

7/16/07

DT5-011-01

SR 40 PD&E Study – Wildlife Crossings Meeting No. 8 Summary

Mtg. Date: July 16, 2007
Time: 9:00 am
Location: Sharpes Ferry Office Conference Room
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
George Borchik – FDOT
Vicki Sharpe – FDOT
Alex Hull – Inwood
David Dangel – Inwood
Mandy Rankin – Inwood
Ray Emmett – EMS
Terry Gilbert – URS/FWC

Carrie Sekerak – USFS
Sandy Jacobson – USFS
Jim Thorsen – USFS
Dave Bowman – DEP/OGT
Brian Scheick – FWC
Todd Mecklenborg – USFWS
Greg Slay – Ocala/Marion TPO
Keith Schue – The Nature Conservancy
Guy Marwick – Smart Growth Coalition

Bill Walsh, with the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), welcomed the group and gave opening statements. He mentioned that the Alternatives Public Workshop has been scheduled for Tuesday, August 14th at the Ocklawaha Bridge Baptist Church from 4:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Alex Hull, with Inwood Consulting Engineers, Inc., gave an overview of the agenda and the objective of the meeting. He explained that his objective is to come out of the meeting with the alternatives that are most viable and will get the job done most cost effectively. He stated that he would like the group to conduct an initial screening and discard the alternatives that are extremes and come out with the best alternative or best two alternatives.

Keith Schue, with the Nature Conservancy, stated that working through the matrix and scoring the various alternatives is cumbersome and that just going by the numbers will not work. He asked why there are some discrepancies with the costs for culverts. Alex explained that there is no unit cost for a structure and that whether it is in a two-lane section or a four-lane section, the location of the culvert and other factors make a difference. He explained that detailed backup is available for review and that Inwood would also take a look at the areas that Keith had questions about the costs.

Sandy Jacobson, with the United States Forest Service (USFS), stated that there has been a vast improvement in the work that has been done to evaluate the wildlife crossing alternatives. She indicated that a few of the objectives should be more species specific. She mentioned that the objective that seeks to reduce wildlife vehicle collisions should be divided into low

mobility and high mobility species. She also stated that they should consider weighting different objectives. In addition, Sandy mentioned that some things can't be evaluated separately from others and need to be looked at as a suite.

Keith commented that they can't just evaluate listed versus common species. He stated that the size of the animal should be more appropriate.

Terry Gilbert, with URS, stated that the list of target species for each location is generic and that there needs to be a specific list for each location.

Alex indicated that what seems appropriate is to have a combination of large structures and culverts. He stated that they could, more than likely, eliminate the alternatives that only have one type of structure. He suggested that the group focus on the middle band of options. He mentioned that once the group has screened down the alternatives to one or two they can discuss them in more detail.

Terry commented on the issue of connectivity and encouraged developing a mitigation plan that would allow the crossings to be coupled with land acquisition.

Alex gave an update on the draft wildlife report developed by EMS. He mentioned that they may want to incorporate the information that is generated from today's meeting. He stated that a good draft would be ready for the group's review in three weeks.

Next, the group discussed the draft Project Connectivity Statement. Alex suggested changing the statements to say "where feasible" rather than "where possible". The group concurred with the change. The group also discussed the need to address vehicle collisions in the statement. The group decided that a new bullet would be added to say "reduce wildlife/vehicle collisions". There was also a suggestion to add "agency" after "land management" in the first sentence of the last paragraph. Alex also agreed to have the statement reviewed again for grammatical errors.

Keith asked what the dimensions are for the small culverts. Alex explained that the small culvert is 54 inches by 36 inches and is based on the design that is currently being used for SR 415. He explained that the culvert size is not final and that this size was chosen as a "placeholder" for costing purposes. Ray Emmett, with EMS, added that the specifics of the culverts can be modified and refined once the alternatives have been screened down. Keith asked if the culverts will have openings in the medians to let light in. Sandy stated that the culverts at this point are just space holders and will be refined as everything moves forward.

Ray commented that the locations of the proposed stormwater retention ponds will affect where the crossings should be. Carrie stated that the ponds will add new species in areas.

Alex mentioned that FDOT needs a letter from USFS sent to SJRWMD stating that it is acceptable to allow stormwater runoff to discharge into high recharge areas. This would eliminate the need for a pond in those areas. Jim Thorsen, a consultant to USFS, stated that he would work on getting the letter.

Keith asked if there has been an assessment conducted on the type of species that will use the culverts. Sandy indicated that the culverts will be designed specifically for the species that will use them. Vicki Sharpe, with FDOT, commented that there is some research that has been done on existing culverts. Keith expressed concern with the lack of research for upland culverts.

Guy Marwick, with Smart Growth Coalition, stated that the alternatives give a good variation of bridges and culverts.

Alex suggested that the group move forward with screening the alternatives with the assumption that the culverts will work reasonably.

Greg Slay, with Marion/Ocala TPO, commented that the design is five or more years down the road and there will be time for additional research as well as a reevaluation. Alex mentioned that it would be good to identify the additional research and analysis that needs to be done and document this as part of the PD&E Study.

Terry asked how the size of the arched culvert was determined. Alex stated that they based it on the design that is being used on another project. Steve added that they also used the literature research to come up with the culvert.

Terry asked about FDOT's maintenance plan for the culverts.

Sandy indicated that there is a lot of information on species using dry culverts. She stated that a maintenance agreement with FDOT is important.

Keith suggested that the group recognize that there are some unanswered questions.

Alex emphasized that the arch culvert that has been discussed is a place holder based on literature research and what is being used and monitored on SR 415. He explained that the design of the culvert can be modified later in the process.

Next, Alex directed the group's attention to the plots of locations A, B, and C.

Keith commented that he would like to see a crossing west of SR 326. Guy stated that there are houses north of SR 40 and SR 326 and that a crossing isn't necessary in that location. Sandy mentioned that bears will find their way to crossings no matter where they are located. The group discussed the area of SR 326. A concern was expressed that the bears would get on SR 326 and end up trapped on SR 40. Alex stated that they would look at the possibility of using escape ramps in conjunction with the fencing.

Alex went over the alternatives for area A. He stated that they would add an escape ramp and fence on the south side of SR 326. The group eliminated alternatives 2, 3, 4, 6 and 7. They decided to keep alternatives 5, 8 and 10. They also decided to keep alternative 9 with the modification as follows: 100-foot structure at tributary, a 50-foot structure just west of SR 326

and a 600 foot structure between SR 326 and CR 315, culverts at 450-foot spacing.

Terry asked the group to consider a longer bridge at Half Mile Creek. Alex stated that they will discuss the specifics of length at another time. Terry mentioned that increased length will benefit the floodplain as well.

Carrie mentioned that she preferred alternatives 8 and 9 when considering the bears around the SR 326 intersection.

Next, the group discussed area A1. Alex directed the group's attention to the PowerPoint graphics of the alternatives. The group discussed the fact that you can avoid some of the issues at SR 326 and SR 40 if the animals cross at A1. The group screened the alternatives and decided to keep alternative 2.

Area B was the group's next topic of discussion. The group agreed to eliminate alternatives 1, 2,3,5,6 and 7. They decided to keep alternatives 4, 8 and 9 for further discussion. Keith commented that he does not support alternative 4. The group discussed fixing funnel fencing at CR 315.

Then the group moved on to talking about area C, the Ocklawaha River Bridge. The group discussed the length of the bridge and also talked about the need to fix the fence at the west end of the bridge. It was decided that they will have to look at alternatives A, B and C together and that they would keep all of the bridge alternatives for further evaluation. Alex said that additional hydraulic analysis would be done to define the floodplain impacts and hydrology issues.

Steve Tonjes, with FDOT, passed out an abstract for a grant proposal to evaluate and ecosystem models that might help determine the impacts of road projects and if crossings would be effective mitigation.

Guy commented that he does not want the cost of the bridge alternatives to drive the decision.

The group took a 35 minute break for lunch and resumed the meeting at 1:05.

Next the group looked at the alternatives at area D. Carrie indicated that the land acquisition representative with USFS, Kyle Jones, has identified property for acquisition. The group discussed what drove the selection of location D for a crossing. Terry mentioned that this area was recommended based on successful crossings. Keith asked for land acquisition to the south to be added to the alternative. Terry mentioned that they could get mitigation credit for land purchase. Dual use of this crossing was discussed because the Florida Trail crosses SR 40 in this location. It was agreed to keep alternative 3 with the addition of land acquisition/conservation easement.

The group discussed area E. Alex gave a description of property access management. He mentioned that the road will be on fill and they could consider utilizing a wall in the fill area that would act as a fence. The group decided to keep alternative 2 and a modified alternative 4,

which shifts the crossing to the east, carries fencing up to SR 40 along the side of 1st Avenue and adds aquatic structure improvements at the existing hydraulic connection.

Area F was the next topic of discussion. The group agreed to keep alternatives 3, 4, 12, 13 and a modified 11, with a 2500-foot structure and the addition of two 50 foot structures. They screened out 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10. Keith mentioned that he likes alternative 13. He stated that he would like to see the fence extended at the east end of area F and to the property line. Sandy asked the group to consider the length and height of the crossing structures.

Next the group discussed area G1. Keith commented that he doesn't understand the utility of putting crossings in a two-lane section. Alex explained that they are working to identify and prioritize the crossings. He explained that in the future they can use research and modeling to refine and improve upon the group's work. The group agreed to eliminate alternative 2 and keep alternative 3.

Area G2 was next talked about by the group. Sandy mentioned that they should consider leaving the culverts open at the top with native earth along the bottom of the culverts to accommodate sand skinks. There was group consensus to keep alternatives 2 and 3 in for further discussion.

The group discussed area G. The group decided to keep and alternative 3 and move the crossing east to the west side of the wetlands.

Next there was a group discussion on area H. There was a discussion on the need for spot improvements. Sandy stated that she sees it as a benefit to have some permeability of SR 40 for wildlife. Terry mentioned that the sites were identified by Walt McCown and based on four years of field work.

Jim Thorsen asked Sandy about the status of the San Dimas fencing research proposal. Sandy explained that there is currently no money; however the director is looking for funding.

Area I was the next topic. The group talked about adding the option of a bridge plus culverts. They agreed to keep alternatives 1, 2, and a modified 4, with culverts, for further evaluation.

The group discussed area J. Keith suggested enhancing the hydrological connection at J and including a crossing to the east in Ocala Forest area. There was a group discussion on the possibility of relocating area J. Alex stated that they would add area J1 and move it up the road from area J. He mentioned that the alternative for J1 would have a 50 foot structure, fencing and culverts if possible.

The next topic of conversation was area K. The group discussed the fact that the location is a pinch point for the State Forest to the north and south. The group agreed to keep alternatives 1 and 3 for further discussion. They eliminated alternative 2 because it does not have culverts.

Lastly, the group discussed area L. They decided to keep alternatives 1 and 5 and shorten

the fence on the north side of the road on the west end so that it does not cross private property.

Alex explained that they will show the graphics that made it through the meeting's discussion as well as the cost matrix at the Alternatives Public Workshop on August 14th. He mentioned that the meeting will have an open house format with a video that will run continuously.

George Borchik, with FDOT asked if Inwood will have the roadway alternatives available for the group's review before the workshop. Bill mentioned that they will have an FDOT review meeting on Thursday, July 19th.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 4:30 p.m.

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 Mandy Rankin at (407) 971-8850 as soon as possible for resolution and revisions if necessary.