

HURRICANE KATRINA: A CRUSHING BLOW

■ Survivor search

Rescuers search for victims in Gulf Coast towns swamped by the fury of Katrina. **A4**

■ Assessing damage

A state-by-state breakdown of the damage discovered in the aftermath of the hurricane. **A4**

■ Local help coming

Emergency responders in all fields eagerly await today's possible calls to rush to the aid of hurricane victims. **A2**

Airport parking made easier

Automated system proposed for terminal

BY LAURA RUANE
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In about a year, transponder users could pay for parking at Southwest Florida International as easily as they now cruise through bridge-toll plazas.

Citizen advisers to the airport on Monday backed developing a system that would allow existing LeeWay transponders to work at the new terminal that's scheduled to open Friday, Sept. 9.

If Lee County commissioners give the go-ahead as expected in September, the south Fort Myers airport would become one of fewer than 10 in the nation to offer such a feature.

When told of the airport plan, transponder user John Chenciner of Sanibel called it "a dynamite idea. It's one less hassle in traveling."

Chenciner, who's flying to Denver today on business, noted that "when you get back, you just want to get home. The last thing you want to do is fumble for money."

Working out the details — including finding a system installer through competitive bidding — is expected to take six to nine months.

People with LeeWay transponders wouldn't do anything different, other than enter and exit airport parking through designated lanes.

The new use is not expected to affect the cost of transponders, airport parking rates or bridge tolls, said Susan Hofstetter. She's the transportation consultant with MSX International who presented the idea to the Airports Special Management Committee on Monday.

Lee County's electronic toll program for the Sanibel Causeway, Cape Coral Bridge and Midpoint Memorial Bridge allows drivers to open a prepaid account. Drivers buy a transponder, and mount it on the windshield. The transponder emits a signal to a receiver to identify the driver's account and deducts the toll.

The LeeWay system currently has 70,000 active accounts.

Transponder-paid parking is offered at JFK, LaGuardia and

■ See **AIRPORT A2**

NEW TERMINAL PROGRESS

Construction is winding down at Southwest Florida International's new passenger terminal. Among the highlights reported to airport advisers at a meeting Monday:

■ **Two airlines** have moved their less-critical belongings into their new spaces.

■ **Most Lee County** Port Authority employees have moved or are about to move from the old terminal.

■ **Work continues** toward achieving county building inspector sign-offs on areas for shops and restaurants and car rental facilities.

■ **Shopkeepers** already are stocking shelves, and "salt and pepper shakers are out at the restaurants," said Bob Ball, executive director for Lee County Port Authority.

■ **Asked for** his assessment, Dan Schultz, an executive with construction overseer DMJM Aviation, merely said: "Ten days out. A-OK."

Devastating hit

Gulf Coast reels from winds, floods



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

■ Henry Rhodes sits in a New Orleans Police Department boat after being rescued in the 7th Ward of the city on Monday. The area was flooded after Hurricane Katrina moved through.

HURRICANE LASHES COAST

Hurricane Katrina stormed ashore Monday, slamming the flood-prone city of New Orleans but centering its wrath on the Mississippi Gulf Coast with a 25-foot storm surge. Its core made landfall as a monstrous Category 4 hurricane with 145-mph winds.

AT LEAST 55 DIE MONDAY

Authorities blame Hurricane Katrina for 50 deaths in Mississippi's Harrison County alone, and at least three more in Mississippi and two more in Alabama. The casualty toll is expected to mount.

POWERLESS

Katrina knocked out power to more than three-quarters of a million people from Louisiana to the Florida Panhandle, and authorities said it could be two months before electricity is restored to everyone.

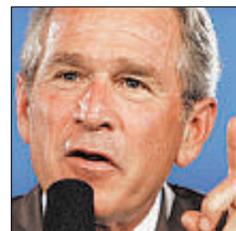
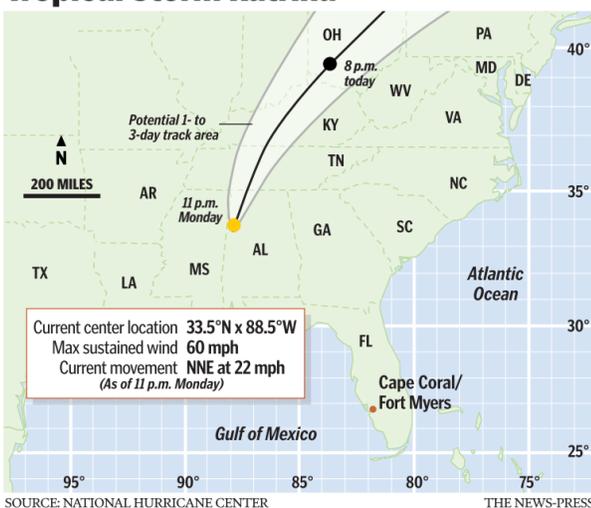
DOWNGRADED

Katrina was later downgraded to a tropical storm as it passed through eastern Mississippi, moving north at 22 mph. Winds were still a dangerous 60 mph.

FORECAST

The storm is expected to move north through the nation's midsection during the next few days, and it's likely to spawn tornadoes with heavy rains.

Tropical Storm Katrina



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

■ President Bush pledged extensive federal help for victims of Hurricane Katrina to "get your lives back in order." The government responded with a massive emergency assistance program.

MORE ON KATRINA

■ **Crude hits \$70:** Fuel shortages and rising gas prices threaten Florida and much of the nation as the Gulf of Mexico's refineries remained closed Monday in Hurricane Katrina's wake. **A3**

Superdome damage:

Katrina rips two holes in the roof of the New Orleans stadium. **C2**

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■ **See for yourself:** View the latest photos and video of Katrina's fury.
■ **Stay informed:** Aftermath of Katrina's pillage updated throughout the day.

"We didn't know if we were going to live."

■ Diana Chavez, one of 10,000 people who spent the night at the Superdome, a refuge of last resort that lost part of its roof.

INSIDE

■ **WEATHER**
High 90 Low 78
Few storms, 30 percent chance of rain; complete forecast **B12**

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BLUE-GREEN ALGAE SEEN HERE
GROWTH WAS TOXIC IN ST. LUCIE RIVER

■ LOCAL **B1**



AVOIDING THE FRESHMAN 15

WORK TO CUT EXTRA POUNDS

■ HEALTHY LIVING **G1**

CAPE MAN GETS KICKS FIGHTING

REALITY SHOW IS 'ULTIMATE'

■ SPORTS **C8**

