

SUMMARY

Virtual Public Workshop

May 25, 2021 through June 15, 2021

I-4 Wildlife Crossing Design Project

Financial Project Identification Number: 201214-8-52-01



- LOCATION:** Virtual at www.swflroads.com/i4/wildlifecrossing
Completely online; no live component
- TIME:** On going from May 25, 2021 (8 a.m.) through June 15, 2021 (11:59 p.m.)
- ATTENDEES:** 18 Attendees Signed In
- PROJECT TEAM:** Doug Burkhart, P.E. - FDOT (Project Manager)
Dave Panigraphi, P.E. - Lochner (Consultant Project Manager)
Laura Turner, AICP - Laura Turner Planning Services
- PREPARED BY:** Laura Turner **Date:** July 7, 2021

The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) is completing the design for the I-4 wildlife crossing located within the City of Lakeland in Polk County. As part of the 1998 Environmental Assessment (EA) for I-4 from the Hillsborough County Line to the Osceola County Line, FDOT committed to the construction of a wildlife crossing near Saddle Creek and the Tenoroc Management Area. Coordination with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) was conducted to determine the appropriate wildlife crossing location alternatives.

The preferred location for the Saddle Creek/Tenoroc Management Area wildlife crossing is located approximately 1.6 miles east of the I-4/State Road 33 interchange. The wildlife crossing consists of a 44-foot wide bridge crossing over I-4. The project is approximately 1,700 feet in length.

The Virtual Public Workshop was held to present project information and to receive public input regarding the proposed design plans. This summary includes the highlights of the notification process, information provided during the workshop, and the submitted comments.

Virtual Public Workshop Notification

Several notification techniques were used to publicize the virtual public workshop, which are summarized in **Figure 1**. Generally, the workshop was publicized through: advertisements (*Florida Administrative Register* and *Lakeland Ledger*); website announcements (www.fdot.gov and www.swflroads.com); emails to elected and appointed officials with the project newsletter (see **Figure 2**); the newsletter mailed to property owners and tenants; and a news release (emailed to Polk County media outlets).

At the Virtual Public Workshop

The Virtual Public Workshop was held from May 25, 2021 through June 15, 2021 with workshop materials posted to the project website (www.swfroads.com/i4/wildlifecrossing). The workshop was held completely online with no live component. Printed copies of the workshop information packet were available during this time at the Larry R. Jackson Branch Library located at 1700 N. Florida Avenue, Lakeland, FL 33805 during regular business hours; six copies were picked up during the workshop.

On the project website, individuals had the opportunity to sign in before reviewing project information. The following project items were available for review:

- Project presentation (video as well as pdf of the slides and script);
- Information packet (newsletter, display boards, and comment form);
- Display boards (project layout, typical section at bridge crossing, typical section at bridge approaches, and schedule/costs); and
- Comment form.

Comments could be submitted using any of the three different ways:

- Through the project website; or by
- Emailing Doug Burkhart, P.E., the FDOT Project Manager; or by
- Mailing comments to Mr. Burkhart.

Submitted Comments

This summary includes written comments received from April 26, 2021 (beginning of the Virtual Public Workshop notification process) through June 15, 2021 (when the workshop ended). A total of 15 comments were submitted during this time; three before the workshop and 12 during the workshop. The following summary presents the comments that were shared. The number in parenthesis indicates how often the comment was made.

Supports the Project (9)

- Letters from specific groups (4)
 - Defenders of Wildlife
 - Florida Wildlife Federation
 - Conservancy of Southwest Florida
 - Sierra Club Florida – Ancient Islands Group
- Wildlife crossing is essential and strategic opportunity to secure wildlife and habitat corridor in the region (1)
- Likes the connectivity between natural areas (1)

Design Elements (4)

- Need to make sure only wildlife has access to the bridge crossing, and not people (2)
- Include fencing along the right of way (specifically along the east side, north of I-4) to protect livestock from wildlife and to protect wildlife from people (1)
- Provided 2 alternative design concepts (1)

Request for Information (3)

- Project Status/Schedule (2)
- Most recent right of way maps (1)
- Amount of land needed from property (1)
- Bridge crossing – underpass or overpass (1)

- Provide similar examples (1)

Provided Reference Document (2)

- *Wildlife Permeability along Interstate 4, June 2020*

Requests to be added to Contact List (2)

Input for Other Wildlife Crossing Projects (6)

- FDOT needs to work with partners to secure additional corridors within the Green Swamp area (1)
- Agencies need to look critically at development and road building in the area of University Boulevard (south of the I-4 project) and Old Polk City Road (north of the I-4 project) (1)
- Investing in wildlife crossing structures, like the I-4 project, will help secure critical linkages for the endangered Florida panther and other native wildlife (2)
- FDOT needs to work with other agencies (such as the Florida Department of Environmental Protection) to acquire and secure additional conservation lands with the Green Swamp and Peace River Refuge Florida Forever projects (1)
- FDOT needs to work with partners to secure additional corridors within the Green Swamp area (1)

Next Steps After Virtual Public Workshop

This input will guide the project team as design plans are finalized. It is anticipated that design will be completed in December 2023 with right of way acquisition to occur in fall 2021. At this time, construction is not funded.

Figure 1
Virtual Public Workshop - Notification Summary



Notification Summary
Virtual Public Workshop
May 25, 2021 – June 15, 2021
I-4 Wildlife Crossing Design Project
FPID Number: 201214-8-52-01

<i>Date Completed</i>	<i>Notification Activity</i>
April 26, 2021	Website (www.swflorads.com/i4/wildlifecrossing) updated
April 27, 2021	Newsletter/handout emailed to 26 elected officials (28 days before virtual public workshop)
April 27, 2021	Newsletter/handout mailed to 14 property owners (28 days before virtual public workshop)
April 28, 2021	Newsletter/handout emailed to 31 appointed officials (27 days before virtual public workshop)
May 4, 2021	FDOT PIO posted hearing notice on www.fdot.gov on District One's Public Notices page (21 days before virtual public workshop)
May 14, 2021	Ad published in <i>Florida Administrative Register</i> (11 days before virtual public workshop)
May 16, 2021	Newspaper display ad published in <i>Lakeland Ledger</i> (9 days before virtual public workshop)
May 18, 2021	FDOT PIO emailed press release to media outlets in Polk County (7 days before public hearing)

Figure2
Virtual Public Workshop – Newsletter (Front Page)



Polk County, Florida

I-4 Wildlife Crossing Design Project

Financial Project ID: 201214-8-52-01

Virtual Public Workshop (May 25, 2021 through June 15, 2021)

The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), District One, is hosting a **Virtual Public Workshop** to review design plans for the I-4 wildlife crossing located in northeast Lakeland. The purpose of the workshop is to present project information and to receive public input regarding the proposed design plans.

The workshop is being held completely online with **no live component**. Workshop materials will be posted to the project website (www.swflroads.com/i4/wildlifecrossing) beginning on Tuesday, May 25, 2021 and may be viewed through Tuesday, June 15, 2021. Hard copies of the workshop materials are available for pick up at the Lakeland Public Library – Larry R. Jackson Branch, located at 1700 N. Florida Avenue, Lakeland, FL 33805 during regular business hours between May 25, 2021 and June 15, 2021. The library's main phone number is (863) 834-4288.

Ways to Share Your Comments

After reviewing the workshop materials online, comments may be submitted in three different ways:

- Through the project website (www.swflroads.com/i4/wildlifecrossing); or
- Emailing Doug Burkhardt, P.E., the FDOT Project Manager at Doug.Burkhardt@dot.state.fl.us; or
- Mailing comments to Doug Burkhardt, P.E. at FDOT District One, P.O. Box 1249, Bartow, FL 33831.

Please note that comments must be received or postmarked by June 15, 2021 in order to be included in the workshop summary, which will be posted to the project website (www.swflroads.com/i4/wildlifecrossing) by mid-July 2021 (about 30 days after the comment period ends).

FDOT solicits public participation without regard to race, color, national origin, age, sex, religion, disability or family status. People who require special accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act or who require translation services (free of charge) should contact Cynthia Sykes, District One Title VI Coordinator, by phone at (863) 519-2287 or by email at Cynthia.Sykes@dot.state.fl.us at least seven days prior to the Virtual Public Workshop.

Project Contact Information

Doug Burkhardt, P.E.
Project Manager
Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT)
P.O. Box 1249
Bartow, Florida 33831
Phone: (850) 536-8539
Email: Doug.Burkhardt@dot.state.fl.us

Project Website: www.swflroads.com/i4/wildlifecrossing

Figure 2 Virtual Public Workshop – Newsletter (Back Page)



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Wildlife Crossings Overview

As part of the 1998 Environmental Assessment (EA) for I-4 from the Hillsborough County Line to the Osceola County Line, the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) committed to the construction of a wildlife crossing near Saddle Creek and the Tenoroc Management Area. Coordination with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) was conducted to determine the appropriate wildlife crossing location alternatives. The preferred location for the Saddle Creek/Tenoroc Management Area wildlife crossing is located approximately 1.6 miles east of the I-4/SR 33 interchange. The wildlife crossing consists of a 44-foot wide bridge crossing over I-4. The project is approximately 1,700 feet in length.

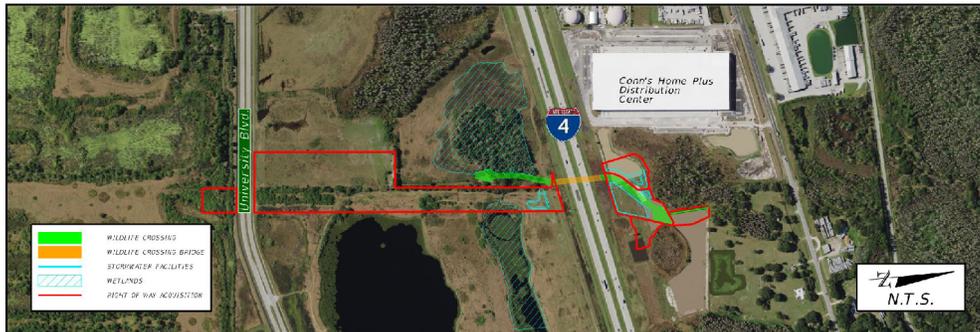
Next Steps After Workshop

- Design completion: December 2023
- ROW acquisition: Fall 2021
- Construction: Not funded

Project Location Map



Project Concept



Project Website: www.swflroads.com/i4/wildlifecrossing