security checkpoint for the immediate future. The businesses want stronger assurance that an entrance will be there forever.

There are preliminary discussions about Disney allowing Harbor businesses to punch pathways behind their properties to the gateway so customers won't have to walk as far to enter the queue.

"It's sort of like they are dumping their problems into our backyard," said Robert "Red" Harbin, a spokesman for the Harbor Boulevard Merchants Coalition, a group of some of the local business owners.

"It's not our intention to delay the project," added Harbin, who said there are more than 25 affected businesses with, on any given day, 10,000 hotel guests. "We're just asking for reasonable accommodations and to flesh out ideas that would be good for the entire block. We want to work with Disney."

In a sense, the business owners always have. Since 1955 when Disneyland opened, businesses have clustered here, getting parkgoers to stay in their motels and eat in their restaurants.

For several months, a Disney spokeswoman said, company officials have been working with neighboring business owners.

"We have held a series of productive meetings with neighboring business owners to listen to concerns and gather input," Disney's Suzi Brown said. "We have responded to their feedback and have been encouraged by the positive responses from many of the group to work together to find creative solutions."

Scott Frisbie, whose family owns the nearby McDonald's, is concerned that to connect to the new Disneyland gateway, the restaurant would have to give up space for a special walkway.

"It's an impractical idea," said Frisbie, 57. "They are asking us to create a walkway for people to walk across our property to their (gateway) entrance.

"But we have a liability and responsibility once we have the public on our property," he said. "Not only that, but that would require us to remove some of our parking stalls, and parking is already scarce in this area."

Paul Sanford, an asset manager for Wincome Management and Development, which oversees the Anaheim Plaza Inn and Suites on Disney Way, said Disney's plans are still being developed and no one should rush to conclusions.

"With change, it's never easy," Sanford said. "There's always concerns with change. I think Disney will come up with real positive options. I have a lot of confidence. The good news is they are listening and coming up with options."

The Planning Commission is scheduled to make a decision Jan. 23. Disney needs a permit for the construction of the pedestrian bridge, the new security-screening area, signage and a transportation hub. It also needs approval for the parking structure. The City Council is expected to have the final decision on at least the pedestrian bridge at some point.

The Eastern Gateway Project came out of the \$1 billion-plus deal Disney made with Anaheim last year. The park agreed to make the major investment, which includes the 14-acre “Star Wars” land, in exchange for the city agreeing not to tax gate admission at the parks for up to 45 years.

The eastside project aims to do several things, including making it easier for those coming in from I-5 to slide into the new parking structure along Disney Way. Hotel shuttles and buses would drop off guests on the east side of Harbor, at the transportation hub, near the security checkpoint and pedestrian bridge’s entrance.

Also, Disney is trying to spread out where people go through metal detectors instead of having them clustered around the esplanade between Disneyland and Disney California, like they are now.

Visitors on foot coming from the south would take a 600-foot-long pathway along Disney Way toward the bridge’s entrance.

The bridge would be built on the site of the Carousel Inn, which Disney purchased for \$32 million last year, and would take guests to the esplanade, which holds the ticket booths for the parks.

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