10/11/06 DT5-011-01

SR 40 PD&E Study – Wildlife Crossings Meeting No. 4 Summary

Mtg. Date: October 11, 2006
Time: 10:00 am
Location: FDOT District Office in DeLand
Project: SR 40 PD&E Study
From Silver Springs to US 17 in Marion, Lake and Volusia Counties
Attendees:

Bill Walsh – FDOT
Steve Tonjes – FDOT
Ian Middlemas - FDOT
Alex Hull – Inwood
David Dangel – Inwood
Tom Roberts – EMS
Cathy Lowenstein - DOF
Brian Scheick - FWC
Todd Mecklenborg - USFWS
Ray Emmett – EMS
Carrie Sekerak – USFS
Walt McCown – FWC
Terry Gilbert – URS/FWC
(via phone)

A meeting was held to review potential wildlife crossing locations and the results of the evaluation of each location made by EMS/FWC. The group discussed the potential wildlife crossing locations within the proposed four-lane widening area and then discussed crossing locations through the remainder of the corridor.

Alex explained that the process involves determining the best location, type and size for the wildlife crossings, then working out the engineering issues (access, land management, etc.) and costs and then reviewing the final recommendations with the decision makers (FHWA, USFS and FDOT).

Cathy Lowenstein with the Lake George State Forest indicated that she was not prepared to provide specific comments on wildlife crossings along the eastern end of the project because she and Dennis Hardin have not been involved in the previous meetings held on the subject. After today's meeting, she will discuss the issues with Dennis Hardin and they will be able to provide comments at that time.

The meeting summary from the recent meeting between FWC and EMS, which includes specific recommendations at each crossing location, was distributed to the group in draft format. Terry Gilbert requested that EMS add a preamble to the minutes which describes the issues that were considered in making the recommendations.

Tom Roberts then walked through the recommendations for the first six crossing locations that were recommended by the original SR 40 Task Force. In general, locations A, C, D and F were the most desirable with B being not as desirable and E not recommended. No new crossing locations were identified or recommended.

A – This crossing is located at a triple box culver crossing under SR 40 for a tributary of the Silver River. It is anticipated that because of the four-lane widening, the existing box culvert will be removed and a bridge will be built in this location. It is desirable to have the bridge span the creek, as well as uplands on each side of the creek. This crossing could be 100 to 150 feet in length. Fencing is recommended to help funnel bears and other wildlife to this crossing. It was also recommended that this location could be improved to include a canoe launch. Alternative funding sources could be tapped for this amenity. Aesthetics will be important at this and all the other crossing locations.

B – A typical 100-foot long bear wildlife crossing is recommended at this location. It would include fencing to the west and to the east (to the Ocklawaha River Bridge). This location is not as desirable as some other locations due to the limited amount of publicly owned lanes along the north side of SR 40.

C – It is recommended that the existing span of the floodplain at the Ocklawaha River be maintained. The height of the existing and proposed bridge at this location was discussed in detail. It is desirable to maintain a relatively high (40-50 ft) bridge opening across this area so that sunlight can get below the bridge and trees can grow. There was discussion regarding birds flying over the bridges and it was stated that it would be best if the bridges are built at the same height so as not to introduce a vertical barrier that would result in bridges of two different heights. A bridge in District 7 (Tampa area) that was built at a similar height as the Ocklawaha River Bridge, in anticipation of the Cross Florida Barge Canal, was recently reduced to a height of 45 feet. There was additional discussion regarding consideration of pedestrian and bicycle accessibility across the bridge.

An important aspect of the B and C crossings is land acquisition. Land acquisition should be considered in the area north of SR 40 and between CR 315 and the Ocklawaha River. The SJRWMD may be a viable funding partner.

D – A 100-foot long standard wildlife crossing structure is recommended. This is a potential dual use structure with the Florida Trail. Land acquisition should also be considered north and south of SR 40 at this location.

E – Because of issues with numerous roadway crossings that would be required by bears, a wildlife crossing structure is not recommended at this location. There is potential for continued residential development south of SR 40 and a wildlife crossing structure would encourage bears to venture into the existing and potential residential development.

F – This is the most significant habitat area within the propose widening section of SR 40 with publicly owned lands along both sides of the road for nearly two miles. A 1000 foot long bridge connectivity structure is recommended near the western end of this area across the xeric habitat. This will serve both large mammals and smaller animals with much shorter home ranges (gopher tortoises, pine snakes, indigo snakes, etc.). Funnel fencing would not work for these smaller animals. Issues that need to be considered include accessibility to the forest for

fire management and access under the bridge for fire fighting and land management equipment.

In addition to the 1000-foot bridge, two additional 100-foot standard wildlife crossing structures are recommended in the area east of the Redwater Lake access road.

The discussion returned to the 1000-foot long bridge. There is concern that the NGO's will argue for a much longer structure to match what is being done for the Wekiva Parkway project. Several reasons were given:

- The research (ICOWET) would support the proposed bridge length.
- Land acquisition in the corridor will provide much more benefit than a longer bridge.
- The Wekiva Parkway is a toll road and there is much more funding available on that project.
- The Wekiva Parkway project is a new alignment that crosses many wetlands.
- The longer structures on the Wekvia Parkway helped eliminate fencing that may not have been practical due to development.
- The Wekiva Parkway project is an OOCEA, not FDOT, project.

Next, the wildlife crossing structures outside of the four-lane widening area were discussed. Because there are not anticipated to be any direct impacts, the driving force for the recommendations through the remainder of the project was safety. The high bear kill areas are areas where motorist safety is an issue.

The first two recommendations are for 100-foot standard wildlife crossings with fencing at locations 2J and 2N.

2J – This crossing is located just east of the Juniper Springs park area. The crossing structure should be located at the edge of the historical hydrologic connection. Restoring the hydrologic connection to the wetlands on the north and south sides of SR 40 should also be considered.

2N – This crossing is located near Blue Creek Lodge Road. There was concern raised regarding the potential that the high number of bear kills is associated with a resident feeding the bears. However, this resident is located a good distance east of this high kill area and it is most likely that the resident did not induce these kills. Brian Scheick agreed to provide EMS with the most recent bear kill data by year.

The 2O site was discussed because there have been a large number of bear kills at this location. The issues at this location include development, Emporia Road and the limited amount of publicly owned lands along SR 40. If land can be acquired in this area, a crossing structure would be much more desirable.

2H – A 300-foot crossing structure is proposed at the power line crossing just west of the Lookout Tower. This location is being recommended because of the existence of sand skinks

and other less mobile animals. This location is seen as potential mitigation for impacts to the National Forest. The length of the structure is recommended based on known information and could change based on future studies.

The need for additional crossings through the eastern end of the project was briefly discussed. There are not any bear kill hot spots in this area. Cathy Lowenstein indicated that she would like the group to keep the opportunity for consideration of crossing structures open until the State Forest can have some internal discussion on the recommendations.

Alex summarized the next steps. The Study Team will prepare concept plans for the recommended wildlife crossings. Engineering issues will then be addressed to determine access issues, fencing issues and land management issues. Costs and impacts will be determined also. The Study Team will need to meet with the USFS to discuss the design and engineering parameters for land management purposes.

Inwood will send out a meeting notice for the next wildlife crossings meeting. The Study Team would like to present the results of the wildlife crossings analysis to the Steering Committee at the December 6 meeting.

Meeting Adjourned at approximately 1:00 pm.

cc: File, All Attendees (via e-mail)

Note: The above reflects the writer's understanding of the contents of the meeting. If any misinterpretations or inaccuracies are included, please contact David Dangel at (407) 971-8850 as soon as possible for resolution and revisions if necessary.