



**WATERBORNE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE
MEETING AGENDA**

December 17, 2021 – 1:00 p.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. **REGIONAL WATERBORNE VISION**
5. **RESTART PLAN OPTIONS OVERVIEW**
6. **WATERBORNE POLICY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND UPDATES**
7. **DISCUSSION / NEXT STEPS**
8. **ADJOURNMENT**

ATTACHMENT: AUGUST 27TH MEETING SUMMARY

Public participation is solicited without regard to race, color, national origin, age, sex, religion, disability, or family status. Persons who require special accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act or persons who require translation services (free of charge) should contact the Office of Human Rights, 400 South Fort Harrison Avenue, Suite 300, Clearwater, Florida 33756; [(727) 464-4062 (V/TDD)] at least seven days prior to the meeting.

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
AUGUST 27, 2021**

Committee Members in Attendance:

Mayor Cookie Kennedy, City of Indian Rocks Beach, Committee Chair, Forward Pinellas Vice Chair
Commissioner Janet Long, Pinellas County, Forward Pinellas Secretary
Councilmember David Allbritton, City of Clearwater, Forward Pinellas Treasurer
Mayor Julie Ward Bujalski, City of Dunedin
Commissioner 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
Anne Morris, 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
Eric Heinz, WSP
Vince Gizzi, City of Dunedin
Abi Jimenez, Charlie Crist's Representative
Cheryl Stacks, City of St. Petersburg

The Forward Pinellas Waterborne Transportation Committee 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 1:00 p.m. by the Committee Chair Cookie Kennedy.

2. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

A moment of silence was recognized for the passing of William B. Horne, Clearwater City Manager and our U.S. troops in Afghanistan and around the world. Those in attendance introduced themselves. The chair also recognized Abi Jimenez, Representative from Charlie Crist's office.

3. WATERBORNE COMMITTEE RECAP

Whit Blanton opened the meeting with thanking everyone for attending, stating this was the penultimate meeting before asking the committee to formally make a recommendation to the Forward Pinellas Board. The goal is to integrate waterborne

transportation into the public transportation framework so there can be predictability, consistency, and opportunity for public funding which is what is needed to make public transportation a part of the transportation network. The work of this committee is important as it gives legitimacy to the recommendations, and the county is looking to this committee to provide guidance related to funding opportunities to encourage the creation of an integrated waterborne transportation network.

Christina Mendoza, principal planner with Forward Pinellas, shared that today's meeting will consist of discussing next steps and sharing waterborne research updates the consultant has provided. The consultant has developed a ridership forecast for the existing and proposed routes and preliminary cost information and restart service plan for the existing services in Clearwater and Dunedin. Preliminary recommendations have also been developed for consideration by the committee.

At the April meeting, action steps were discussed and have since been completed, as well as research updates. There was discussion of PSTA systemwide integration that covered vessel designs, dock concepts and proposed routes. Also provided was an overview of potential funding options for waterborne service.

Next steps will be to cover draft recommendations in today's meeting and finalize the recommendations in the fall, as well as the system plan vision. By winter of 2021, the goal is to develop a waterborne section of the Advantage Pinellas Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). Looking forward, the committee will host a yearly meeting to evaluate service expansion and phasing as well as measure and celebrate service success.

4. WATERBORNE SYSTEM PROFILE

Ms. Mendoza then provided context on the waterborne ridership forecasting work. The study was funded by Forward Pinellas and FDOT through PSTA. She informed the group that they will be presenting some preliminary ridership forecasts for seven identified routes. The plan is to finalize the report and results after the meeting so that the group's comments and questions can be incorporated. The consultants were there to present their findings. In addition, PSTA has been working on identifying operational and maintenance costs with focus on the Clearwater and Dunedin existing service.

Ridership forecasts were developed for existing and proposed routes, and the analysis conducted was meant to be an estimate of potential demand based on an evaluated methodology. The team will be using this forecast to help build the case for funding and to identify key routes to consider for future service expansion. But that is only one piece of the puzzle, there are other considerations as well such as projected operating and infrastructure costs as well as a set of identified prioritization criteria that has been shown previously, that will help to evaluate each route.

Eric Heinz, with WSP, shared a presentation giving an overview of what an expanded and enhanced waterborne transportation system could look like. The primary objective is to evaluate the ridership potential of operating waterborne ferry service(s) along the intercoastal waterways of Pinellas County. Ridership forecasts of the existing and proposed network of Pinellas County are primarily driven by population, employment and the number of hotel units around each dock location. It also factors in the travel time distances from dock to dock and the number of ferry trips. Capital and operating cost assumptions were also shared.

Existing routes reviewed were:

The Cross Bay St. Petersburg to Tampa
North Beach: Downtown Clearwater to Clearwater Marina
Dunedin

Proposed new routes:

North Beach: Downtown Clearwater to Clearwater Marina
South Beach: Clearwater to Sand Key
Intercoastal North: Clearwater Beach to John's Pass
Intercoastal South: John's Pass to St. Pete Beach
South Point: St. Pete Beach to St. Petersburg
Gateway: St. Petersburg to Gateway
Apollo Beach (St. Pete): St. Petersburg to Apollo Beach
Apollo Beach: Apollo Beach to Tampa

Future action steps include: 1) secure funding for existing operations, 2) support capital improvements for existing services, 3) expanded existing operations to optimal scenarios (revalidate model) and 4) establish priorities and include in LRTP.

Mayor Bujalski requested a copy of the PowerPoint presentation to be sent to members of the committee and also requested additional clarification on the forecasted ridership projections; questioning if the numbers shown on the existing routes were actual or projected. Mr. Heinz responded, with regard to the existing routes, the forecast is based on actual numbers. The existing routes were used to validate the transportation forecasted model.

Commissioner Long expressed her frustration in that the commission is being pushed into a quick decision without regard to this committee's big vision, ideas for where the funding will come from, or even what the community identifies as the greatest need. There has been no prior discussion of these ferry routes from Pinellas County over into Hillsborough. Additionally, the Cross Bay Ferry service is to begin on October 1st, and no one has come to the Commission regarding this service or had a conversation with the Commission or made known the routes the Cross Bay Ferry is looking to take. Commissioner Long was also under the impression that the committee was seeking funding action and that was not the case.

Mr. Blanton stated in response that this committee is the forum to make presentations on desired actions for waterborne transportation and to ask where waterborne transportation fits into the Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) and as of this meeting, there are no waterborne transportation projects identified in the LRTP. There will be no decisions made today, however the committee will ask for a recommendation to the Forward Pinellas Board to incorporate this into the LRTP, identifying priority routes and seeking funding at the next meeting.

5. CLEARWATER AND DUNEDIN RESTART PLAN

Cassandra Borchers, PSTA, provided an overview on the Ferry Public Transportation Operations Restart Plan.

Key Activities:

- Transforming existing proof of concept projects into integrated, viable public transportation
- Service hours that meet needs of commuters and entertainment
- Equitable fare pricing policies
- Networked communication
 - trip planning and real time locators
 - fare media integration
- Public sector involvement
 - Funding contribution
 - System operation / Capital ownership

After a sit-down discussion with Clearwater Ferry to see which were the most productive parts of the current service, PSTA was able to construct a fixed service Restart Operations Proposal, showing year-round service for Downtown Clearwater, Clearwater Marina, North Beach and Dunedin, days of operation and a Spring Break Operation segment for Downtown Clearwater to Clearwater Marina. Ms. Borchers also shared the projected FY22 Cost of Service estimate, with a total cost of restart service equating to \$622,965 and showing revenue hours of \$5,743. PSTA is looking to request a potential contribution for the service from the City of Clearwater for \$260,283 (3,235 revenue hours), the City of Dunedin for \$49,927 (621 revenue hours) and Pinellas County for \$151,825 (1,887 revenue hours), along with anticipated fares and advertising revenues, which would put PSTA in a place to have a regular fixed route service.

Ms. Borchers reviewed the Capital Investment Proposal and once local funding is secured for a restart of service, federal opportunities will become available for capital investment. An FTA Passenger Ferry Program notice of funding availability came out earlier this month, and an application has been prepared that would support the Clearwater and Dunedin routes. All the docks and all the vessels may not be incorporated, but some funds could be made available. In conversations with FDOT, a match through Toll Revenue Credits will allow some FDOT funds to be available, but these funds would have to be requested when grant funds become available. A request can also be made of the Tourist Development Council (TDC) for the docks but would not be able to be used for the vessels. By applying for this grant at this time and making sure everything is in line, this will give PSTA a better position next year, even if they do not get accepted this year. There are only \$38 million dollars available for the entire country, with \$4 million available for electric vessels. What PSTA is looking for is a hybrid-electric vessel which will allow for a greener system while still having the reliability of the backup traditional propulsion system. It will also allow for converting to all electric should the improved technology opportunity arise.

PSTA is fully committed to this program, currently supporting a dock design prototype and cost estimating \$53,600; Ferry vessel concept design for \$48,300; Additional design services for \$33,000; service development / partner agency coordination and grant application development and submittal. Future commitments, currently in the 2022 budget, consist of \$100,000 State of Good Repair Support; pre-grant planning and design services (10% design); Service Oversight: operations, safety, audits and regulatory compliance. Technology commitments include automatic vehicle locators, fare collection system and APP integration; Marketing: Cross promotion and signage as

well as Service Expansion Planning.

Councilmember Allbritton inquired if the cities were contributing to operational investments until grant funds are made available. Ms. Borchers confirmed for the Restart Service Program, contributing funds from the cities will be used; however, PSTA will seek local state and federal funding opportunities first.

Mr. Blanton added that the Infrastructure Bill that is forthcoming will essentially increase sources of revenue. One of the sources of revenue for transportation is Surface Transportation Block Grant Funds and there is no match for these grant funds. These funds can be applied to dock and similar capital improvements. The Transportation Alternatives Program is also an available source of funding used through the MPO which awards eligible multimodal projects in Pinellas County under \$2 million.

Mayor Bujalski inquired if the ferry service will be integrated into the PSTA bus service and fare service system, which Ms. Borchers confirmed.

Commissioner Long shared a conversation with Michael Zas, the representing County Attorney for the Tourist Development Council (TDC) on ordinances and statutes. If it can be shown that a transportation service is being provided for tourists to move from one place to the other, the TDC funding can be available. Advertising for the TDC can help sweeten the deal through a bus or vessel wrap.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS/NEXT STEPS

Ms. Mendoza provided a brief overview of some draft recommendations for the Committee to bring to the Board:

- Recommend establishing a sustainable funding strategy that uses grants
- Will require local operating commitments and a funding match (a condition for expanding service)
- Identification of viable funding options facilitated by coordination
- Authorize staff to secure local government funding commitments from participating local entities
- The Committee recommends that PSTA serve as the administrative and contracting entity for waterborne service
- PSTA is an eligible recipient of federal, state and local funds
- Enabling the agency to contract with one or more private operators for service delivery
- Recommends a phased approach to the incorporation of routes
- Identified routes are based on identified needs
- Determination of feasibility will be based on:
 - funding availability and a multi-year commitment
 - operational and infrastructure cost estimates
 - ridership forecasts for proposed routes identified
- Prioritization based on evaluation criteria
 - providing a viable alternative to driving and parking
 - enhance connectivity to existing and planned transit service
 - presence of safe walking and bicycling infrastructure to other modes
 - provide reasonably competitive travel times to other modes
 - consider equitable transportation outcomes when determining

- fare structure for waterborne services
- local commitment to match for capital and service
- Continued monitoring and reporting through staff coordination efforts
- Will play a key role in implementation of a systemwide plan through the County
- Goal is to create an integrated transportation network that provides quick, accessible and reliable service.

7. DISCUSSION

Chair Kennedy inquired as to when would the elected officials of the communities should begin the conversations with the community members about the implementation of this waterborne transportation plan. Mr. Blanton shared that the conversation should begin now, based on how high the priority for waterborne transportation is to that community. When this program is adopted into the LRTP next year, that would begin the official policy to pursue waterborne transportation within the county. Mr. Blanton would be happy to visit the different communities to give a presentation, but the first order of business would be to get the Clearwater Ferry up and running back to normal capacity.

Mayor Julie Bujalski inquired if the committee draft recommendations are approved and we convene in November, will the committee be asked to approve the draft recommendations and the system plan vision and present the recommendations to the Forward Pinellas Board? Mr. Blanton confirmed and noted that based on the recommendation, the LRTP would be amended and brought back to the Forward Pinellas Board for approval of the amendment.

Brad Miller, PSTA, commented that he feels positive about this project and looks forward to working with the different municipalities seeking this service. There will need to be two contracts with each municipality, with the first one being an interlocal agreement relating to funding since the start-up service would need to be funded by the municipality until state or federal funding can be established. It could consist of a four party interlocal agreement between the City of Clearwater, the City of Dunedin, Pinellas County and PSTA to fund the operations. The second agreement would be a two-party agreement between PSTA and the service provider. The second contract would cover the fare amount and maintaining the vehicle to provide the service. The wrinkle in this is that PSTA has already invested many dollars into the planning and is holding \$100,00 in funding to get the vessels operational. Before investing, PSTA would like a commitment from these municipalities and Pinellas County for the first year of funding. Dunedin and Clearwater have committed. Once a commitment comes from Pinellas County, PSTA will invest in the capital project to get the service vehicles up and running for 2023.

Commission Long commented that the organization of the Pinellas County 2023 budget will begin late January, early February and it is best to get before the council early.

Mr. Miller also commented that the Waterborne Transportation Committee should have additional discussion regarding the Cross Bay Ferry because the county is being asked to support the Cross Bay Ferry as well even though it is not just Pinellas County waterborne transportation.

Commissioner Long also commented to the committee with respect to the individual municipality budgets, to keep an eye on the AARP funding, as that funding can be layered into economic recovery funding of waterborne transportation. Mr. Blanton recommended that members check with their municipal attorney to determine meeting

the requirements. Mr. Blanton expressed that he and Representative Chaney have had several favorable conversations with the other municipalities regarding waterborne transportation and January would be the time to take the Waterborne Transportation presentation of recommendations of this committee and the Board to the other municipalities' council meetings.

Commissioner Suzy Sofer, City of Belleair Bluffs, commented that being one of the smaller communities, funding would be a target factor. Funding opportunities are far and few, but this will be a primary focus to participate. Mr. Blanton commented that some MPO Transportation Alternative fund grants do not require a match, therefore Forward Pinellas can assist with the capital cost, however we do not have the ability to assist with operating costs.

Cheryl Stacks, City of St. Petersburg, stated that the Cross Bay Ferry is transitioning to be led by Hillsborough County as well as the contract with HMS. Much of this work has been completed since the last Waterborne Transportation meeting and is close to completion. The City of St. Petersburg has held a great partnership with Hillsborough on this project and Ms. Stacks would be happy to see if Hillsborough would like to share a presentation at the next committee meeting on their vision of the combined service connecting Hillsborough County and Pinellas County. St. Petersburg is still very interested in sustaining the service that is the Cross Bay Ferry and some of the routes presented today that showed additional connections.

Commissioner Sofer commented that she feels it would not be a far stretch to request bed tax dollars. Mr. Blanton commented that although the TDC was not ready to jump in to fund transportation projects when Commissioner Long was chair of the TDC, if the committee brings them a project for evaluation, the case could be made, especially if it shows benefits to tourism.

Commissioner Long reminded the group that the constraints around the TDC dollars are written into Statute and the legislature historically is very reluctant to open that statute because bad things happen when you open a statute in the Florida legislature. Since those conversations took place 3 years ago, that Board has changed significantly and therefore the institutional history and knowledge are no longer there.

No action is necessary today and the committee can accommodate the invitation of Hillsborough sharing a presentation.

Ms. Mendoza advised that the next meeting would likely be in November or December and a doodle poll will be sent out for the best date.

Mayor Kennedy in closing stated there is a lot involved in these big asks and looking at the big picture, and it can be frustrating or exhilarating. This committee is outspoken, and everyone sees that waterborne transportation is good for the communities.

8. ADJOURNMENT

There being no additional items for discussion, the meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m.