

US 301/41 Charrette Summary

Sarasota/Manatee Metropolitan Planning Organization

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Introduction

The Sarasota/Manatee Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) hosted a half-day community planning charrette on May 14, 2012, at the Manatee Convention Center focusing on strategic objectives and near term steps for the US 301/41 corridor in Manatee County. The corridor discussion included the possibility of a new bridge crossing of the Manatee River. While no true consensus clearly emerged on the big question of whether to pursue a new bridge in relation to the idea of constructing flyover ramps on US 301 to reduce intersection delays, there was general agreement on several near- and mid-term strategies for the US 301/41 corridor in Palmetto and Bradenton. The study limits for the charrette generally extended from 17th Street on the north to 13th Avenue on the south. This memo summarizes the input and areas of consensus from this charrette event for moving forward on developing more detailed plans and priorities for the corridor.

A charrette is an intensive and collaborative work session of varying length and level of detail intended to delve into one or more key issues to build support for a course of action. In this case, the MPO's US 301/41 charrette involved about 75 local elected officials and staff from Manatee County, the cities of Bradenton and Palmetto, the MPO, the Florida Department of Transportation, property and business representatives, and interested citizens in a discussion about potential mobility solutions in the corridor. Most of the participants stayed throughout the afternoon, which entailed an opening plenary session with a presentation covering corridor conditions, previous studies and recommendations, and a series of two small group break-out discussions. The break-out discussions focused first on defining corridor issues and opportunities, and then on defining action steps and strategies. Random seating assignments enabled the participants to interact with a diversity of participants at their table. Finally, a representative of each group presented the results of their discussions to the entire audience, outlining the group's consensus on both near term and longer term actions.



US 301/41 is one of Manatee County's most congested and regionally significant roadways. Despite its economic importance to the community, there are currently no improvements programmed for mobility improvements in the corridor, and this vital gateway into the cities of Bradenton and Palmetto lacks adequate treatments for pedestrians and bicyclists. Studies have considered overpasses and a new bridge to address future mobility in this corridor. A practical, thoughtfully phased plan is needed to improve mobility and support economic opportunity. The charrette focused on identifying the key issues and next steps to improve mobility and access in the corridor, and how can they best fit the context of the community.

Summary of Outcomes

The charrette participants affirmed the role of US 301/41 as a regional corridor, and as such, it should function more effectively for all modes. Origin-destination survey data from 2008 revealed that about 50 percent of motor vehicles entering Palmetto or Bradenton on US 301 from the south or north are traveling through to a destination beyond the downtown area, such as the DeSoto Mall, the Sarasota-Bradenton International Airport area, downtown Sarasota and other points. Conversely, the Business 41/Green Bridge corridor is viewed by those at the charrette as more of the local main street corridor. The participants suggested that part of the solution may be in relatively lower cost wayfinding and signage programs that should be developed to guide regional and local travelers to the most appropriate route given their destinations. Key issues will be determining the best locations for wayfinding/directional signage, compliance with federal and state signage requirements and the type, scale and design of the wayfinding and signage elements to provide the most effective results for the targeted audience (e.g., non-local through traffic, local vehicular traffic, freight and various types of commercial vehicles and bicyclists).

The DeSoto Bridge lacks any accommodation for bicyclists and pedestrians, and treatments for those modes should be added to the bridge as an extension on either side or incorporated as part of planned reconstruction of this aging structure when funds become available. There is no current plan to replace or reconstruct the bridge.



While it may be structurally obsolete, there was general agreement that capacity of the DeSoto Bridge is not an issue. The congestion occurs on either side of the river because traffic volumes exceed the functional capacity of the 10th Street interchange in Palmetto and the at-grade intersections with SR 64 (Manatee Avenue and 6th Avenue), 9th Avenue and 13th Avenue in Bradenton. The competing traffic volumes for limited signal “green time” at US 301 and SR 64, in combination with the close spacing of each of those traffic signals creates excessive queues that cause recurring delay for travelers.

There was no clear consensus among the break-out groups on the issue of construction of a new bridge versus the concept of adding flyover ramps added to the existing roadway to reduce delays at one or more of the at-grade intersections. Participants cited the need for better information about potential flyover design concepts and their feasibility, how the bridge would connect into the existing roadway network north and south of the Manatee River, the extent to which either type of project would provide value relative to its cost, and how either solution would be funded in light of the region’s current backlog of project needs. The charrette included strong voices both for and against a new bridge, which would be very expensive and potentially disruptive to existing residential neighborhoods, the environment and historic areas like Braden Castle. Proponents of a new bridge cited the cost, scale and potentially divisive nature of grade-separated flyovers at existing intersections.

Circulation and ingress/egress issues plague the Red Barn Flea Market and Plaza in Bradenton and the Walmart shopping center in Palmetto. Drivers have to make u-turns to access the Red Barn, and all traffic to and from Walmart is via US 301 because of the railroad to the rear and the ramp to access northbound US 41. Local street and cross-access connections should be explored for both sites to better manage ingress and egress to the heavy traffic-generating developments so that traffic is better distributed across a network and disruptions in flow for US 301/41 are minimized. Various participants suggested examining the potential of giving Walmart direct access to the northbound on-ramp to US 41, and an underpass at 17th Avenue in Bradenton to help facilitate the flow of traffic leaving McKechnie Field after an event.

Participants agreed that multimodal treatments in the corridor are needed to help encourage and improve the safety of walking and bicycling, as well as accessing public transportation. The US 301 corridor is a barrier that divides parts of the cities of Palmetto and Bradenton, and it presents an uncomfortable and uninviting environment for most people to walk or bicycle. Treatments for vulnerable road users should include new or enhanced facilities, signage/routing, signals and enforcement to address unsafe behavior of vehicles and non-motorized travelers. There was also discussion about the addition of one or more park-and-ride lots in Palmetto with express or priority transit service along US 301 to employment and retail destinations to the south.



The charrette participants agreed that right-of-way (ROW) acquisition and access management should be short-term strategies. Right-of-way is less expensive to buy now and should be acquired to enable wider sidewalks or shared use paths, turn lanes or other types of mobility improvements. Access management would help traffic flow now.

The MPO should partner with Manatee County, the municipalities and FDOT to conduct a more detailed Congestion Management Study of the corridor as a precursor to a more in-depth Project Development and Environment (PD&E) study of major capacity and access improvements in the corridor. The Congestion Management Study of selected corridors is an important part of the MPO's continuing Congestion Management Process, which is one of the important tools the MPO uses to address short-term transportation needs. The study would focus on a detailed access management plan, safety, multimodal treatments and operational strategies like improved signal timing.

Summary and Recommended Next Steps

The Sarasota/Manatee MPO's US 301/41 charrette provided a useful forum for a diverse range of stakeholders to take time out of their busy schedules to focus on one major transportation issue of regional and local significance. The primary value of the meeting was to re-initiate an important dialogue about a long-standing issue of concern in the community – how to improve north-south mobility in an area where the Manatee River, established neighborhoods and existing businesses limit the options. Following a review of the charrette outcomes and recommendations, the MPO and its partners should consider pursuing the following near-term actions:

- Requesting assistance from the Florida Department of Transportation to undertake a more detailed feasibility assessment of mobility, access and circulation options along the US 301/41 corridor, including its impact on operations, multimodal access, safety and delay.
- Exploring solutions for improved business and site circulation improvements that would reduce out-of-direction travel and congestion on state-maintained thoroughfares.
- Developing concepts for wayfinding and signage that would help travelers navigate through the corridor depending on their destination and trip purpose.
- Initiating transit service and facility improvements in the corridor to encourage more potential riders to use transit as an alternative to driving.
- Requesting a feasibility study to explore the possibility of adding bicycle and pedestrian facilities to the DeSoto Bridge.

The following highlights a summary of the key bullet point recommendations as presented by each of the eight separate break-out groups. Each group identified their major areas of agreement and desired next steps.

Group 6

No new bridge

Manage traffic with bridges they already have:

- North side near 41 and 19th Southbound – variable message sign with travel time and delay information
- Cantilever to both side of DeSoto Bridge for peds and bikes
- Signalization timing for the whole corridor, including 7th Avenue; avoid separating the community

In Bradenton:

Red Barn should not be first significant destination...give people more destinations to stop and spend money locally

Short term: sign boards and signalization and sector plans for economic development

Design cantilevers to bridge in mid term

Redesign 10th and 41 in the mid term

Long term – 41 / 301 intersection and building the bridge cantilevers for bikes and pedestrians

Group 5

Funding and constraints analysis will be important to move forward

Flyover – possibly a long term idea

Control some of the turning movements – flyover at 7th rather than a full intersection, which is the best way to handle the hotel and convention center traffic.

Park and ride lot opportunities with riverfront redevelopment

Short term: buying right of way because it's a good time now to buy land

Wayfinding

Long term – flyover to accommodate through traffic

Did not talk about a new bridge

Group 4

Short term – understand more about travel patterns

What's recommended from FDOT for Haben/7th and 10th to guide recommendations longer term

Signalization, especially at 3rd Ave on the Green Bridge

MID- range: 10th Street interchange improvements

DeSoto improvements for ped and emergency response

Longer term: identified two possible locations for a new bridge – Canal Road or Ellenton Gillette and tying in with 27th St E or 9th St E; must address community impacts

There is a need for a 3rd bridge for emergency response or during construction periods.

Group 3

Divert traffic off 6th Avenue to 9th Avenue (MLK) to help alleviate gridlock in short to mid-term

Looked at a bridge – possibly at 27th Street E – but trying to avoid Braden Castle. But if it connects to 27th Street, it has to go all the way to 301 and 44th Avenue.

Short term – fix the Palmetto 10th Street interchange and add park and ride lots for transit

Long term – construct a new bridge, but be aware of environmental impacts

Group 2

Gridlock on 1st Street (US 301) is because of traffic on Manatee Avenue and 6th Avenue

Considered flyovers at Manatee and 6th – but it separate the community and create a sense of blight, so did not support

Long term need to consider a north-south alternative (bridge)

Short term: 3rd Street West – take advantage of this underutilized road to give people travel options

Long term: direct access ramps from DeSoto Bridge to 3rd Avenue or to connect with 2nd Avenue; give people multiple different access methods into and out of downtown and the hospital.

Incorporate multimodal options into the redesign of the existing DeSoto Bridge

Give direct access from Walmart to on-ramp to merge going north

Group 1

Need a third bridge....looked at 27th and Leffingwell or 9th Street and Canal, but 15th St E is the better connection

Widening DeSoto Bridge to accommodate additional lane and multimodal facilities

Connect 7th to Haben and get signal working...giving economic opportunity along 7th Avenue in Palmetto

Need better east-west capacity in Bradenton from 15th Street W to a new bridge on the east.

Redesign of US 301 & 10th Street interchange

Did not like concept of elevated roadways on US 301

Group 7 (middle back of room)

It is a regional transportation corridor

Avoid bypass community syndrome, which detracts from economic growth in the area

Discounted 3rd bridge, let's work with what we've got

Replace the 301/DeSoto Bridge – new bridge replacement

- Tie in with parallel corridor on 9th Street

Group 8 (closer to front)

Consensus not to build a bridge – political reality and environmental issues make it infeasible

There is a direct access possibility to the Red Barn from the south to eliminate 13th Ave u-turn

17th Ave connects to McKechnie Field – create an underpass to the Red Barn and let people turn left to head north after a ball game

Grade separation of existing 301 intersections is the best option if done in respectful way to existing businesses.

Replacement bridge with 6 lanes and shoulders/bike lanes/sidewalks would be best option.

Our feeling is the 7th St extension in Palmetto was not needed; the site for hotel is better closer to the water

7th Street is a road to nowhere

Short-term – get PD&E study underway to get right-of-way started

Red Barn access point

Mid-term – working on grade separation

Long term- bridge replacement