



**CHARLOTTE COUNTY-PUNTA GORDA  
SARASOTA/MANATEE  
METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATIONS  
JOINT REGIONAL MEETING**

**Venice Community Center  
326 Nokomis Ave South  
Venice, Florida 34285**

**9:30 A.M.**

**MINUTES FOR JANUARY 26, 2015**

**Members Present**

**Charlotte County– Punta Gorda MPO Board**

Commissioner Christopher Constance	Charlotte County Commission
Commissioner Stephen R. Deutsch	Charlotte County Commission
Commissioner Ken Doherty	Charlotte County Commission
Mayor Carolyn Freeland	City of Punta Gorda
Commissioner James Herston	Charlotte County Airport Authority

**Sarasota/Manatee MPO Board**

Commissioner Larry Bustle	Manatee County Commission
Commissioner Betsy Benac	Manatee County Commission
Commissioner Vanessa Baugh	Manatee County Commission
Councilman Patrick Roff	City of Bradenton
Councilman Gene Brown	City of Bradenton
Commissioner Charles Hines Esq.	Sarasota County Commission
Commissioner Alan Maio	Sarasota County Commission
Commissioner Christine Robinson	Sarasota County Commission
Mayor William “Bill” Shearon	Island Transportation Planning Organization (ITPO) (Anna Maria, Bradenton Beach & Holmes Beach)
Vice Mayor Susan Chapman	City of Sarasota
Mayor Willie Shaw	City of Sarasota
Commissioner Linda Yates	City of North Port
Vice Mayor Jacqueline Moore	City of North Port
Councilman Jim Bennett	City of Venice
Commissioner Phill Younger	Town of Longboat Key
Commissioner Jack Rynerson	Sarasota-Manatee Airport Authority

**Member Absent**

Mayor Shirley Groover Bryant                      City of Palmetto

**Advisory**

Billy Hattaway    Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT)  
District One Secretary

**Charlotte County-Punta Gorda MPO Staff**

Robert Herrington, Director  
Bekie Murrill, Administrative Services Coordinator  
Gary Harrell, Principal Planner  
Lakshmi N. Gurram, Planner II  
Wendy Scott, Planner II

**Sarasota/Manatee MPO Staff**

Michael Howe, Executive Director  
David Hutchinson, Planning Manager  
Sue Clapsaddle, Human Resources/Fiscal Manager  
Nanette Eubanks, Office Manager  
Mike Maholtz, Senior Transportation Planner  
Jim Van Pelt, Public Transportation Planner  
Colleen McGue, Transportation Planner  
Rachel McGue, Office Assistant

**Others Attending**

Commissioner Cheryl Cook, North Port City  
Chris Smith, FDOT  
Richard Shine, FDOT  
Phil Catalano, FDOT  
Laura Lockwood, FDOT  
Zac Burch, FDOT  
Lori Carlton, FDOT  
Roxann Lake, FDOT  
Cody Vaughan-Birch, Charlotte County Attorney Office  
Rick Kolar, Charlotte County Transit  
Rocky Burke, Sarasota County Area Transit (SCAT)  
Sarah Blanchard, SCAT  
Brian Barnes, Charlotte County Public Works  
Paula Wiggins, Sarasota County  
Sage Kamiya, Manatee County

Ben Newman, City of North Port  
Bruce Henry, City of North Port  
Claude Tankersley, City of Bradenton  
Alex Davis Shaw, City of Sarasota  
Sandy Leathers, Seminole Gulf Railroad  
Kathie Ebaugh, Sarasota County Schools  
Richard Dreyer, Tindale-Oliver  
Joel Rey, Tindale-Oliver  
Ned Baier, Jacobs Engineering  
Michael Adams, Atkins  
Ernie Gerlach, GECY  
Tess Canja, AARP Chapter 8 and Team Parkside Committee  
Kaye Newman, Condo on the Bay  
Lou Costa, Citizen  
Lou Dorff, Citizen  
Joe Justice, Sarasota/Manatee MPO Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) Chair  
Will Oler, Sarasota/Manatee MPO CAC  
Robert DiSabatino, Sarasota/Manatee MPO Bicycle, Pedestrian, Trails Advisory Committee (BPTAC)  
Bruce Dillon, Sarasota/Manatee MPO BPTAC  
Bud Gaines, Sarasota Manatee MPO BPTAC  
Steve Schoff, Charlotte County-Punta Gorda MPO CAC  
John Burrage, Charlotte County-Punta Gorda MPO CAC

### **Call To Order**

Council Member Jim Bennett called the Joint MPO Board Meeting to order, and welcomed everyone to the City of Venice. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited. Members introduced themselves and stated their jurisdictions.

### **Agenda Item #I – Open to the Public**

Councilman Jim Bennett asked if any member of the public wished to comment:

- ~ Bruce Dillon spoke on behalf of the Friends of the Legacy Trail regarding the effort to complete the Trail extension from south Sarasota to Downtown Sarasota. He noted that the organization had recently achieved its funding goal through the assistance of several foundations, businesses and individuals. He distributed a Tour de Parks cycling brochure for the group's main fundraising event on Sunday, March 22, 2015. The Cycling Tour is planned to start and finish at the Venice Train Depot. Mr. Dillon stated that group

members were looking forward to the Sarasota County Commission's review of the Trail extension.

- ~ Tess Canja, representing Team Parkside Community for a Lifetime Committee and the Charlotte County AARP Chapter #80, spoke regarding the Transit Coordination agenda item. She noted that a need exists to connect Port Charlotte and Sarasota Transit, and there is a wonderful opportunity to move forward. Ms. Canja reviewed a brief history of past transit studies including a 2009 University of Florida study of transit needs in Charlotte County, followed by an FDOT study to determine the feasibility of fixed route, the resulting Corridor Access Management Plan (CAMP), the 2012 Transit Latent Demand Study conducted by the MPOs working with the Charlotte and Sarasota County Boards, and the 2014 Transit Development Plan (*Charlotte Rides TDP*). She stated that the 2009 FDOT study determined that a fixed route from the Charlotte Regional Medical Center in Punta Gorda along US 41 through Port Charlotte would garner sufficient riders to be doable, and the 2012 Transit Latent Demand Study found that a fixed route from Parkside in Port Charlotte connecting to the Sarasota Bus line could produce ridership higher than that of neighboring transit systems. Ms. Canja noted that although two 10 year Transit Plans that include fixed routes have been adopted by the Charlotte County Board of County Commissioners (BCC), no action to implement the plans have been taken. She stated recent changes to merge on-demand services in Charlotte County will significantly cut public transportation for those who need it most. She urged the Charlotte BCC to act now for affordable consistent transportation that could also connect us to the transit systems that are all around us.

### **Agenda Item #II – Opening Comments**

Commissioner Christopher Constance welcomed everyone on behalf of the Charlotte County-Punta Gorda MPO. He stated that Charlotte County-Punta Gorda MPO Board members were glad to be present and wanted to work with their neighbors to the north on transportation and other issues.

Councilman Jim Bennett seconded Commissioner Constance's remarks. He welcomed City of North Port Commissioner Cheryl Cook who was present in the audience.

### **Agenda Item #III – Regional Discussion Items**

#### **1. Transit Coordination Between Sarasota County and Charlotte County**

New Sarasota County Area Transit (SCAT) transit director Rocky Burke was introduced. He noted that it was his fifth week on the job, having recently arrived from seven years of transit experience in Lexington, Kentucky. He stated that SCAT transit service in the southern part

of Sarasota County currently includes six routes that serve the Venice/Englewood/North Port area and two express busses. He said that through conversations the Charlotte County staff, he understands that Charlotte County busses do connect with SCAT busses and he would like to foster that relationship. He also noted that SCAT will soon be conducting a Comprehensive Operations Analysis utilizing a consultant which will begin sometime this summer and will include a review of all routes particularly those in South Sarasota County. He commented on the importance that regional transit had played in his former work.

Rick Kolar described Charlotte County's current demand response (advance reservation) transit system. He noted that it connects with SCAT at two locations in Englewood and in North Port. He stated that the *Charlotte Rides TDP* had been completed last year. Staff was analyzing the feasibility of starting proposed fixed route transit service changes and would return to the BCC regarding implementation, while still continuing Dial-A-Ride system to current riders. Mr. Kolar noted that funding for a bus washing system had been obtained thanks to FDOT efforts. He stated that Charlotte County Transit continues to work with Sarasota on regional ideas to better serve the population in South county.

## **2. Englewood Interstate Connector (River Road and Winchester Boulevard)**

Bob Herrington provided a brief history of the River Road and Winchester Boulevard projects. He distributed an article from *Venice Magazine* regarding growth in the River Road area. This joint corridor serves as a hurricane evacuation route for Englewood. It is a regular topic of conversation at the Charlotte County-Punta Gorda MPO Board. Brian Barnes from Charlotte County and Paula Wiggins from Sarasota County were present to brief the Board Members. David Hutchinson referred to a handout with a map showing what is currently in the FDOT plan for the corridor. He also noted that an FDOT meeting would be held the following evening to review the six-laning of US 41 in the area south of River Road. Commissioner Deutsch acknowledged the presence of Secretary Hattaway and emphasized how important the issue of River Road is to both counties, especially given rapid growth in the area. He stressed that Charlotte County would be happy to work cooperatively in this effort, since River Road is a major concern to Englewood residents. Commissioner Maio noted confusion regarding the geographical directions on River Rd and US 41 descriptions.

Brian Barnes, Capital Projects Engineer for Charlotte County Public Works, described how the northern portion of Winchester Boulevard (SR 776 to River Road) had been provided in 1998 by Charlotte County citizens via sales tax funded improvements. The total project construction cost was \$10.2 million to four lane a section to the County Line and two lane a section through the Myakka Forest up to River Road. The section in Charlotte County was \$1.5 million, while the section in Sarasota County was \$8.7 million. Work commenced

in May 2000 and concluded in June 2002. The next southern phase (a three mile long section from SR 776 to CR 775) started construction in November 2013 and will be completed in late summer 2015. The \$17 million project includes right of way, a curbed median, two 12 foot lanes north and south, sidewalks, traffic signalization at SR 776 and at CR 775, and full street lighting.

Paula Wiggins, Sarasota County Transportation Planning Manager, provided an update on Sarasota County's River Road improvements, now known as the River Road Regional Interstate Connector (RRRIC) to connect I-75 and US 41. She stated that the portion from US 41 to Center Road would be six-laned, and the section from Center Road to I-75 would be four-laned. Although design is 100 percent complete, right of way acquisition is still an issue, with approximately \$4.2 million required to complete purchase. Construction costs are estimated at \$15 million for the I-75 to Center Road section and \$26 million for the portion from Center Road to US 41. Although the construction phase is unfunded, Ms. Wiggins noted that Sarasota County has authorized staff to pursue a TIGER grant for this project. She commented that it is the #1 Sarasota County Major Highway project through the MPO process.

Commissioner Hines noted that the revamped project name reinforces the fact that the roadway serves multiple counties and local jurisdictions, making it truly regional in scope (serving more than only the Englewood area). The City of North Port is annexing a large portion of Thomas Ranch which will result in major development.

Commissioner Constance asked if there is a plan to involve the new developments in funding transportation improvements. Commissioner Hines stated that options such as mobility fees are being examined. He stated that the burden is too much for only Sarasota County to bear, and everybody needs to contribute to the effort. Bob Herrington referenced the joint interlocal agreement between the Charlotte County-Punta Gorda and Lee MPOs, especially to coordinate efforts on funding for Burnt Store Road. He said that the Sarasota/Manatee and Charlotte County-Punta Gorda MPOs might wish to make the River Road project a similar joint priority, by seeking specialized funding such as TRIP and/or RTAP.

Commissioner Deutsch commented on the state statute regarding roadways that service state parks, as is the case with River Road. He remarked that FDOT may wish to reacquire River Road as a state roadway in light of Commissioner Hines' comments regarding how it serves multiple jurisdictions and many communities as a true regional roadway. Commissioner Robinson outlined multiple efforts to address the River Road project. She noted that the state park issue had already been examined. FDOT's response was to propose a costly swap for a road with a bridge on it. Two years ago, a letter was sent to FDOT and the Governor from all members of both County Commissions on the issue of River Road.

TIGER grants had been pursued. A 2011 statute change regarding concurrency had made it difficult to obtain funding from developers. She asked staff about potential actions that could be taken. Michael Howe and Bob Herrington offered some suggestions. Bob Herrington stated that the two boards might wish to consider designating the project as a TRIP project (as had been done with Lee County on Burnt Store Road), leaving it as a top priority until completion.

Commissioner Maio stated that Commissioner Hines was on the right path regarding the regional nature of the project. He observed that it would be important on the next TIGER grant application to list all the communities impacted. He pointed to the collaborative efforts done for a project at the intersection of River Road and US 41. He stated that he is asked weekly by constituents about a River Road solution.

Mayor Freeland asked if a motion was needed regarding soliciting funding from FDOT for the project. If this was the case, she was making such a motion. David Hutchinson noted that both MPO Boards were in the midst of their Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) updates, where the process of regional prioritization occurs and financial feasibility is assessed.

Commissioner Doherty asked for clarification on the amount of design and right of way (ROW) acquisition. Ms. Wiggins indicated that the portion from I-75 to US 41 was at 100% completion of design permitting, while the southern portion remained unfunded. ROW acquisition was 60% complete for the portion north of US 41 intersection and 75% complete for the section south of US 41 (because of the West Villages exchange). Commissioner Doherty noted that the first step would be to secure ROW funding. Commissioner Constance asked staff to revise the map that had been distributed to provide the estimated costs for each section of the project, the amounts of ROW acquired, and the percentages of plan development. He requested that it be emailed to all Board members from both MPOs. Commissioner Constance noted that Charlotte County already had contributed project funds in the past in this portion of Sarasota County. Brian Barnes stated that in the 2000-2002 timeframe, Charlotte County had funded the building of two lanes on Winchester Blvd North in Sarasota County. Total project construction cost was \$10.2 million of which approximately \$8.704 million was provided for construction within Sarasota County. Additionally, there were administrative and design costs associated with the project.

Commissioner Yates emphasized the importance of the project to the City of North Port. She asked Michael Howe if a joint letter from both boards could help to expedite the project. Mr. Howe indicated the joint letter from both MPO chairs reiterating to FDOT the regional significance of River Road could be a next step. He stressed that each MPO

must strategize internally to address the funding challenge using various options including a TIGER grant, FDOT funding for regional roadways and TRIP funding.

Mike Maholtz provided a review of the 2035 LRTP update process currently underway for both MPOs. Staff would be addressing this joint MPO meeting's Board Member discussion accordingly. He stated that River Road is already identified on the joint regional roadway network and documents would be revised to reflect the new project name.

Commissioner Maio noted that impatience was growing regarding the needed improvements and prices continued to increase. He appreciated Commissioner Doherty's suggestion to break the project into pieces to make funding more palatable. Mike Maholtz described how the Sarasota/Manatee MPO's current LRTP contains four prioritized project segments, but the number and dimension of segments could be changed with the next LRTP update. He stated that the methodology of segmenting had worked before on the Venice Bypass project.

Commissioner Robinson indicated that the motion might not be needed since the River Road project was already on the regional network. She asked Mr. Howe to develop a plan of action with specific recommendations to foster momentum in light of the project's high need. Commissioner Hines also stressed the current significant need along River Road and the requested guidance from staff on commencing immediate action. Mayor Freeland stated that her motion was not for regional road designation, but rather for the two MPOs to agree to move jointly to make the roadway a priority for future funding.

Commissioner Yates noted that it was important to expedite the funding for Phase 1 ROW.

Commissioner Bustle, speaking as a Manatee County representative to the Sarasota/Manatee MPO Board, did not wish to jeopardize the good working relationship between the organization's member entities on developing a fair project list. He called on staff to issue a proposal regarding the current discussion on priorities and stated that he was not prepared to vote on the matter at the meeting, since he wanted to fully understand the impact on the priority listing.

Commissioner Doherty said he would appreciate a staff-developed action plan to help define specific requests. He emphasized that the project's ultimate success would depend upon taking it in logical phases, such as design and ROW. He characterized lengthy delays of 10 to 15 years as unacceptable. Commissioner Constance stated that the project was now a need, not a want. He wondered if a six lane proposal for the US 41 to Center Road portion was necessary, when four lanes might be sufficient.



Michael Howe agreed to develop an action plan in coordination with Bob Herrington and Sarasota County staff. He related how the River Road project initially had been put on the MPO priority list seven years ago, simply as a placeholder. Then, it was identified as a candidate for Congressional earmark funding to be requested by the local jurisdictions. Then, developer impact fees were anticipated until the economic downturn. So it has been a moving target. Now, it is recognized as a top priority in the MPO process. He stated that staff can develop a strategy that incorporates the progress that has been made. He reiterated that the project must be identified in the Sarasota/Manatee LRTP in order to spend any federal transportation funding. The project was placed in the last LRTP, and the phases guidance on anticipated revenues. He said staff would put together a bulleted memo to outline a phasing strategy.

Mayor Freeland rescinded her motion in light of the comments of Sarasota/Manatee MPO Board members. Commissioner Constance asked staff to move forward with a plan. He wondered if Secretary Hattaway knew of any potential increased gas tax revenues given the recent availability of inexpensive fuel. Secretary Hattaway did not have any information on the subject.

### **3. Florida Department of Transportation**

Secretary Hattaway stated that FDOT will be happy to support the MPOs on these current issues. Roxann Lake discussed the construction projects that had been let on three of the last four sections of I-75 widening in the two counties.

#### **Agenda Item #4 – Board Member Comments**

Commissioner Chapman made a request for information from assembled transportation experts. She noted that data was needed on compliance with detours and barriers, since it had become a problem in the City of Sarasota.

Bob Herrington reiterated that per the interlocal agreement, a procedure exists for prioritizing TRIP projects annually. It requires that projects alternate by County in an equitable fashion. The same listing order is maintained until projects receive funding. He also noted that staff members from both MPOs would develop a recommended joint list for each Board's approval, thereby negating the need for MPO Board Members to hold subcommittee meetings. Commissioner Hines felt this was a good idea.

#### **Agenda Item #5 – Adjournment of Joint Regional Meeting**

The Joint Regional Meeting was adjourned at 10:47 a.m.