



SR 29 from I-75 to Oil Well Road PD&E Study FPID #: 434490-1-22-01

MINUTES: Environmental Advisory Group Meeting #1
DATE: May 9, 2019 **TIME:** 10:00 AM
LOCATION: CareerSource Southwest Florida, 750 S. 5 Street, Immokalee, FL

Attendees: Thirteen (13) EAG members attended in person and 10 members of the project team attended in person. Four (4) attended via GoToMeeting (listed below). See attached sign-in sheets.

GoToMeeting Attendees:

John Wrublik (USFWS)

Mark Tamblyn (USACE)

Brian Barnett (FWC)

Andrew Kizlauskas (USACE)

I. Welcome

Alicia Gonzalez of Media Relations Group (MRG) called the meeting to order and welcomed everybody. She also mentioned that the meeting was being recorded and there were members participating via GoToMeeting. Attendees introduced themselves and the organizations they represented.

Alicia then provided a brief description of the goals and role of the EAG

- To share study materials prior to going to the public
- To share information and ideas that help achieve the project purpose and need with the least overall harm
- To assist in the identification of environmental issues to be addressed within the scope of this PD&E Study
- Provide feedback and comments regarding the PD&E study information presented
- Assist in the identification of potential project impacts, opportunities and constraints
- Identify or clarify environmental, community, social, and/or transportation issues that are relevant to the study area
- Act as a point of contact from and to your organizations sharing and providing information
- Be aware of and cooperative regarding the project goals and timeframes



II. SR 29 PD&E Study Presentation

Will Sloup Consultant Project Manager with Metric Engineering, and Rob Myers Environmental Lead with Metric Engineering, gave a brief presentation regarding the study objective and issues. The presentation discussed the following:

- **What is a PD&E Study?**

Will explained that a PD&E Study involves three components: developing and evaluating engineering alternatives, determining the impacts those alternatives will have on the social, natural, physical and cultural environments, and obtaining public input and consensus.

- **SR 29 Description**

The project begins at I-75 and ends at CR 858/Oil Well Road (approximately 10.2 miles). SR 29 today is a two-lane undivided rural highway and is classified as a Strategic Intermodal System Highway (SIS) facility. It is also a designated hurricane evacuation route. This segment of SR 29 is bordered along the west by the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge and along the east by the Big Cypress National Preserve. This study will also be conducted in cooperation with the National Park Service.

- **Purpose and Need**

The need of the project is based on safety needs, the project status, system linkage, capacity and transportation demand.

- Safety: The results of the safety analysis performed show a decrease by 36.6% in annual crashes if SR 29 is widened to a 4-lane divided roadway
- Project Status: Project has been identified in the Collier Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) 2040 Long Range Transportation Plan and 2018-2022 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). It has also been identified in FDOT's SIS Five Year Plan.
- System Linkage: SR 29 is one of 4 designated freight mobility corridors in Collier County. This is one of 5 on-going projects along SR 29 by FDOT D1 to fulfill a long range vision to upgrade the SR 29 corridor.
- Capacity: This segment of SR 29 serves approximately 24.1% trucks. The analysis results indicate that under the No Build Scenario, SR 29 north of the I-75 interchange will fall below the LOS target prior to the design year, 2045.
- Transportation Demand: Collier County has been one of the fastest growing counties in Florida, anticipated to grow 53.6% by 2040. Immokalee is designated as a Rural Area of Opportunity

- **Existing SR 29**

Existing two, 12-foot lanes in each direction, with a design speed of 65 mph.

- **Wetlands and Surface Waters**

There are high quality wetlands within the existing FDOT R/W. The Barron Canal parallels SR 29 is owned by each private and public land owner bordering the canal. There are several other water features within the study area including the Zloty Canal and Grassy Pond.

- **Wildlife Habitat**

High quality wildlife habitats are present within the study area. The project is bordered by Big Cypress National Preserve (BCNP) and the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge (FPNWR). There is existing fencing associated with the wildlife crossings within much of the limits of BCNP and FPNWR. It is anticipated that FDOT will not acquire additional R/W for the project, minimizing habitat impacts. The Collier Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) is an on-going effort and the northern limits of the project study area is part of that planning effort. There is a panther mortality "hot spot" within the limits of the project will be evaluated during the study.

- **Threatened and Endangered Species**

There is an opportunity to improve existing wildlife issues and conditions. This project will evaluate locations for the potential construction of a new wildlife crossing.

- **Section 4(f) Resources**

Do not anticipate using any adjacent Section 4(f) lands. The westerly 100 feet of existing SR 29 R/W is owned by FDOT and leased to the USFWS. The lease allows for FDOT to terminate the lease to use the land for transportation purposes. The existing total R/W including the leased area is 180 feet.

- **Alternatives**

The project is generally evaluating widening SR 29 to four lanes with a grass median. There is a potential that the existing lanes will remain and used as the future northbound lanes and new southbound lanes will be constructed.

- **Schedule**

A second EAG is anticipated for September of 2019 and the third and final EAG for September of 2020. An Alternatives Workshop is anticipated in the fall 2019 where concepts will be presented to the public. The Public Hearing is anticipated for fall 2020.

III. Group Discussion

- Brad Cornell (Audubon) asked if this is the scoping prior to the PD&E. Will explained that we are already in the PD&E Study. A prior traffic analysis/feasibility study was completed, and we are now beginning the PD&E process.
- Andrew Kizlauskas (USACE) asked if we were evaluating offsite alternatives. It was clarified that at this time we are only looking at alternatives within the existing SR 29 corridor. A lot of work was done prior to this and documentation of why alternative corridors are not feasible will be documented.
- Jed Redwine (NPS) asked if we have already made a decision on the alternative that will move forward and if we have a sense of what this project will look like and how many alternatives will be presented to the public. Gabriela Garcia (Metric Engineering) explained that during the feasibility study a Project Traffic Analysis Report (PTAR) was prepared that evaluated different alternatives, including adding passing lanes only, an enhanced two-lane option with a barrier wall in the median with and without passing lanes, and a four-lane option. It was determined at that time that a four-lane typical section with a divided median is the best solution to address the safety and traffic needs of the area. The idea is to develop a win-win scenario that not only addresses the transportation needs but can also address the environmental needs of the study area.
- April Olson (Conservancy) requested a copy of the feasibility analysis. This will be emailed to anybody who requests it.
- Bob Sobczak asked when this project will be constructed. Gwen Pipkin (FDOT) explained that from PD&E to construction could take a minimum of 10 years. As the project goes through the process, it will become funded for the different phases.
- Ben Nottingham (FPNWR) confirmed and requested clarification on the purpose and need. He also asked to elaborate on what is Section 4(f). This law was explained to him and clarified that there are a number of Section 4(f) resources within the study area including FPNWR, BCNP, Oil Well Park, Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve.
- Jed Redwine (NPS) stated that this road is intimately involved in the historical flow path of water flowing from BCNP to the Fakahatchee Strand which is laid out in the Southwest Florida Comprehensive Watershed Feasibility Study. Agrees there is an opportunity to enhance the hydrological system with this project.



- Tony Pernas (NPS) wanted to see if it is still an option for them to review the purpose and need of the study and potentially modify it. Rob explained that there are many ways to incorporate different opportunities into the project without pulling them into the purpose and need.
- John Wrublik (USFWS) stated that he put a dispute resolution in the ETDM and asked what the status is. He asked if the dispute effected the PD&E process. Gwen explained that she was hopeful that it will be resolved through the PD&E process and through the solutions developed. He agreed.
- Meredith Budd (Florida Wildlife Federation) asked about the complications of the project and modifying the purpose and need to include modifications to the canal. Gwen explained that it must be something the FDOT can control. The canal is under private ownership which is out of FDOT's jurisdiction. She explained that anything that is under FDOT's purview to aid in the goals of the area, they will consider.
- Rob explained the need to identify the approximate location and type of improvement needed within the FDOT R/W in order to accommodate hydrologic improvement goals.
- Tony Pernas asked why was USFWS disputed the project. John Wrublik stated it was due to the potential for panther habitat loss. He stated that he is willing to work with the FDOT to minimize and mitigate those impacts. USFWS is willing to work with the FDOT to come up with solutions.
- Bob Sobczak (BNCP) stated that he believes that restricting the road to 180-foot R/W could impede future access to BNCP and FPNWR because having destination features is as important, if not more, than the pass through traffic. Adding more bridges under SR 29 is not going to send more water into FPNWR because the canal is draining all of the water. He is concerned that the project will not address water quality. Rob Myers explained that FDOT must treat the stormwater runoff as part of the project. Due to the fact that the water outfalls into Outstanding Florida Waters (OFW) FDOT must meet 50% greater treatment requirements.
- Michael Duever (consultant to SFWMD) explained that the 2000 Southwest Florida Feasibility study brought together all agencies that had interest and authority in water resources in the area and produced the Southwest Florida Comprehensive Watershed Plan (2009). It identified fixes to water resources issues in the area that benefit the whole system. The plan has a SR 29 component. The idea is that they are not against SR 29 or the widening. Instead, the plan identifies getting rid of the canal, which is draining the water and not allowing historic flows into Fakahatchee Strand and FPNWR. They would not like to see any improvements to SR 29 that would preclude them from filling in the canal in the future.
- Tony Pernas (BCNP) stated that although the NPS cannot cede ownership of the canal, since park boundaries are congressionally mandated, they can issue an agreement with FDOT so that FDOT can feasibly address the canal.
- Dan Smith (UCF-Project Team Member) asked if there is an implementation strategy for the Southwest Florida Comprehensive Watershed Plan: how will it be funded and how can it be done parallel to the roadway study. We cannot expect FDOT to fund all of the work that needs to happen to the canal and asked if there is a parallel implementation plan. Michael Duever explained that the original plan was to go to congress to obtain funding. Some individual components of the plan have already been implemented. Collier County incorporated the plan into their watershed management plan in 2011. There are many ways that pieces of the plan can be implemented. He explained that there were several meetings with land owners when the plan was being developed and that a pump station would have to be put in in order to protect the people upstream from being flooded and maintain existing conditions for them.
- Gabriela Garcia stated that this is a great initial conversation, and everyone agrees that much work needs to be done to hopefully implement components of the Southwest Florida Comprehensive Watershed Plan as part of this project. The team is committed to keep the coordination going with the goal that the two parallel studies can come together at the end.

- Jed Redwine (NPS) asked that the project commit that this PD&E Study is connected to, is supportive of and will accommodate the future hydrologic improvement plans being discussed with the NPS and other stakeholders. Gwen Pipkin stated she is concerned that FDOT does not fully understand what the plan entails and can inadvertently preclude items. Jed Redwine (NPS) stated that he understands that FDOT needs to understand and have some certainty on how to fit this project in with the larger landscape needs. He explained that that is what the NPS is here for. They can review and perform some level of modeling and design to identify where the opportunities really lie. But this needs to happen in close coordination. He wants FDOT to assign value to the natural lands and recognize that the decision associated with the project will have a large potential impact on the future value of the lands.
- Gwen Pipkin stated that FDOT wants to do this project correctly and hopes to get the timing to align with other planning efforts in the region.
- Dan Smith stated that we are also working on wildlife crossing issues and requested that anybody who has any concerns or issues to please bring it to the team.
- Robert Wiley (Collier County Stormwater Management) explained that FDOT does own the portion of the canal just north of I-75. As of recent drainage easements acquired from the private land owners, the County is now in charge of maintaining the canal from Immokalee to Sunniland. He requested that the project not impede access for the County to be able to maintain the canal. They currently have many issues accessing the canal. They currently have almost no access, they are maintaining from the canal bank on the side of the road or small barges which takes a lot of time to perform the maintenance.

Alicia closed the meeting. She explained that minutes of this meeting will be drafted. She stated that the next EAG meeting will be held approximately in September with the first public meeting in the fall. The team will reach out to the EAG as the dates get closer.

She asked the attendees to hand in any comment cards they have. She reminded the team to feel free to contact Patrick Bateman, FDOT Project Manager with any comments, questions or concerns.

END OF MEETING SUMMARY

This meeting summary was prepared by Gabriela Garcia, PE on behalf of the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT). It is not verbatim, but it is a summary of the meeting activities and comments received. If you feel something should be added or revised, please contact Gabriela Garcia by email at Ggarcia@metriceng.com or by telephone 305-235-5098 within five (5) days of receipt of this summary.

SR 29 FROM I-75 TO OIL WELL ROAD PD&E STUDY

Financial Project ID: 434490-1-22-01

ENVIRONMENTAL ADVISORY GROUP (EAG) MEETING



SIGN-IN SHEET

Thursday May 9, 2019, 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.
 CareerSource Southwest Florida, Conference Room 2
 750 S. 5 St., Immokalee, Florida 34142

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