Glynn County Commissioner Bill Brunson speaks to the St. Simons Island Rotary Club on Tuesday. Brunson discussed on several current issues including roundabouts on St. Simons Island, the wrecked cargo ship Golden Ray and Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax 2016.

Taylor Cooper/The Brunswick News

Roundabouts on St. Simons Island became a central topic of discussion at a St. Simons Island Rotary Club gathering Tuesday.
Glynn County Commissioner Bill Brunson spoke to the club and answered some questions during the lunchtime get-together. He addressed several topics — a potential St. Simons Island ferry, the grounded Golden Ray cargo vessel, current and future special-purpose, local-option sales taxes and development impact fees — in his discussion.

But much of his time at the gathering was spent talking about roundabouts.

Rotarian Roy Turner said traffic on Frederica Road on St. Simons Island is known to stop or long periods of time and at “odd hours of the day.”

He feared what would happen if traffic stopped during an emergency, and people couldn’t get across the causeway to the mainland. He asked Brunson if an ongoing St. Simons Island traffic study would address that issue.

Brunson said the county commission recognized the problem and that he hoped putting roundabouts at the intersections of Demere and Frederica roads, Demere Road and East Beach Causeway and Frederica Road and Kings Way would help speed up the flow of traffic.

He also suggested the intersection of Sea Island and Frederica roads would benefit most from a roundabout, a sentiment with which many in the room voiced their agreement.

“It would be the most controversial, I can tell you that,” Brunson said.

Putting a roundabout at the intersection would cost around $5-7 million, he said, and require the removal of several trees.
Twitty Park, located on either side of Sea Island Road east of Frederica Road, would be an obstacle, he said, but not an insurmountable one.

A court battle between the county, the Sea Island Co., the Glynn Environmental Coalition and heirs of original park owner T.L. Cain ended in 2019 when Glynn County Superior Court Judge Stephen Kelley reverted ownership of the park to the county.

The GEC argued that the county had violated the restrictions Cain placed on the property when he dedicated it to the public as a park by swapping it with the Sea Island Co. for land adjacent to the Dunbar Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant.

While the judge ruled the land swap violated the deed restriction, he found that paving Sea Island Road through the middle of the park did not. According to Kelley, the park was also intended to be used as a perpetual entryway to Sea Island, so the road did not violate any restrictions.

Brunson used that ruling to say that the county could replace the intersection of Sea Island and Frederica roads with a roundabout if necessary.

Attempting to do so would undoubtedly result in another lawsuit, he admitted, but one he felt the county would win.

Fellow Rotarian Leslie Mattingly criticized the “traffic circle” at the St. Simons Island end of the F.J. Torras Causeway, saying the county should give it a major do-over.

Upon showing the design to an unnamed expert, she was told that it looked as if it had been designed by an engineer, not a roundabout specialist. She then passed a recommendation on to Brunson.

“He said it’s going to bottleneck right there, and he was right. My message is: hire a roundabout specialist, not a (Georgia Department of Transportation) engineer,” Mattingly said.

Another rotary club member asked if the county had given much thought to alternatives to the roundabout at East Beach Causeway and Ocean Boulevard or to the two planned for East Beach Causeway at Demere Road and Frederica Road at Kings Way.

Brunson said the character of the island was a great consideration, and that roundabouts fit the area’s feel much better than traffic lights and four-way stops.
He also referenced a statement made by Glynn County Attorney Aaron Mumford at a recent county commission meeting.

The Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax 2016 ballot item called for “improvements” to county intersections. He said that not everything done to an intersection could be considered an improvement.

Putting up two more stop signs at the Ocean Boulevard intersection, as some had suggested, would not, in his opinion, be an improvement.

Taylor Cooper