



Board Meeting Summary & Action Sheet

April 10, 2024

Please note that this summary has not been approved as the official minutes of the board.

THE PLANNING COUNCIL AND METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION FOR PINELLAS COUNTY

The Forward Pinellas Board held this public meeting in person on April 10, 2024, at 1 p.m. in the Palm Room at the Pinellas County Communications Building.

The board approved a modification to the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and amendments to the Unified Work Program (UPWP).

Chelsea Favero presented the amendments to the UPWP, a two-year plan that identifies a metropolitan planning organization's (MPO) transportation planning activities and associated funding. The amendments concern de-obligating \$730,000 in funds that the MPO anticipates not using for the remainder of the two-year period ending June 30, 2024, which would allow those funds to be available at the start of the next two-year planning period, in July 2024.

Discussion:

- Commissioner Eggers requested information on why we must de-obligate funds. Chelsea clarified that the Florida Department of Transportation needs administrative processing time.
- Commissioner Scott asked if we anticipate spending all the money during the upcoming fiscal year? Chelsea noted since the UPWP is a two-year document, and the de-obligation comes up every two years, any remaining funds for this next year will not need to be de-obligated. There are plans in place that would make use of the funds.

The board approved and accepted the PPC and MPO Annual Audits for 2022-23 (FY23).

Julie Davis and Elise Leach, with Rivero, Gordimer & Company, shared the auditor's opinion that the MPO and PPC have complied in all material respects with applicable financial requirements for the year ended September 30, 2023.

Forward Pinellas staff presented the preliminary FY25 Pinellas Planning Council (PPC) Budget.

Rodney Chatman shared the preliminary budget that funds the primary responsibilities of the PPC, including the administration of the Countywide Plan, providing technical assistance to local government partners, and conducting special studies and research. The agency submitted a flat budget and associated stress tests, which would potentially reduce expenses by 3% and 5%, to the Office of

Management and Budget (OMB), as requested. Overall, the PPC's fiscal picture is good - the preliminary flat budget is balanced without using reserves, resources are available to achieve the strategic priorities of the agency, and three months of expenses are reserved for an emergency.

Discussion:

- Whit Blanton highlighted the purpose of the reserves/unassigned fund balance. It importantly serves as a working capital fund. It is helpful to have in an agency like Forward Pinellas that seeks out significant federal funds. The reserves can be used to help meet local match requirements, can assist in funding future MPO merger costs, etc.

The board members were provided an update on plans for US 19 North.

Brian Hunter with the Florida Department of Transportation provided the board with an overview of projects that can be considered for the US 19 North corridor, with the intent to improve highway capacity on US 19 while also providing safe accommodations for bicycle, pedestrian, and transit rider access and visibility of local businesses in the Palm Harbor and Tarpon Springs area of North Pinellas County.

Discussion:

- Commissioner Eggers noted he would be interested to hear about user experiences of the viaduct in Gandy in Tampa. He also inquired if having elevated lanes would reduce congestion. Brian said yes, as it would move traffic along quicker and relieve pressure off the at-grade level.
- Vice Mayor Gerard inquired if FDOT was leaning towards the viaduct as the solution. Brian noted there is no preference at this time as significant community input is still required.
- Whit Blanton said he would be interested in hearing from the public about how to activate the space underneath US 19 if the elevated viaduct is created.

The board was provided updates regarding the Advantage Pinellas 2050 plan.

Jared Austin provided updates on the Transit System Plan. The goal of this effort is to identify the top performing corridors, that with the right investments and strategic land-use planning, could best foster redevelopment and growth in ridership, improve transit service quality and connectivity, and benefit the overall transit network performance. This included a two-step screening process to evaluate each corridor's readiness for redevelopment and better transit service.

Discussion:

- Commissioner Scott inquired how the initial eight routes were identified. Whit said what was considered included the top performing PSTA routes in terms of ridership, but also where we can most likely link jobs, housing, and redevelopment. Commissioner Scott then

also asked for the difference between Step A and Step B in evaluations. Jared clarified that Step B includes more refined data analysis, such as access to housing, jobs, land use changes, etc.

- Whit noted that public sentiment and local government support needs to be considered in addition to these metrics.
- Commissioner Eggers asked if all categories (land use, equity, mobility) are weighted equally? Jared will follow-up with more details on the weighting scheme.
- Vice Mayor Gerard asked why Ulmerton Rd. was not included? Chelsea said some of the considerations of which corridors to include considered parcel size and land development potential. Whit noted a limitation of Ulmerton Rd. is it has a lot of single use, industrial warehouse parcels, so there is not a lot of employment density potential compared to other corridors. Ulmerton is still part of our LRTP.

Kathrin Tellez, of Fehr and Peers, provided an overview of the update to the Active Transportation Plan (ATP). The ATP identifies the vision for a highly connected and accessible trail and bicycle facility network throughout Pinellas County. The plan includes a scoring system that prioritizes and develops a cost feasible list of projects through 2050. To date, multiple corridors and overpasses have advanced to design and construction, while others have been delayed for various reasons.

Discussion:

- Commissioner Eggers drew attention to a couple maps that indicated there are more areas that are comfortable for walking than biking. Kathrin confirmed this is accurate.
- Commissioner Scott noted he disagrees with the analysis of certain sections, such as Clearwater Beach to Belleair Causeway, and asked if any of this analysis includes interviewing cyclists or pedestrians? Kathrin noted this analysis is based on the FDOT's Multimodal Analysis guidelines and so it is intended to be a generalized analysis of the county and does not factor individual experiences. She said people were not interviewed at this time since this is an update, but this can be included during the next whole refresh. Whit said we did do a recent survey with bicyclists and pedestrians about their experiences with the trail that can be integrated with this analysis.

Forward Pinellas staff presented the draft Transportation Priorities.

Chelsea Favero presented the draft Multimodal Priority List and the Transportation Alternatives (TA) Program Priority List. These lists are incorporated into the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) each year, guide decisions on using federal funding for transportation projects, and are used by FDOT to develop its Five-Year Work Program.

Discussion:

- Commissioner Eggers inquired when the Gateway Expressway will open. A representative from FDOT said it is tentatively scheduled for April 22nd, pending weather.

- Councilmember Floyd asked for the status of conversations with FDOT regarding projects with shortfalls in funding in the City of St. Petersburg, with the goal of completing projects that already have some funding before adding new projects. Chelsea confirmed there has been ongoing conversations with the city, but there have been challenges to a couple projects. Some items FDOT cannot pay for by virtue of the program, in addition to inflation costs. Forward Pinellas is looking at reshuffling projects in the later years of the Work Program to make these projects whole.
- Commissioner Eggers asked if counters are being set up in the new areas of the trail? Kyle Simpson, with Forward Pinellas, responded that Forward Pinellas has not, but FDOT just installed one just north of Chestnut Park.
- Commissioner Eggers then asked if there have been any safety issues at the flashing beacons at Sunset Point, a four-way intersection? Chelsea noted there are none that we are aware.
- Commissioner Eggers raised the point that there are inconsistencies at trail crossings across the county. Chelsea and Mayor Bujalski noted this is partially to do with working with the differing needs of local communities. Whit Blanton added that a Board of County Commissioners workshop is being planned for August in which trail issues, such as this, will be discussed.
- Councilmember Driscoll inquired if projects in St. Petersburg need modification considering an upcoming vote to alter the zoning overlay in the Warehouse Arts District? Chelsea noted the recommendations came from the city just last year but will inquire.

The 2023-2024 Forward Pinellas intern with the University of South Florida’s Master of Urban and Regional Planning Fellowship provided an overview of work completed.

Alexis Hall provided an overview of the items she has worked on during her time at Forward Pinellas, including Bicycle and Pedestrian Planning Program support, Advantage Alt. 19 Implementation, Gateway Master Plan Implementation, and participation in Safe Streets and Roads for All Projects.

SPOTlight Update

Executive Director Whit Blanton provided the following updates:

- A State Rd. 60 Corridor Study is in the works between Pinellas County, FDOT, and the City of Clearwater. FDOT has identified its share of the needed funding. The City and County have been briefed and indicated interest in financially participating. The City of Clearwater was awarded a Safe Streets for All (SS4A) grant for safety improvements in this corridor in the amount of \$1 million of the \$10 million requested. Thus, there is a need to redesign that project given available funds.
- Regarding waterborne transportation –
 - The St. Pete Chamber has been working with the Urban Land Institute to figure out a scope for a technical assistance panel on improving the efficiency and effectiveness

of the Cross Bay Ferry. Forward Pinellas has offered to do market research and market segmentation analysis.

- There is ongoing conversation on pulling money together for a local match for the FDOT grant awarded to PSTA for the Clearwater Ferry. The target for re-launching this regular service between Dunedin, downtown Clearwater and Clearwater Beach is in October.
- Forward Pinellas is working with the County on the new county campus on Ulmerton Road, including dialogue about how to address transportation and access issues to that site. The City of Largo will initiate amendments to its Comprehensive Plan to implement recommendations from the Target Employment and Industrial Land Study Update for that area.

Other Items

- Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority (PSTA) Report:
 - The PSTA Board approved a Project Management/Construction Management contract to provide project management assistance for various PSTA capital projects, such as a new SunRunner station, solar panel installation, and fiber connection to PSTA.
 - The Board received a report on development that is occurring in the SunRunner corridor which has seen residential, hotel, and commercial development with a construction value of \$9.4 million.
 - Vice Mayor Albritton shared that there will be a ceremony to commemorate the closing on the land for the new Clearwater Transit Center on Monday April 15th at 10am, at the corner of Myrtle and Court St.
- Regional Activities Report:
 - TMA leadership group has discussed the governing board structure for a potential regional MPO. They found consensus regarding the role of regional transportation operators. These would be considered regional entities and, thus, should not come out of Hillsborough's voting allocation by population, so long as the representative from these regional entities is not an elected official.
 - Regarding the regional MPO formation, Chair Janet Long said the St. Pete/Clearwater Airport (PIE) should be included with regional operators. She also inquired if there is value in having someone from our St. Pete/Clearwater Airport (PIE) to come give a presentation on the airport's growth.
 - Commissioner Scott shared that PIE expecting to accommodate an increase from 2.5 million to 3.5 million passengers.
 - Commissioner Eggers noted regional operators' seats/votes would be off the top. The remaining 23 would be split between the three counties. A part of Pinellas County's allocation could come from the airport since, unlike the Tampa International Airport and Port of Tampa Bay, the PIE airport is specifically Pinellas County's, in terms of funding and oversight.

- Whit also added the board of county commissioners oversees the airport, so the airport is currently represented in this way, but this can be revisited as discussions of the regional MPO continue.
- Whit Blanton provided the following legislative updates (not an exhaustive list):
 - The Governor signed Bill 1301 into law. It puts restrictions on transit agencies in terms of advertising and the lane repurposing process. It also ultimately brings more funding to transportation.
 - In the budget the legislature has passed, but has not yet passed to the Governor, there are numerous earmarks (legislative appropriations) listed. These earmarks would come out of the state transportation trust fund. Thus, they will have direct impact on the five-year work program, because when these earmarks come in and are not vetoed by the Governor, they take priority over an MPO's prioritization list.
- The Forward Pinellas apportionment plan has been transmitted to the Governor's office. The interlocal agreement will be sent around to the local government partners shortly, in anticipation of the plan being signed.
- A position statement from the Campbell Park Neighborhood Association regarding I-175 was provided to the board.
- Public Comment:
 - David Ballard Geddis Jr. provided a critical comment about the automobile insurance industry.
 - Vice Mayor Mike Eisner from Tarpon Springs said he wants more LED lights in school zones to improve safety in dimly lit areas.

**Action Sheet
April 10, 2024**

At its April 2024 meeting, the Forward Pinellas Board took the following official actions:

- **Consent Agenda** (vote: 11-0)
Approved to include the following:
 - A. Approval of Minutes of the March 13, 2024 Meeting
 - B. Approval of Committee Appointments
- **Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Modification and Unified Work Program (UPWP) Amendment(s)**
Following a presentation by Chelsea Favero, Forward Pinellas staff, the board, in its role as the metropolitan planning organization, approved the TIP Modification, UPWP amendments and MPO Agreement. (vote: 11-0)
- **PPC and MPO Annual Audits 2022-23 (FY23)**
Following a presentation by the auditors from Rivero, Gordimer and Company, the board approved and accepted the annual audits for the PPC and MPO. (vote: 11-0)