



**WATERBORNE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE
MEETING AGENDA**

August 27, 2021 – 11:00 a.m.

Florida Botanical Gardens; Magnolia Room
12520 Ulmerton Rd, Largo, FL 33774

THE PLANNING COUNCIL AND METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION FOR PINELLAS COUNTY

1. **CALL TO ORDER**
2. **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**
3. **WATERBORNE COMMITTEE RECAP**
4. **WATERBORNE SYSTEM PROFILE**
5. **CLEARWATER AND DUNEDIN RESTART PLAN**
6. **RECOMMENDATIONS/NEXT STEPS**
7. **DISCUSSION**
8. **ADJOURNMENT**

ATTACHMENT: APRIL 2ND MEETING SUMMARY

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Appeals: Certain public meetings result in actions taken by the public board, commission or agency that may be appealed; in such case persons are advised that, if they decide to appeal any decision made at a public meeting/hearing, they will need a record of the proceedings, and, for such purposes, they may need to ensure that a verbatim record of the proceedings is made, which record includes the testimony and evidence upon which the appeal is to be based.

**FORWARD PINELLAS
WATERBORNE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE
MEETING SUMMARY
APRIL 2, 2021**

Committee Members in Attendance:

Mayor Cookie Kennedy, City of Indian Rocks Beach, Committee Chair, Forward Pinellas Treasurer
Commissioner Janet Long, Pinellas County, Forward Pinellas Secretary
Vice Mayor David Allbritton, City of Clearwater
Mayor Julie Ward Bujalski, City of Dunedin
Vice Mayor Suzy Sofer, City of Belleair Bluffs

Absent:

Councilmember Brandi Gabbard, City of St. Petersburg

Also Present:

Whit Blanton, Executive Director, Forward Pinellas
Christina Mendoza, Principal Planner, Forward Pinellas
Maria Kelly, Secretary, Forward Pinellas
Chelsea Hardy, County Attorney's Office

Other Interested Parties in Attendance:

Brad Miller, Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority (PSTA)
Cassandra Borchers, PSTA
Brian Pessaro, Tampa Bay Area Regional Transit Authority (TBARTA)
Chris Leffert, Florida Department of Transportation, District 7 (FDOT)
Trisha & Dennis Rodriguez, Clearwater Ferry Services
Michael Lavery, City of Clearwater
Christine Fisher, City of Clearwater
Cheryl Stacks, City of St. Petersburg
Kasey Cursey, AECOM
Bob Niederhauser, Thrustmaster of TX
Judy DuBose, Thrustmaster of TX
Brannon & Ashley Breaux, Breaux Brothers Shipyard
Joseph Cardella, Elliott Bay Design Group

The Forward Pinellas Waterborne Transportation Subcommittee met in the Magnolia Room at the Florida Botanical Gardens; 12520 Ulmerton Road, Largo.

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 1:15 p.m. by the Committee Vice Chair David Allbritton.

2. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Those in attendance introduced themselves.

3. COMMITTEE KEY OBJECTIVES AND CRITERIA

Whit Blanton opened the meeting by thanking everyone for attending on Good Friday and sharing that two committee members were running late. Mr. Blanton informed everyone that Christina Mendoza and Cassandra Borchers have been working together researching case studies and conducting interviews with key stakeholders and conducting a deep dive into what it means to integrate waterborne transportation

into the public transportation network. Today we are looking for direction, feedback and guidance from the committee as we begin to look at projects for the priority list that is submitted to FDOT every year, to be ready for any additional funding that may come to Pinellas County. Jumping ahead, we hope to have another meeting in the summer and again in the fall, to wrap up the committee's work and develop recommendations that will be incorporated into the Advantage Pinellas Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). It is known that if you want federal or state funding, you need to have a project that is well defined in the LRTP. Also knowing if the project will be financially feasible is an important consideration.

Christina Mendoza, principal planner with Forward Pinellas, provided a brief recap of the discussion and accomplishments from the prior meeting. She reminded the committee of the proposed objectives, how the committee will prioritize projects, and what the next steps are:

- Spring 2021 – Seeking funding strategy
- Summer 2021 – Draft recommendations
- Fall 2021 – Adopt vision and finalize recommendations
- Winter 2021 – Develop a Waterborne Transportation section on the LRTP
- Yearly/As Needed – Evaluate service expansion/phasing
- Yearly/As needed – Measure and celebrate service success

Staff is currently conducting research and analysis on a waterborne travel demand forecasting project, funded by Forward Pinellas and PSTA/FDOT, to determine how to expand service in the County. Seven routes have been identified and the analysis should be completed in July 2021. In addition, we are looking into developing a funding strategy for service through several grant applications that PSTA is currently preparing for Clearwater service, infrastructure investments and costs, new vessel acquisition and additional service development. PSTA was in attendance to provide updates on systemwide ferry integration followed by a group discussion. (Chair Mayor Cookie Kennedy arrived.)

4. PSTA PERSPECTIVES ON SYSTEMWIDE INTEGRATION

Cassandra Borchers, PSTA, provided an overview on Building an Integrated Pinellas System- Phase 1, including looking at how public transportation functions on the water in connection with PSTA's bus service. The discussion at the last meeting included:

- Improving on/expanding the Clearwater service by improving docks, exploring vessel acquisition, and expanding support for operations
- Improving the Cross Bay and John's Pass services by enhancing commuter options and developing a plan for new, more accessible terminals
- Examining other options for expanding existing service

PSTA has been actively working on the passenger ferry program grant pursuit, understanding dock and vessel costs, and while they will be prepared to submit a grant application, there are many refinements needed first. They are also working on service development options. Although the service is in combination with the capital investment, it can also run independently of the capital investment.

Ms. Borchers reviewed dock concept developments, focusing on a singular design, with high-level cost estimates, vessel acquisition and consideration of a commitment to funding strategies to get the infrastructure built. (Commissioner Janet Long arrived). PSTA has consulted with the cities of Clearwater and Dunedin, focusing on a

replicable design, upland waiting area with ADA compliant passenger access, two vessel accommodations and utility connections. Next steps would include coordinating and integrating with the Clearwater Marina to refine the preliminary concept and solidify cost estimates per dock; prepare grant applications and secure a local grant match for capital.

The vessel acquisition concept will take the following into consideration:

- Consistent fleet to minimize maintenance costs and allow for service expansion
- Environmentally sustainable/Green Technologies
- Vessel speed requirements of 17-20 knots, full loaded
- Min 50 passenger capacity plus bicycle capacity, ADA compliant
- Meets bridge height restriction, 14" vertical clearance
- Propulsion Upgradability

PSTA would like to move forward to fund and conduct a concept design phased project to supplement the work shown today, refine the preliminary concept and secure the cost estimates per vessel, prepare the application for the FTA Passenger Ferry Grant program and work to secure the local capital grant match whether it is from the state or other funding sources.

Lastly, the reservation service currently existing for the Clearwater Ferry is necessary for the pandemic, but PSTA would like to see it return to regularly scheduled service. A recommendation of a higher level of service to include 7 days a week, with a 30-45-minute frequency with extra seasonal service was made. The fare structure will be reviewed and changed to include federal half-fare requirements and fare equity analysis.

Requested actions for the committee are to add the Integrated Ferry System- Phase 1 to the Forward Pinellas priority list and to get support and secure a local funding match.

5. DISCUSSION

In response to query by Councilmember David Allbritton regarding the number of passengers to transport, Ms. Borchers stated the vessel currently being sought would hold about 60 passengers with a 40 to 50-foot range in vessel length.

In response to query by Mayor Julie Bujalski as how this service will connect to the current bus service and trolley, Ms. Borchers explained that at the stops, the trolley would be rerouted to connect with the ferry drop off locations as well as service scheduling to make sure the ferry and trolley would arrive at the same time so that riders could transfer. Depending on the route, headways could be as much as 45 minutes, and trolley service would need to be increased. Covered dock areas would need to be constructed for waiting customers so that the picturesque sunsets would not be blocked for people coming down to the docks to see the sunsets. Mayor Bujalski also requested a copy of the presentations to share with the Dunedin Marina engineering team. Ms. Borchers responded in that by working with Dunedin and creating a master plan for this project, all of these inquiries can be addressed. Mayor Bujalski also commented that the vessels need to be cute and fun to attract customers.

Commissioner Suzy Sofer inquired as to how private ferry service such as the

Clearwater Ferry was going to be incorporated into PSTA, to ensure this business was not putting other businesses out of business. PSTA wants to see this ferry service enhanced by the public/private partnership. The technical expertise of the private operator is needed by PSTA, while they work with PSTA to offer public service. PSTA will work with the private operators to develop ferry schedules. Commissioner Sofer also inquired if there are any restrictions the grant cannot be used for? These are capital grants and although there are restrictions, PSTA sees them as minor restrictions.

Commissioner Janet Long shared praise for presentation by PSTA and the partnership with private enterprises to make waterborne transportation more of a reality. She praised the selection of a hybrid vessel which syncs with meeting the criteria at the federal level focusing on electrification for public transportation options. *Commissioner Long made a motion for the recommendation to Forward Pinellas to approve adding the Integrated Ferry System- Phase 1 to the Multimodal Priority list. Mayor Bujalski seconded the motion.*

Chris Leffert, Florida Department of Transportation, District 7 (FDOT) responded to query by Mayor Kennedy, as to how the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) will advance the project once a recommendation is made to add it to the Multimodal Priority List. Chris Leffert, FDOT District 7 responded by saying that the service demonstration project application will be submitted by PSTA and the process to funding begins. There are a lot of pieces to the project such as local matches, etc. Mayor Kennedy also inquired as to how many vessels PSTA was looking to acquire? Ms. Borchers shared that the level of frequency PSTA is looking to achieve would require five vessels, the Clearwater Ferry currently operates three and with the purchase of two by PSTA, the operation could begin. Mayor Kennedy also asked PSTA to work with the cities who may benefit from this project to bring them on board. Ms. Borchers expressed a desire to bring the presentation to the BIG-C, to make them aware of what they will need to do to be ready for waterborne transportation of this magnitude before PSTA can bring them on board.

Mayor Kennedy asked for a vote from the committee, and the motion carried with a unanimous vote.

At this time, Mayor Kennedy asked the members of the consulting team and guests to come to the podium to introduce themselves.

6. NEXT STEPS

Ms. Mendoza reviewed what's next for the committee. The committee is seeking a funding strategy for waterborne service. The funding strategy will require local operating commitments and a match for capital grants, which is a condition for expanding service. Several options at the local level include the Tourist Development Tax, the Tourist Development Council (TDC) Capital Projects Funding Program. Dock upgrades and dock construction could be eligible for this funding, however a TDC recommendation and BCC approval would be needed with matching funds. This is just one avenue of funding shared.

Cheryl Stacks, City of St. Petersburg gave an update on the Cross-Bay Ferry. The City of St. Petersburg is in the last year of the Seasonal Service in the contract with HMS, with no opportunities to renew. This is also the last year for the FDOT Service Development Grant. The city is currently working on an RFP to continue the seasonal service. The Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners is currently looking

to take up an item at its meeting next week to return their waterborne transportation planning back to Hillsborough County; it is currently with HART in a contract with HMS. In the council packet agreement, as a part of that agreement there is an opportunity to allow ferry service between downtown Tampa and downtown St. Petersburg. The City is really interested in seeing that the seasonal ferry service continues and will hopefully turn into a yearlong service. St. Petersburg has set aside \$200,000 for 2022 for continued seasonal service accounting for the fact that FDOT's grant funding will no longer be available.

Trish Rodriguez commented that they are grateful for the opportunity to be servicing the line for Clearwater and the support they have received.

7. NEXT MEETING

Ms. Mendoza advised that the next meeting would likely be in July and a Doodle Poll would be forthcoming to determine the best date.

8. ADJOURNMENT

There being no additional items for discussion, the meeting adjourned at 2:16 p.m.