Draft Meeting Summary

Representatives of FDOT District 4 conducted a series of listening sessions with various planning partners in fall 2013 as part of the I-95 Corridor Mobility Plan.

FDOT met with representatives of Palm Beach County on November 22. The group discussed the various goals and challenges of the County, the strategies and efforts the County is undertaking, potential indicators to measure success of their goals and strategies, and coordination efforts with other planning partners.

# Key Themes and Takeaways

* Palm Beach County staff explained that the County is “built out” and the development patterns are unlikely to change in the near future. The County is focusing on absorbing new growth through redevelopment and infill in the urban redevelopment area.
* The County is experiencing pressure to develop their agricultural reserve lands in the western part of the County, but the County is trying to protect this land by focusing growth into the urban redevelopment area.
* Palm Beach County suggested several options for increasing capacity for long distance commute trips, including improvements to the Turnpike interchanges, managed lanes with express transit service, and park-and-ride lots.
* Palm Beach County is looking for ideas on how to give transit oriented developments a “break” in the concurrency requirements to further incentivize this type of development. The County has also established Traffic Concurrency Exception Areas.
* Palm Beach County has not yet seen a lot of Complete Streets projects because of the potential reductions in auto capacity.
* Palm Beach County staff mentioned several times the strong influence of the local governments and the ‘home rule’ of the cities.
* When asked about measuring success and quality of life, County staff mentioned views and beach parking in addition to traffic as factors that influence quality of life.

# Action Items

* FDOT will share the regional transit map with Palm Beach County staff.
* FDOT will look into the regional climate action plan recommendations for the Hillsboro Bridge on I-95.

# Participants

* Lorenzo Aghemo, Palm Beach County, Planning Director
* Jennifer Barrow, FDOT District 4, Complete Streets Coordinator
* Lois Bush, FDOT District 4, Policy Planning Section Leader
* Jessica Dimmick, Renaissance Planning Group, I-95 Corridor Mobility Plan Project Team – by phone
* Lisa Dykstra, FDOT District 4, SIS Coordinator and Concept Development
* Larry Hymowitz, FDOT District 4, Mobility Coordinator
* Karen Kiselewski, Renaissance Planning Group, Project Manager
* Jorge Perez, Palm Beach County, Senior Planner/Urban Designer
* Tom Turberville, FDOT District 4, SIS Coordinator and Concept Development
* Dan Weisberg, Palm Beach County, Director of Traffic Division, Engineering & Public Works Dept.
* Dave Wiloch, Palm Beach County, Planning

# Discussion

After an initial overview of the I-95 Corridor Mobility Plan project and status update, FDOT representatives engaged the participants from Palm Beach County in a dialogue on Palm Beach County’s ongoing initiatives, indicators they used to measure success, coordination efforts and challenges.

## Strategies and Future Possibilities

Palm Beach County participants asked FDOT about initiatives FDOT is pursuing and other future opportunities.

### Alternative Corridors & Parallel Relievers

Palm Beach County staff asked if FDOT has given any thought to “finding an alternative” to I-95 in terms of another high-capacity north-south roadway that can facilitate long-distance commuter trips? FDOT explained that parallel relievers are one aspect of a broader holistic solution that the I-95 project is looking at.

Participants discussed the possibility of the Turnpike as an alternative corridor. County staff explained that the Turnpike interchange at Glades Road is incredibly congested and is overly saturated, making it not a feasible route for residents in southern Palm Beach County. Mr. Weisberg recounted the various efforts that the Turnpike undertook to increase capacity, all of which could not move forward for political reasons. Yet, County representatives voiced a need for the Turnpike to try new initiatives to increase capacity so that more cars can access the Turnpike in southern Palm Beach County. County staff suggested that the Turnpike should try again to implement improvements at Palmetto Road and Glades Road.

### Managed Lanes with Transit

FDOT explained that the addition of managed lanes will help address congestion issues for the next 10 to 20 years, but it is not really a long-term strategy because it alone cannot solve the problem of congestion. Ms. Dykstra said, “It’s scary to think about.”

Palm Beach County staff said they thought the combination of park-and-ride lots with express transit service along the managed lanes is a very effective strategy. Traveling on the express buses in the managed lanes is a much shorter trip than driving. The park-and-ride lots are free, which also eliminates the cost of parking at the destination. FDOT noted that this is evidence of the beginning of a culture shift in which transit attracts choice riders as well as transit dependent populations.

County staff mentioned China’s elevated highways for buses that run parallel to and on top of the original highways as an extreme example that has some similarities to the concept of transit in the managed lanes. County staff explained, “we need to start thinking about these sorts of things.” Other participants noted that Tampa has a more local example of a ‘double-decker’ facility – FDOT District 7 constructed an elevated HOV toll facility over an existing highway.

### Park-and-Ride Lots & I-95 Express Bus Service

Mr. Weisberg mentioned a recently abandoned former park-and-ride lot at the Congress Avenue exit near Linton Boulevard, and offered the idea of using this park-and-ride lot in conjunction with transit service on the managed lanes once they are constructed to Linton Boulevard. County staff noted the success of the I-95 express service from Miramar, and inquired whether an I-95 express route to serve this location would be beneficial. FDOT clarified that they are not trying to duplicate Tri-Rail service for long trips.

### Transit-Oriented Development and Concurrency

Palm Beach County staff discussed the transit-oriented development (TOD) land uses they are encouraging around their fixed route transit stations. The Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council (TCRPC) conducted detailed land use studies around these station areas, which included measures like vacancy rates. These studies showed that the future development potential of these areas is only enough to support fixed route bus. However, now Palm Beach County is looking more closely at the FEC rail stations.

County staff explained they would like to give TODs a “break” in the concurrency requirements to further incentive TOD. County staff noted that the impacts to the SIS facilities are the most problematic for TODs, and would like to have some way to lessen the mitigation requirements for TOD. County staff suggested that perhaps TODs should be analyzed for concurrency and mitigation requirements separately. Ms. Bush clarified that FDOT considers TOD to be a mitigation technique for SIS connectors. FDOT participants explained that “there is no simple way to mitigate impacts to I-95,” because typically no single project results in significant impacts. Addressing the cumulative impacts will require creativity and coordination from local governments, which is what the I-95 Corridor Mobility Plan is trying to foster. Mr. Hymowitz explained that viewing the interstates as an integral asset for economic development will help to frame this issue.

### Traffic Concurrency Exception Areas

The flip side to providing more capacity for long distance trips is influencing travel patterns by encouraging people to make shorter distance trips and making “smarter” decisions about where they live and where they work. Palm Beach County staff said that while the local governments are primarily responsible for shaping growth and mixing land uses, County staff have established Traffic Concurrency Exception Areas (TCEAs) that include parts of Boynton Beach, Riviera Beach, West Palm Beach, and Delray Beach.

### Urban Redevelopment Area

Palm Beach County has also created an Urban Redevelopment Area (URA) in the middle of the County. County staff explained that the URA “hasn’t worked yet, but that the County wants to promote redevelopment and increase densities within these areas, which generally follow the Multimodal districts and nodes from the I-95 Corridor Mobility Plan.

Palm Beach County has allowed developments within the URA to be exempt from concurrency requirements. They are also looking specifically at improving drainage in these areas. County staff explained development within the URA has slowed from the market downturn.

### Complete Streets

When asked about Complete Streets, Palm Beach County staff replied that it has not yet garnered a lot of traction. County staff explained that projects that really create a change for pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure require a sacrifice for auto capacity, and they are not yet sure that Palm Beach County is ready and willing to “go there.”

FDOT representatives shared that they have a lane elimination process that requires an analysis of the transportation system to understand the potential impacts, and that they are willing to share this with the Palm Beach County staff. Some local governments have already used this lane elimination process to implement Complete Streets projects.

### Land Development Regulations for Infill and Redevelopment

When asked about the County’s vision for the future, County staff replied that the development plans are set and are not going to change in the near future. Palm Beach County is “built out” and the County is focusing on redevelopment and infill for new growth through the URA. The County is changing their land development regulations to better support infill development. County staff said their goal is to focus development through increased density along the coast where infrastructure already exists.

County staff described the pressure to develop in their agriculture reserve lands in the western part of the county. Developers are trying to “find holes” in the policy that would allow them to develop. One argument is that schools are more important than agriculture, so schools should be allowed to develop. County staff explained they have spent hundreds of millions of dollars to buy lands and make this reserve, and they are trying to protect it by focusing on redevelopment. County staff believe there is enough capacity within the urban tier to absorb the growth, but some staff members question whether all of the new residents will want to live in these denser units and whether the projected population growth will actually occur.

## Coordination with Local Governments

Palm Beach County staff immediately indicated that the local governments are a necessary partner in any discussions regarding transportation and land use. FDOT indicated they have met with the local governments and will continue to work with them through the working group in the implementation tasks of the I-95 Corridor Mobility Plan.

Palm Beach County’s tourist destinations and cities are very small compared to Broward County. There is no unincorporated land along I-95 in Palm Beach County. County staff reiterated a need for the I-95 project team to work more closely with the local governments.

Palm Beach County sees their role in the I-95 project as much smaller than the contributions of the local governments. County staffs explained that the cities successfully eliminated the former countywide planning council, and have a strong home rule in Palm Beach County.

### Opportunities for Better Coordination

County staff said that the local governments and the County have created good energy together through the planning for the Tri-Rail Coastal Link service on the FEC rail corridor. The cities have worked together to encourage density to support future ridership. This is a good example of building relationships and partnerships to achieve common and individual goals. FDOT asked how they could help facilitate this process, and indicated they would like to make broader connections with the other benefits that this initiative can produce.

County staff explained that the institutional problem is that each County makes decisions in isolation. The Regional Transit Authority is “supposed to help,” but they are only involved in the planning stages. SFRTA is not active in land development around station areas, which is left to private interests under municipal direction. The areas that have been successful in implementing TOD have a defined area and have a taxing regional authority. County staff believe that the lack of a taxing authority is a problem. The Palm Beach County Board does not support ad valorem taxes for bus services at this time.

Another common goal around which the cities have come together to pursue is the All Aboard Florida intercity passenger rail service.

County staff explained that there is no “common enemy” around which the cities will rally together. Sea level rise and climate change are not imminent enough, and congestion is not “bad enough” yet. Palm Beach County has small windows where roads are congested, but it is not a problem compared to Broward and Miami-Dade counties. One participant mentioned that a common enemy could be the “brain drain” from South Florida, where the young educated people are leaving to move elsewhere.

## Additional Topics of Discussion

### Timeframe of Recommendations

Palm Beach County representatives asked whether this project is looking at short-term recommendations, such as in the next 10 to 20 years, or whether it is looking longer term. FDOT replied that this project is considering short, mid, and long-term strategies.

### Language Clarification

Palm Beach County staff inquired about the definition of premium transit and what it means to be a primary multimodal facility and a commerce facility. These terms need to be clearly defined to be meaningful.

### Climate Change

Participants mentioned the concerns of climate change and sea level rise, which could displace people.

### Demographic Shifts

County staff mentioned that the number of persons per household is generally increasing, but that generally Palm Beach County staff do not expect a large shift in demographics.

### Measuring Quality of Life

When asked how they measure success, County staff replied that they do not know how they would measure quality of life. County staff said that one of the goals in their Comprehensive Plan is to protect and enhance the diversity of lifestyles. Besides traffic, many of the factors that influence quality of life are intangibles that are difficult to measure, such as view.

County staff did indicate that a lack of beach parking is a ‘hot button issue’ that many residents are concerned about.

### Hillsboro Bridge

Palm Beach County staff asked FDOT if they are considering the recommendations of the regional climate action plan to raise the Hillsboro Bridge on I-95. FDOT did not know the answer to this question, and said they would look into it.

# Strategies and Indicators

The following tables list the strategies and indicators that representatives from Palm Beach County mentioned throughout the listening session.

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| Strategies |
| System-Wide   * Conduct land uses studies around station areas to determine the appropriate type of transit to serve future densities. * Allow exceptions to concurrency mitigation requirements for TODs. * Adopt a lane elimination process to evaluate capacity effects of potential Complete Streets projects * Revise land development regulations to better support infill and redevelopment * Identify issues around which local governments can come together to support (e.g. Tri-Rail Coastal Link and All Aboard Florida service on FEC railway) * Create a regional taxing authority for transit improvements   Facilities   * Identify alternate corridors to I-95 that can serve as high-capacity north-south roads to facilitate long-distance commuter trips * Implement improvements at the Turnpike interchanges, especially at Glades Road in West Boca. * Implement managed lanes with park-and-ride facilities and express transit service.   Places   * Encourage TOD around fixed route transit stations. * Establish Traffic Concurrency Exception Areas. * Create an urban redevelopment area and focus growth here through infill and redevelopment * Create an agricultural reserve |

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| Indicators |
| Quantitative   * Vacancy rates in transit station areas * Densities in transit station areas (existing and future)   Qualitative or Anecdotal   * Diversity of lifestyles * Beach parking * Views |