



**CHARLOTTE COUNTY – PUNTA GORDA
METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION**

MINUTES OF THE MPO BOARD MEETING, MARCH 6, 2017
MURDOCK ADMINISTRATIVE BUILDING
18500 MURDOCK CIRCLE, ROOM #119
PORT CHARLOTTE FL 33948

MEMBERS PRESENT

Commissioner Christopher Constance, Charlotte County Commissioner, MPO Vice Chair
Commissioner Stephen R. Deutsch, Charlotte County Commissioner, MPO Chair
Commissioner Ken Doherty, Charlotte County Commissioner
Commissioner James Herston, Charlotte County Airport Authority
Councilmember Nancy Prafke, Punta Gorda City Council

ADVISORY

Bessie Reina, FDOT District One

STAFF PRESENT

Bob Herrington, MPO Director
Gary Harrell, MPO Principal Planner
Lakshmi N. Gurram, MPO Planner III
Wendy Scott, MPO Planner II
Bekie Leslie, Administrative Services Coordinator

OTHERS PRESENT

Steve Walls, FDOT Southwest Area Office Director
D’Juan Harris, FDOT
John Burrage, CAC Chair
Steve Fabian, Jr., CAC Vice Chair
Venkat Vattikuti, TAC Vice Chair/Charlotte County Public Works

1. Call to Order & Roll Call

MPO Chair Stephen R. Deutsch called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. Commissioner James Herston gave an invocation. MPO Chair Stephen R. Deutsch noted that all MPO Board members were present.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

3. Additions/Deletions to the Agenda

There were no Additions and/or Deletions to the Agenda. *Commissioner Constance made a motion to approve the Agenda. Commissioner Doherty seconded the motion, and it was approved unanimously.*

4. Public Comments on Agenda Items

There were no public comments on agenda items.

5. Chairs' Reports:

A. MPO Board Chair's Report

MPO Chair Deutsch stated that it was appropriate to open the meeting with an invocation, and Commissioner Herston had agreed to give the one at this meeting. He noted that other MPO Board Members may volunteer for future meetings. He commented on a glitch in US 41 signalization at the intersection of Olean Blvd that he had noticed about 3 months ago, where the timing for the green light was only 6-7 seconds long. Venkat Vattikuti indicated that neither the State nor the County staff had changed anything with the signal timing. He speculated that perhaps the Contractor had replaced a faulty switch, which fixed the problem.

B. Citizens' Advisory Committee (CAC) Chair's Report

John Burrage reported on the February 8, 2017 CAC Meeting. He stated that the CAC Members had recommended approval of the 2040 LRTP amendment. He noted that the CAC Members were pleased with the status of the Burnt Store Road project and were awaiting answers from staff on various other issues raised at the meeting. Commissioner Deutsch thanked the CAC Members for their volunteer service.

C. Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) Chair's Report

TAC Vice Chair Venkat Vattikuti reported on the February 8, 2017 TAC Meeting. He stated that there were no major issues other than the draft Project Priorities List.

6. Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) Report

Bessie Reina introduced Steve Walls, the new FDOT Southwest Area Office Director. Mr. Walls has over 30 years of experience in the transportation field with the last 10 years at FDOT District One.

She also introduced D’Juan Harris, the new FDOT liaison for Charlotte County. Mr. Harris stated that he looked forward to working with the Charlotte County-Punta Gorda MPO, after serving as FDOT liaison for the Lee County MPO for the last 2 ½ years. He was pleased to report that State Road 31 has been designated as an emerging Strategic Intermodal System (SIS) highway, which opens the corridor for funding opportunities. He also noted that Jim Boxold resigned as the Florida Department of Transportation Secretary, and Ms. Rachel Comb is serving as interim in that position.

Commissioner Deutsch asked whether or not the SR 31 project would be put on the fast track, especially given Governor Scott’s support of Babcock Ranch. He noted that the Babcock Ranch Grand Opening would be held on the coming weekend. He cautioned that increased Babcock Ranch traffic will mix with cargo traffic. FDOT staff noted that given the Emerging SIS status, a new pot of funding may become available for SR 31. Most projects have a 10-15 year horizon. Commissioner Deutsch believed the focus should be on 3-5 years instead. Commissioner Constance stated that the roundabout slated for the intersection of SR 31 and CR 74 should be fast tracked, especially in light of (1) safety issues including fatalities, (2) future traffic increases and (3) its role as emerging infrastructure for freight. He also mentioned the need for increasing fortifications on SR 31. He stated that CR74 should become a state road once again given its role as a major Florida east-west corridor. Commissioner Doherty related that this intersection has been a problem for three decades. He requested that FDOT “please help us help you” by letting the MPO Board members know what actions they could take to help move the project up the line. Councilmember Prafke supported her colleagues’ statements, indicating that a proactive rather than reactive stance was needed. Commissioner Deutsch noted that there is MPO Board Member unanimity on this issue. He stated that he believed that the State should take back roads that had been transferred in the past, but he realized that there is only a small chance of this occurring. Discussion then centered on a Kittelson & Associates 2013 study that identified some constraints like utility lines and wetlands in the area. Steve Walls stated that currently FDOT has studies underway to assess the area and is trying to improve the process. Truck damage is being assessed and corrected. He noted that he was personally well aware of the corridor, having driven it for years on business trips. He reiterated that the Emerging SIS designation will help in the future. Commissioner Deutsch invited all to attend the Babcock Ranch Grand Opening at 10 a.m. on Saturday, March 11, 2017. Councilmember Prafke stressed the need to include the bicycle community in this area’s planning efforts. She stated that in the past, rumble strips on the roadway had placed bicyclists into the main road and made it more dangerous.

7. Charlotte County Airport Authority Report

Commissioner Herston stated that the Punta Gorda Airport is doing well. Passenger counts are up 33% over the prior year and have broken through the million passenger level. Hangars are

fully rented. A Special Meeting was scheduled for the next day to discuss building more rental car space and parking. He expressed his appreciation for support from both the City and the County.

Commissioner Deutsch requested the addition to future MPO Board agenda's for reports from both the County and the City. Commissioner Doherty stated that County representatives will be traveling to Washington, DC and Tallahassee soon, and a report at the next MPO Board Meeting would be appropriate. Bob Herrington stated these reports would be added to the forthcoming MPO Board agendas.

Councilmember Prafke indicated that she would be happy to provide a City report. She discussed the newly approved hotel to be located in downtown Punta Gorda which will add more traffic in that area. She also noted that an accident with fatalities on I-75 over the weekend (at Mile Marker 177) directly impacted US 41 through downtown Punta Gorda. Commissioner Constance stated that scheduled improvements to Harbor View Road will help to address problems with traffic flow between both the I-75 and US 41 bridges whenever there are accidents on either major roadway.

Commissioner Herston asked Councilmember Prafke if there had been any complaints or requests regarding possible signalization at the two intersections of US 41 (bridge area) and Retta Esplanade. Councilmember Prafke stated that this was more of an issue on the northbound side of US 41 at the hotel. Signs have been installed asking pedestrians to cross at the signalized intersection at US 41 and Marion Avenue which is a safer route. Commissioner Constance noted that it was incredibly dangerous to cross at the area of US 41 and Retta Esplanade. He also observed that the Gilchrist Park renovations were also underway. He asked FDOT staff if there was any answer regarding the right on red issue at Nesbit Street onto Marion Avenue (comparing it to the similar situation on Retta Esplanade and US 41). Bessie Reina stated that the current signalization was in place because there are protected dual left turn lanes which creates safety concerns. Following a discussion on the matter, MPO Board Members requested that FDOT staff assess the situation further and give consideration to allowing a right on red signal only when traffic is allowed to flow on Marion Avenue (not when the opposing two left turn lanes have the right of way). Commissioner Herston said that this type of signal was recently installed at Kings Hwy and Veterans Blvd.

8. PUBLIC HEARING: 2040 Long Range Transportation Plan Amendment

Bob Herrington described how this LRTP Amendment adds the Babcock Webb Trail Corridor extension through the Webb Wildlife Management Area as a multi-use trail. Charlotte County requested this LRTP Amendment for this 12.6 mile corridor, following the BCC action on September 27, 2016 to amend its 2050 Comprehensive Plan to include the Babcock Webb Trail Corridor extension. An amendment is required by FDOT to add projects in the 2040 Needs Plan to be consistent with the FDOT 2060 Florida Transportation Plan.

Chair Deutsch opened the Public Hearing. No one wished to speak.

Commissioner Constance made a Motion to close the Public Hearing. Commissioner Herston seconded the Motion, and the Motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Constance made a Motion to approve an amendment to the Charlotte County-Punta Gorda MPO 2040 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) adding the Babcock Webb Trail Corridor extension through the Webb Wildlife Management Area as a multi-use trail. Councilmember Prafke seconded the Motion. Following a roll call vote, the LRTP Amendment was adopted unanimously.

9. Consent Agenda

- A. Approval of Minutes: December 19, 2016 Meeting**
- B. Approval of Minutes: January 23, 2017 Joint Charlotte-Sarasota/Manatee MPO Board Meeting**
- C. FY 2016/2017 – FY 2017/2018 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)/Metropolitan Planning Organization Agreement Amendments and De-Obligation of PL Funds**

Commissioner Ken Doherty, asked Mr. Herrington if he wished to make any comments of Agenda item 9C. Mr. Herrington stated that this routine action was required annually to move funding between years.

Commissioner Doherty made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. Commissioner Constance seconded the motion, and the motion carried unanimously.

10. 2017 Project Priorities – Discussion

Bob Herrington noted that FDOT requests new items annually for the Project Priorities List. He observed that the projects are very similar to those found on last year's list, and there has been some updating of project phases. Projects alternate between the County and the City. He also noted that some Burnt Store Road TRIP funding had been obtained.

Commissioner Deutsch inquired about when the US 41 at Murdock Circle left turn lane extensions will be completed. Bob Herrington indicated that funding will be available any time after July 1, 2017. Commissioner Deutsch noted that the County had wanted to provide advanced funding to accomplish the work sooner, and he asked FDOT staff to advise the County if they can help move ahead on the project.

Councilmember Prafke noted that a change would be needed to the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP)-Local Projects List Item #3 regarding US 41 sidewalks. The recommendation is a change from sidewalks to Multi-Use Recreational Trails (MURTs) in the City of Punta Gorda and South Charlotte County areas. After thorough discussion, it was agreed that City of Punta Gorda staff will review the need for an appropriate change in the description of TAP List Item #3 (*sidewalk to MURT*). The entire final 2017 Project Priorities List will be offered for approval at the May 1, 2017 MPO Board Meeting for forwarding to FDOT by July 1, 2017.

11. Public Comments

Steve Fabian spoke regarding the proposed US 41 bicycle/pedestrian project on the west side of the roadway in Punta Gorda. He noted that there are twelve dangerous driveways in that area. He stated that bicyclists will have right of way which could tie up US 41 traffic trying to turn into those driveways. He stated that the situation will be unsafe and should be further analyzed.

10. Staff Comments

Bob Herrington referenced a newspaper article regarding the passing of Ann Mercer, who he characterized as “a great lady, who was active with various MPO committees.” He reviewed recent staff activities including:

- Tracking of proposed federal legislation to repeal the recent MPO coordination rule
- MPO Chairs (or their alternates) attending the Coordinated Urban Transportation Studies (CUTS) meeting (given a BCC meeting conflict, Commissioner Herston attended)
- Florida MPOAC events
- Morning tour held that day for FDOT staff to view Charlotte projects

12. Members Comments

The MPO Board Members welcomed new FDOT staff. Commissioner Herston looked forward to working with them, especially on the issue of extending US 41 left turn lanes at Murdock Circle. Commissioner Constance said that the issue was longstanding, and advance reimbursement from the County had been offered on the project, but not accepted. He hoped for improved coordination in the future. Commissioner Herston felt that a “push button contract” arrangement would be great, and County Engineering could assist with plan development. Commissioner Deutsch noted that beyond the MPO staff, City and County staff will be very accommodating in working cooperatively with FDOT in a strong team effort. He stated that the MPO Board was anxious to correct this left turn extension issue. He noted that signage stating “Keep right except for passing” would be helpful.

13. Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 2:50 P.M. The next scheduled meeting of the MPO Board will be held on Monday, May 1, 2017.