



MEETING MINUTES

Date: December 5, 2007 - 9:00 AM
Re: SR 40 PD&E Study
Steering Committee Meeting No. 9

Attendees: See sign-in sheet

Meeting Handouts: Meeting Agenda and PowerPoint Presentation slides

Bill Walsh, the Project Manager for the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), gave some welcoming and introductory statements to the group. He introduced George Hadley, Leslie McCarthy and Jorge Rivera, with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Bill gave a quick update on the project status. He stated that the wildlife crossings have been an issue in the project and that they have gained a general consensus on the preferred alternatives. He also stated that the Value Engineering (VE) Study is finished and indicated that Alex is working on responses to each of the group's recommendations.

Next, Bill gave a brief overview of the status of the Monster Pipe issue. He indicated that the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) is on the same page with Marion County in regards to plans and permitting. Mickey Thomason, with FDEP, stated that they met with the Marion County Commission. He commented that FDEP will be working to improve the water quality.

Bill turned over the meeting to Alex Hull, with Inwood Consulting Engineers, Inc. Alex gave an overview of the purpose of the meeting and directed the group's attention the meeting agenda.

Alex moved to the second item on the agenda and asked for comments from FHWA. Leslie stated that FHWA was pleased to have the opportunity to participate in the VE Study. She mentioned that the VE group worked to find ways to not only save money but to make the project more cost-effective. She stated that it was an intensive process.

George mentioned that he had two major comments on the study to date. He commented that the wildlife crossings outside the build section of the project limits will not be eligible for federal funding as part of this transportation project. He mentioned that the wildlife crossings outside of the build project limits could be funded through other federal funding sources such as enhancement funds. Bill added that they could environmentally clear the crossings outside of the build section through the NEPA process and then they could be approved for future funding from other sources.

The second comment that George presented to the group involved the NEPA decision. He stated that if the United States Forest Service (USFS) plans to transfer the property within the right-of-way, they will need to get together in order to come up with the proper wording for the NEPA document.

Cathy Lowenstein, with the Florida Division of Forestry (FDOF), asked if the crossings in the corridor around Barberville are out of the funding qualifications. George stated that since those crossings are out of the area where the action will be taken (build project), they do not qualify for federal funding from the transportation sources but would be eligible from other federal funding such as enhancement funds.

Keith Schue, with the Nature Conservancy, asked if there is a way to prioritize the crossings outside of the build section. He commented that he questions the effectiveness of the crossings in the two lane section of the project with the exception of the areas where there are already constraints. George suggested that they come up with a prioritization tool to give to FDOT and MPO planners. Alex agreed and stated that they can prioritize the crossings outside the build section.

Leslie requested that everyone introduce themselves. The group went around the room and gave introductions.

Todd Mecklenborg, with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), asked if they will be consulting on the crossings outside of the build section. Steve stated that USFWS should consult on the entire project. Todd indicated that they will need an environmental baseline for the entire project before they can give an opinion.

George asked who will take the lead on the crossings outside of the build section in the future. He asked if FDOT will be available to supplement the studies. Bill stated that he will have to think about it before he can give a definite answer.

Jim Thorsen, consultant with USFS, stated that they will want to convert the entire right-of-way to an easement at once rather than only the build section.

Next, Alex directed the group's attention to the PowerPoint presentation. Alex gave an explanation of VE and a summary of the VE Study group's recommendations. He explained that VE is a process that brings people, with varying expertise from outside of a project, to look at ways to add value and save money. He stated that FDOT conducts VE on all major projects. He showed the group the list of participants of the VE meetings. He explained that the group focused on the areas that are highest in cost, the wildlife crossings, Ocklawaha River Bridge, right-of-way and drainage. Moreover, he gave an overview of the team mission.

Alex briefly went over each of the wildlife crossing recommendations from the VE Team with the group. The first VE recommendation is to replace an underpass with an overpass. Alex explained that they talked about the recommendation at the Wildlife Crossings Committee meeting and there was a comment that there are some instances where an overpass may be applicable; however there would be a lot of impacts to habitat as a result of the slopes that would need to be built. He stated that there is one location where the terrain works for an overpass. He indicated that after doing a cost comparison on an overpass versus an underpass, they found that they were not going to recommend an overpass except where the terrain is suitable.

Alex discussed the VE recommendation to look at using flat slab bridges rather than bridges with beams and to use an hour glass shape to reduce the actual size of the crossing.

Next, Alex went over the VE road analysis recommendations. He stated that one of the recommendations involved eliminating the multi-use path. He indicated that the cost savings associated with eliminating the trail would be high. He stated that they will be

recommending to continue evaluation of the road with and without a trail.

Alex explained the next recommendation, which was to continue with an urban typical section from Forest Corners to the end of the project limits. He stated that typically, in highly urbanized areas, the right-of-way costs are more significant than the construction costs. In this case, the construction costs out weight the right-of-way costs so the rural optimized alternative was the most cost effective alternative. Alex mentioned that there are also operational reasons why the recommendation would not work. He stated that the design speed for the urban typical is 50 mph but the current operating speed is about 60 mph.

Alex next discussed the recommendation to eliminate the sidewalks on the south side of roadway from the end of the urban construction in Segment 3. He stated that he thinks it is appropriate to have sidewalks. Keith asked if there are places where they could pick up savings by eliminating sidewalks. Bill stated that there seems to be a need for the sidewalks on both sides.

Alex went over the recommendation to move the east project end limit, 2000' to the west. Alex explained that it will save money and right-of-way impacts to use a drop lane and widen the median width to receive four lanes. Bill mentioned that they should look at the level of service of the intersection. Alex agreed that they will take a look at it.

The group next discussed the VE recommendation on the Ocklawaha River Bridge. Alex mentioned that there was a question as to whether or not it would be better to salvage the substructure and piers. He commented that the top of the bridge does not meet current design standards. He explained that the structural engineers, with the consulting firm RS&H, have done analysis on the possibility of saving the substructure. He indicated that they have found that the cost would be the same as if they replaced the entire structure. Alex explained that the bridge was constructed around 1972 and the lifespan of the bridge may be up, therefore, the cost effectiveness of keeping the substructure is questionable. He stated that they will continue to carry both options forward for additional analysis.

Keith asked if there could be the possibility of keeping the old bridge for two lanes of the traffic until the lifespan is up and it needs to be replaced.

Alex stated that they will continue to look at cost savings options for the bridge because it is such a big ticket item.

Next, Alex gave an overview of the "gist" alternatives from the last Wildlife Crossings meeting. He explained that it has been a good process thus far and the group has come up with a general consensus of the preferred crossing alternatives.

Alex stated that in location A the "gist" alternative was number 8. He mentioned that they are working with St. John's River Water Management District (SJRWMD) to look at the possibility of discharging stormwater runoff into the upland soils.

Mickey requested an update on the possibility to discharging stormwater into the soil in order to reduce the amount of ponds. Alex stated that a field meeting was been scheduled with Tony Miller, with SJRWMD, for December 13, 2007. He explained that the following week they will meet with senior engineers with SJRWMD. Alex indicated that SJRWMD is being cautious with the decision because what is done with this project could set a precedent.

Next, Alex returned to the overview of the “gisted” alternatives. He stated that the wildlife crossing committee’s consensus in location B was alternative 8.

Alex explained that the group agreed that in location C, they liked maintaining the length of the existing bridge.

Alternative 3 was the “gist” consensus in location D.

Alex explained that the group did not come up with a “gist” for location E. He stated that they made a commitment to take a more detailed look and that one of the key components of making a crossing worthwhile is the acquisition of a conservation easement. He mentioned that they cannot negotiate acquisition of a land easement at this point, but will cost it out and keep it as an alternative. Keith stated that the Nature Conservancy would like to keep a crossing in this location on the table for further evaluation.

Alex stated that in location F, alternative 13 gained consensus from the Wildlife Crossings Committee. He stated that group preferred alternative 13 because it allows for a crossing in each of the different habitat types.

Next, Alex gave the group an overview of Comparative Risk Assessment Framework and Tools (CRAFT). He stated that it provides a structured approach to identifying and clarifying objectives through modeling and other tools. He indicated that CRAFT is in a testing phase by a research group from the University of North Carolina Asheville. This group has been contracted with by the USFS and that the USFS is looking for real life cases to try it out on. He explained that through the help of Sandy Jacobson, USFS has decided to use CRAFT as a tool to further evaluate the wildlife crossings alternatives in area F. Keith expressed concern for CRAFT moving the current process backwards. Alex commented that he is aware that many people are leery of this process. He explained that CRAFT will only be used as a tool and will not make any final decisions.

Lastly, Alex gave an overview of the schedule of upcoming events. He stated that they would like to cancel the PAG meeting that is scheduled for January 9th because there will not be anything new to present at that time. He mentioned that the next Wildlife Crossings Committee meeting will be held sometime in January. He indicated that the next Public Alternatives Workshop will be held in February and the Public Hearing will be in late summer.

George requested that they be sure to send the draft documents to the cooperating agencies for review. Alex stated that they have been doing that already. Jim mentioned that USFS needs to meet the regulations for the draft of the Environmental Assessment (EA).

Cathy asked if the crossings outside of the build section will be talked about at the next Wildlife Crossings Committee meeting. Alex stated that they will be discussed. Cathy asked how the PD&E Study treats the crossings that will not be eligible for funding. Alex stated that they will have to meet the same criteria and same reviews as the crossings in the build section.

Todd asked if the stormwater ponds shown in the graphics are the general dimensions. Alex stated that the ponds shown are the preferred alternatives and represent the size of the ponds needed for each area.

Mickey asked for an update on the status of the San Dimas fence research. Jim stated that there is no funding from San Dimas at this time. Alex suggested that they write a

commitment to work with the land managers on the design and aesthetics of the fencing. Steve mentioned that FDOT is currently working on some fence research in conjunction with the University of Central Florida (UCF).

Alex asked if anyone else had any further comments. He thanked everyone for attending the meeting.

The meeting ended at 3:15 p.m.

*Note: The above reflects the writer understands of the contents of the meeting. If any misinterpretations or inaccuracies are included, please contact **Mandy Rankin (407) 971-8850** as soon as possible for resolution and revisions if necessary.*