

May 8, 2019

*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

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#### **A consultant for Pinellas County presented alternative options for improving traffic flow and reducing travel times at the intersection at Gulf to Bay and Belcher Road**

- A representative from the county had previously come to the Forward Pinellas Board in February 2017 to discuss original recommendations for the intersection
  - Options of widening the roadway and adding turn lanes would cost between \$15M and \$18M but would not improve the traffic level of service to justify the cost
  - An overpass at Belcher Road would improve traffic flow and level of service, but cost more than \$80M
  - Pinellas County directed staff to look at additional alternatives to improve traffic flow and safety
- The consultant is a national expert in innovative intersection designs
- The new recommended alternative would create “Michigan U-turn” options instead of left turns at the intersection, resulting in a greatly improved estimated level of service
  - Signalized U-turns would be added in the medians 500-700 feet east and west of Belcher, based on observed traffic patterns
  - This would allow better traffic flow with reduced travel time, shorter intersection cycle time, and increase pedestrian safety for crossing
  - This alternative would also allow the signal to remain at Walmart/Publix on Belcher, which would have to be removed in many of the expanded roadway scenario
  - Small amounts of right-of-way would have to be purchased to allow “bump-outs” that would help large trucks make the U-turns safely
  - This would be by the cheapest option of all alternatives, coming in at \$13.4M
  - It would be nearly as effective as the \$80M overpass option previously rejected
- Board members expressed concern about several factors, including the difficulty of conveying advantages to the public, whether the U-turn option would be intuitive for drivers, and whether the U-turn would decrease traffic volume at this intersection but increase congestion at other intersections
- The presentation was not an action item and will come before the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners for a decision

#### **Forward Pinellas staff presented an update on the Advantage Pinellas Plan**

- Staff presented a snapshot of the outreach activity that has been conducted countywide for the past several months, which shows widespread support for spending funds on better bus service, rail and bicycle/pedestrian connections and lack of support for spending on more or wider roads
  - This generated significant discussion among board members, who expressed surprise at the results and felt it told a story that would be valuable in development of the plan
  - Board members asked staff to explain the locations and methodology of the activity
  - The activity is a ball game survey to help people define funding preferences and is not statistically valid
  - Outreach events thus far have occurred mainly in South Pinellas County with more planned for spring and summer elsewhere
  - Board members liked the exercise and expressed desire to see more outreach in all parts of the county
- Staff also spoke about the needs assessment with the roadway network adjustment and priority transit corridors

- Staff are running computer model tests on various roadways to evaluate changes to the road network, such as widening/reducing lanes or using toll roads, including east-west corridor alternatives
- Transit needs are being developed, focusing on suitability for improved service to connect existing residents to workforce development and job-training opportunities
  - Premium or priority transit corridors were identified by connecting the highest employment and workforce development areas with transit-supportive neighborhoods, reflecting population and social/economic characteristics
  - This resulted in developing three main types of inter-connected premium transit corridors
    - Regional
    - Tourism-oriented
    - Intra-County
- Board members expressed a desire that the Gateway area be served by premium transit and that transit corridors serve tourists as well as residents

**FDOT District 7 Secretary David Gwynn gave a status update on several Tampa Bay Next projects**

- Express lanes on I-275 from I-375 to Gandy are currently being evaluated
- FDOT is in the process of designing a Bus on Shoulder pilot project on I-275 in Pinellas County, with construction estimated to be completed in 2022
- The \$580M Gateway Expressway project is underway, with completion in 2022
  - The Gateway Expressway will provide connections from US 19 and Bayside Bridge to I-275, and the I-275 widening will create a tolled express lane in each direction from south of Gandy to north of 4th Street N
  - Gwynn also discussed the workforce training program that District 7 had implemented for the Gateway Expressway project, which had been very successful in training and retaining workers
- Howard Frankland Bridge construction will begin in early 2020, with a transit envelope designed to support future light rail
- FDOT is still working to obtain funding for the full Westshore interchange, which has been prioritized by Hillsborough, Pinellas and Pasco as the number one regional priority and includes:
  - Three general purpose and two express lanes in each direction
  - Express lane access to Tampa International Airport
  - Dedicated ramp from Kennedy Blvd to the airport
  - Connects Veteran's to I-275 via express lanes
  - Local street connections under I-275
  - New connection from Rio Street to I-275
- The difficulty has been that the downtown interchange still faces community opposition, and the Federal Highway Administration would prefer to move the two interchanges forward at once
  - District 7 would prefer to separate the Westshore interchange and advance that billion-dollar project separately while continuing to work with the community on solutions for the downtown interchange

**Forward Pinellas staff outlined changes to the Transportation Alternatives Program, which were approved by the board**

- The TA Program uses federal funds to construct pedestrian and bicycle projects, as well as infrastructure to improve non-car access to transit
- In the past, subjective scoring and loose application requirements had led to a long list with many projects and very limited funding, resulting in projects that stayed on the list for long periods of time without funding
- The revised program structure would have a more fully outlined set of criteria
  - Minimum award of \$300K, maximum award of \$2M

- Forward Pinellas will select a maximum of four projects for funding each year
- Each jurisdiction would only be allowed to submit two projects per year
  - In the first year of the new criteria, jurisdictions would be allowed to submit three projects if they had projects on the previous list
- After three years without getting funding, projects will be removed from the list
- Jurisdictions must meet three prerequisites for projects to be considered
  - Local commitment
  - 100% of right-of-way or easement
  - Have achieved Local Agency Program (LAP) certification, make progress toward LAP certification, or partner with a LAP-certified agency to build the project
- Scoring criteria (including percentage of local match, filling a gap, access to priority transit, and more), are assigned points, for a maximum of 80
- The new TA project priority list will come to the board for approval in March 2020

**The board approved amendments to the current Transportation Improvement Program**

- An amendment adding \$2.5M in FY2020 toward design for express lanes and lane continuity on I-275
- An amendment adding \$533K to FY2019 for engineering design of a roundabout to improve intersection safety on Alternate US 19 at Florida Avenue

**The board recommended approval for two amendments to the Countywide Plan submitted by the City of Largo**

- A subthreshold amendment from Retail and Services to Employment for a property on 66th street north, allowing for future development of what is currently a warehouse and storage facility
- A regular amendment from Employment and Target Employment Center to Retail and Services and Target Employment Center for a property in the ICOT center, allowing for continued retail and commercial uses on the property

**Other Items**

- Tarpon Springs Vice-Mayor Townsend Tarapani joined the board, filling the seat previously held by Tarpon Springs City Commissioner Jacob Karr
- The board approved amendments to the agency's Public Participation Plan
- The board heard an update from Bike/Walk Tampa Bay about its initiatives to increase safety and biking/walking education in the region
- The Forward Pinellas Legislative Committee will be adjourning until September as the legislative session has ended
- The Indian Shores mayor will be coming before the board in June to talk about drainage issues and sidewalk needs on Gulf Boulevard
- The 2017/18 agency audit was presented and approved, with one internal control finding on the MPO side that had been swiftly addressed

**Action Sheet**

**May 8, 2019**

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

- **Consent Agenda** (vote: 12-0)  
Approved to include the following:
  - A. Approval of Minutes of the April 10, 2019 Meeting
  - B. Approval of Committee Appointments (CAC & LCB)
  - C. Acceptance of Quarter Two Financial Report
  - D. Approval of Forward Pinellas/FDOT Joint Certification Statement and Summary
  - E. Cancellation of the August Forward Pinellas Meeting
  
- **Proposed Amendment(s) to FY 2018/19 – FY 2022/23 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)**  
Following a description of the amendments by FDOT, the board, in its role as the metropolitan planning organization, approved two amendments to the TIP by roll call vote to:
  - add \$2.5 million to FY2020 toward the development of design concept plans for improvements to I-275 (SR93) from 54th Avenue South to South of Roosevelt Boulevard (vote: 12-0)
  - add \$533,000 to FY2019 for the preliminary engineering of a roundabout to improve intersection safety on Alternate US 19 at Florida Avenue (vote: 12-0)
  
- **Proposed Amendments to the Public Participation Plan (PPP)**  
Following a staff presentation, the board, in its role as the metropolitan planning organization, approved the amendments to the Public Participation Plan as outlined. (vote: 12-0)
  
- **Subthreshold Countywide Plan Map Amendment(s)**  
One case was recommended for approval:
  - 1. CW 19-09 – City of Largo (vote: 11-0, Councilmember Rice had stepped out of the meeting)
  
- **Regular Countywide Plan Map Amendment(s)**  
One case was recommended for approval:
  - 1. CW 19-10 – City of Largo (vote: 11-0, Councilmember Rice had stepped out of the meeting)
  
- **FY 2017/18 PPC and MPO Audits**  
Following a presentation by the audit firm, the board accepted the final audits for both the PPC and MPO. (vote: 12-0)
  
- **Transportation Alternatives Program**  
Following a staff presentation, the board, in its role as the metropolitan planning organization, voted to approve the changes to the program as outlined. (vote: 12-0)