



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

MINUTES OF THE MPO BOARD MEETING, MAY 1, 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

Steve Walls, 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

Lynn Matthews, Punta Gorda City Council
Bessie Reina, FDOT
D’Juan Harris, FDOT
Josh Moye, Assistant Charlotte County Attorney (MPO Legal Services)
John Burrage, CAC Chair
Steve Fabian, Jr., CAC Vice Chair
Mitchell Austin, TAC Chair/City of Punta Gorda
Stephen Carter, BPAC Chair
Danny Quick, Charlotte County Public Works
Mike Koenig, Charlotte County Community Services
Michelle Edwards, Charlotte County Transit

Andrea McDonough, Charlotte County Transit
Jill Mead, Charlotte County Public Schools
James Stultz, Pastor, Peace River Baptist Church
Rick Braun, BPAC Applicant
Emily E. Chidester, Peace River Riders Bicycle Club/BPAC Member Applicant
Carol DeLuca, I.P. Condo Association, Punta Gorda
Dennis Rudge
Catherine Polcari
Eleanor D'Arcy
James Hall
Delores Hall
Brad Hillberry
Brenda Hillberry
Janet Mustachio
Patricia Kelly
John Kelly
David C. Flagg
Jim Gibbons
Kim Mosteller
Patricia Raynes
Christina Faulkner
Bill Reilly
Barbara Michaelson
Ardis Baus
Paris Milliken
Marshall Fernholz
Lin Fernholz
Ann Slattery
Mike Slattery
Sue Manternach
Sara Smith

DRAFT

1. Call to Order & Roll Call

MPO Chair Stephen R. Deutsch called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. All members were present, except Commissioner Constance who arrived shortly after the start of the meeting.

2. Invocation

Pastor James Stultz (Peace River Baptist Church) gave the invocation.

3. Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

4. Additions and/or Deletions to the Agenda

There were no Additions and/or Deletions to the Agenda.

5. Public Comments on Agenda Items

Rick Braun, a bicyclist and candidate for the BPAC, gave a brief biography and expressed his opinion on various bicycle safety concerns.

David Flagg, a Punta Gorda resident, spoke against Agenda Item #8, a proposed amendment to the 2040 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) to add a project of widening Aqui Esta Drive from Bal Harbor Blvd to US 41. He noted that a resort proposed for the area had been voted down by the Punta Gorda City Council and would no longer impact the roadway.

Emily Chidester, a bicyclist and BPAC applicant, expressed her interest in being on the BPAC as well as her support of Agenda Item #8.

6. Chairs' Reports:

A. MPO Board Chair's Report

Commissioner Deutsch raised the issue of needed improvements to SR 31 and CR 74 especially given the area's new Babcock Ranch development. He noted that these current two lane traffic roadways require immediate attention, considering an increase in the number of Babcock Ranch visitors, as well as construction, mining and farming traffic. He characterized this as a serious priority that cannot wait.

Commissioner Deutsch provided a brief history of the upcoming extension of the two left turn lanes from NB US 41 at Murdock Circle. Danny Quick mentioned that the last information received from FDOT staff was that project funding was budgeted in the upcoming fiscal year beginning July 1, 2017. Discussion followed regarding whether the County may up-front funding to complete the project before the next tourist season. Steve Walls stated that he would check on the issue.

Commissioner Deutsch noted that the County was nearing the end of completion of roadwork along Edgewater Blvd. The informal opening date was scheduled for June 1, 2017 with a formal opening to follow later in the month.

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

John Burrage reviewed a summary of the actions taken at the April 12, 2017 CAC Meeting. He noted that following a discussion of the proposed motion on the Aqui Esta LRTP amendment, CAC members had voted against the motion, 5-4.

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

TAC Chair Mitchell Austin summarized the actions taken at the April 12, 2017 TAC Meeting. He noted that all agenda items were approved except the proposed motion on the Aquí Esta LRTP amendment. TAC member consensus instead was to include the project in the 2045 LRTP update in 2020. Mr. Austin stated that the City will work cooperatively with both the MPO and County staff as well as the Consultant on the Greenways and Trails Multi-Use Master Plan.

Commissioner Constance asked Mr. Austin about any proposed development activity on Aquí Esta Drive. Mr. Austin stated that there was currently no new development proposal, since the City Council had voted down a proposed resort development. He stated that the LRTP Amendment reflected concern for increased traffic in the long term, given continued Punta Gorda Isles (PGI) buildout and hurricane evacuation needs. He emphasized that the City would like these long term needs on Aquí Esta Drive comprehensively addressed.. Commissioner Constance noted that in the previous Aquí Esta project, the big issue was bridge width on that roadway. Mr. Austin gave a brief history of the earlier project and how it had been scaled back, noting that hurricane concerns regarding flooding had been addressed. Mr. Austin stated that it was his understanding that the bridge as built could accommodate expanded lanes, but some additional Right-of-Way costs could occur from lane expansion.

Councilmember Prafke noted that the previous Aquí Esta project had been a County-led initiative with significantly modified objectives. She noted that the Amendment was a long term objective with no imminent projects.

D. Bicycle/Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC) Chair's Report

Stephen Carter, BPAC Chair summarized actions taken at the March 16, 2017 BPAC Meeting. Discussion had occurred on a potential less costly alternative route for the US 41 Multi-use Trail, east side from Tuckers Grade to Taylor Road. One member had praised the recent addition of a trail through the Babcock Webb Trail as an excellent addition to the Plan, connecting the SUN Trail and the center of the City of Punta Gorda to rural routes.

7. Local Government Reports:

A. Charlotte County Airport Authority

Commissioner Herston handed out a package of various reports, including monthly passenger counts for Allegiant and Frontier Airlines, operations reported by the Airport Tower, cities served by the airlines, hangar rentals, gallons of fuel sold, and a Director's Development Update on numerous projects and the progress of the Airport Master Plan Update. Figures in these reports were all trending upward.

Councilmember Prafke thanked the Airport Authority regarding their educational outreach to the citizens, since the City cannot field aviation complaints. She noted that she has worked with Airport Chief Operations Officer Ron Mallard who deals continually with the airlines to remedy complaint situations.

Commissioner Doherty requested that Allegiant Airlines consider exploring additional opportunities in the Northeast US area for connections to Punta Gorda.

B. City of Punta Gorda

Councilmember Prafke noted that a hotel was being constructed in Punta Gorda's downtown. Recently, a zoning change was approved for an historic home on Retta Esplanade for conversion to Carmelo's Restaurant. She reported that a new accident report had shown eleven crashes westbound on West Marion Ave at Maude Street at the entrance to Fisherman's Village and the Visual Arts Center. Eight of these crashes involved vehicles in the right lane turning left across adjoining traffic. Therefore, the City was developing highway signage on West Marion Ave. announcing Fisherman's Village on the right and Visual Arts Center on the left.

She also described a recent issue in coming to terms with an FDOT contractor over the current Retta Esplanade/Gilchrist Park construction project. It became necessary for the City to hire CEI Services for \$200,000 to oversee the project and the contractor, in addition to the over \$2.1 Million project costs. City officials were disappointed that the contractor had been approved by FDOT. She noted that it would have been nice to know upfront about the additional expense. She stated that now with CEI on site, the contractor is performing well.

Remodeling at the Burnt Store Publix Plaza is ongoing with completion forecast for Summer 2017. Councilmember Prafke stated that increased traffic was expected for this area soon.

C. Charlotte County

Commissioner Doherty thanked County staff for providing a brief list of six road projects:

- Burnt Store Road Phase 2 (North of Zemel Road to Notre Dame)
- Gasparilla Roadway (CR 771) (from Rotonda Blvd East to SR 776)
- Edgewater Drive (Harbor Rd to Midway Blvd)
- Midway Blvd (Sharpe Street to Kings Hwy)
- Olean Blvd (US 41 to Easy Street)
- Piper Road (Henry Street to US 17)

A brief discussion was held regarding joint efforts with the Sarasota/Manatee MPO to improve River Road in Sarasota County as a needed evacuation route for Charlotte County citizens. This effort is somewhat similar to the one underway with the Lee County MPO on Burnt Store Road improvements.

8. Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) Report

D'Juan Harris noted that FDOT was taking public comment on the Florida Complete Streets Handbook through May 2017. He noted that area roadways are still very busy, and FDOT initiatives are underway including Bike Month and Share the Roads efforts.

Commissioner Herston referenced the shift in the design of state highways especially in determining the classification of highways. He inquired if Complete Streets design replaces the new spacing requirements. Mr. Harris stated that it was his understanding that the Complete Streets Manual will be integrated with the new Design Manual.

Commissioner Deutsch inquired about the requirements on signage vs. visual pollution on US 41, noting that the County Commission is currently looking at the sign ordinance. He stated that signage reading “Keep right, except when passing or turning” on US 41 was warranted at the intersection with Murdock Circle. Steve Walls noted that signs are regulated heavily. He offered to look at this request to see if it could be done or if there is anything similar done elsewhere. Mr. Walls was not aware of it being done before, noting that often “oversignage” is not the solution to the issue.

9. PUBLIC MEETING:

A. FY 2017/2018 – FY 2021/2022 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

Bob Herrington reviewed the TIP document including a new handout with a map and spreadsheet. He stated that the TAC and the CAC had both recommended approval of the TIP and the Resolution.

Chair Deutsch opened the Public Meeting.

David Flagg expressed two concerns: (1) needed improvements to the Punta Gorda Isles evacuation route starting at Aquí Esta/US 41 and ending at US 17 and (2) a safety issue at Burnt Store Road in the area of Home Depot when drivers are attempting to make a left hand turn out of the parking lot, especially given limited vision at that location. Public Works Director Dan Quick agreed to provide his card to Mr. Flagg for future discussion of these issues.

Councilmember Prafke stated that she will discuss area traffic flow with Dan Quick once the Burnt Store Publix reopens later this year. She noted concerns with the impact of the remodeled plaza on Tripoli and other area roadways. She mentioned the possibility of signaling traffic in the area where it is exiting the Home Depot parking lot. Staff is waiting to gather data following the Publix reopening. She thanked Mr. Flagg for commenting on this matter.

Commissioner Constance made a Motion to close the Public Meeting. Commissioner Doherty seconded the Motion, and the Motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Doherty made a Motion to adopt the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) for Fiscal Year 2017/2018 – FY 2021/2022 and authorize the MPO Chair to sign the Authorizing Resolution and transmit the document to FDOT. The Motion should allow for staff to make minor changes and adjustments based on comments and input received. Councilmember Prafke seconded the Motion. Following a roll call vote, the TIP was adopted unanimously.

8. PUBLIC MEETING: 2040 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) Amendment

Bob Herrington stated that the City of Punta Gorda was requesting approval of a 2040 LRTP Amendment to add a project of widening Aquí Esta Drive from Bal Harbor Blvd to US 41. At the April 12, 2017 TAC Meeting, due to the lack of a motion, the TAC members by consensus recommended that the MPO Board include the project in the next (2045) LRTP Update. On the same date, the CAC Members recommended that the MPO Board not approve the project to be included in the 2040 LRTP (5-4 vote).

While respecting the City's request, Commissioner Doherty wanted clarification regarding additional technical details of the project from experts in the areas of engineering, transportation and traffic and reasoned that a deferral of the item to the August 7, 2017 MPO Board Meeting might be warranted. Dan Quick stated that when the previous Aquí Esta project was performed, half of the roadway was in the City and the other half was located in unincorporated Charlotte County. He noted that now the entire length of roadway was under the City of Punta Gorda's auspices. Nancy Prafke stated that this road was not appropriately addressed in the beginning. She reasoned that when the vacant parcel is developed some day, it would turn the parcel to a level of service "D" from there to US 41 not accounting for additional development in PGI. She noted that level of service is a concern and the City Council felt it needed to be addressed and brought to the MPO Board's attention. Commissioner Deutsch asked if it was possible that road improvements could be made a part of the development. Councilmember Prafke stated that this had been discussed with the developer, but there had been no developer interest in this request. Other areas of interest were entrance and egress as well as bicycle lanes for the entire stretch of roadway. She noted that the City can always ask for such considerations. Commissioner Herston observed that the needs plan is a wishlist for unfunded projects. He stated that the MPO Board should honor the City's request, since they merely would be adding a project to the wishlist. Councilmember Prafke characterized the City's resolution as a long range request. Commissioner Constance noted that it was wonderful that the City was bringing the issue forward, but he observed that a few months' delay to gather information on concerns such as right-of-way (ROW) costs wouldn't matter. He stated that PGI residents should consider how much they really wish to get out in time of emergency and then, should offer some buy-ins such as signing petitions, offering ROW and exploring a small financial commitment from residents in the entire region to complete the project sooner.

Chair Deutsch opened the Public Meeting.

Emily Chidester spoke in favor of approving the LRTP Amendment so that: (1) vehicles could give the state required 3 feet of room when passing bicyclists even during tourist season, and (2) the action would be adding a place marker for improving the roadway for auto and bicycle traffic in the future.

Jim Gibbons, who resides at Buttonwood Village for 6 months each winter, stated that many people in Buttonwood Village are opposed to widening Aquí Esta Drive. He noted that at the time of an emergency, two lanes going one way should be considered.

Kim Mosteller, a Buttonwood Village resident, stated that despite predictions to the contrary, it was hard to believe that the developer of the large tract of land along Aqui Esta Drive would not attempt to push through development in the near future. She asked if it might happen even sooner than it was planned.

Commissioner Constance made a Motion to close the Public Meeting. Commissioner Doherty seconded the Motion, and the Motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Doherty stressed that it was essential to determine the long range needs for buildout/capacity for easterly exiting of PGI and consideration of options including other routes available in case of emergency, since he was not convinced that just widening Aqui Esta Drive was the solution.

Councilmember Prafke remarked that it was not solely an evacuation issue, but also one of quality of life for residents in the area, since if development continues, the level of service will degrade. The City was only requesting that it be put on the list for consideration.

Commissioner Constance addressed the citizen's question about whether or not development would drive faster funding for the project. He stated that as evidenced at many MPO meetings, this will not happen, given more important State and regional road issues, such as Harbor View Road widening, which is a connector with thousands of users. He stated that the Aqui Esta Drive project wouldn't rank high enough to override bigger/more important roadway projects, which are generally interconnectors between major roadways/Counties. He did not envision it jumping to the top of the list.

CAC Chair John Burrage responded to Commissioner Herston's request for greater detail on the discussions of the CAC members regarding the proposed LRTP amendment. Commissioner Doherty stressed that it would be wise to review the topic further and asked Bob Herrington about what staff could accomplish between now and the August 7, 2017 MPO Board meeting as far as development of costs and consideration of other options. Mr. Herrington stated that it would be up to City staff to provide the requested details of the project for the MPO Board's consideration at the August meeting.

Councilmember Prafke made a Motion to amend the Charlotte County-Punta Gorda MPO 2040 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) adding a project of widening Aqui Esta Drive from Bal Harbor Boulevard to US 41 (Tamiami Trail). Commissioner Herston seconded the Motion.

Commissioner Doherty stated that if the item could not be deferred until August, he would vote against it. Commissioner Constance requested that City staff answer questions. Mitchell Austin stepped forward to state that City staff did not have a cost estimate available at the present time, but could develop one in cooperation with the MPO staff. Commissioner Constance inquired if the addition of this project to the needs list now gives a developer any advantage. Mr. Austin noted that if the project was added to the LRTP as an identified need with no funding, it could give the City the opportunity to have a conversation with the developer regarding funding share.

Commissioner Constance made a Motion to amend the earlier Motion to include a requirement that City of Punta Gorda staff provide a briefing for discussion at the August 7, 2017 MPO Board Meeting regarding the proposed Aqui Esta widening project.

Commissioner Doherty seconded the motion. Following a roll call vote, the Amendment to the original Motion was approved unanimously.

Commissioner Doherty made a Motion to amend the Charlotte County-Punta Gorda MPO 2040 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) adding a project of widening Aqui Esta Drive from Bal Harbor Boulevard to US 41 (Tamiami Trail) as amended (to include a briefing by City Staff at the August 7, 2017 MPO Board Meeting). **Commissioner Constance** seconded the Motion. Following a roll call vote the Motion as amended carried unanimously.

11. Consent Agenda

- A. Approval of Minutes: March 6, 2017 Meeting**
- B. FY 2017/2018 Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Section 5305(d) Transit Planning Application**
- C. Transportation Disadvantaged (TD) Planning Grant Agreement**
- D. FY 2016/2017 – FY 2017/2018 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)/Metropolitan Planning Organization Agreement Amendment**
- E. Citizens' Advisory Committee Appointment**
- F. Charlotte County Transportation Disadvantaged Local Coordinating Board (LCB) Appointment**

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

12. Charlotte County Transportation Disadvantaged Local Coordinating Board (LCB) Appointment

This item was postponed until the August 7, 2017 MPO Meeting due to a technical issue with the meeting packet materials.

13. Bicycle/Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC) Appointment

Following a vote by MPO Board members, Bob Herrington announced that Emily Chidester was elected to fill the BPAC Bicycle Club vacancy.

Commissioner Constance made a motion to appoint Emily Chidester as the Bicycle Club Representative on the BPAC. **Commissioner Doherty** seconded the motion, and the motion carried unanimously.

Bob Herrington noted that applications for non-elected committee applicants are always kept on file, so that these individuals may be contacted whenever there is a vacancy.

14. FY 2018/2019 – FY 2022/2023 Project Priorities

Bob Herrington reviewed the Project Priorities List. TAC/CAC/BPAC members all had recommended adoption of the list.

Commissioner Doherty made a Motion to adopt the Charlotte County-Punta Gorda MPO FY 2018/2019 – 2022/2023 Project Priorities for the upcoming FDOT Draft Tentative Work Program Cycle. Commissioner Herston seconded the Motion, and it carried unanimously.

15. Greenways and Trails Multi-Use Master Plan Interlocal Agreement

Bob Herrington described the reason for the proposed agreement. Handouts provided at the meeting included a new scope of work.

Commissioner Doherty made a Motion to approve the Interlocal Agreement for staff to work cooperatively with County staff to develop a County Greenways and Trails Master Plan. Commissioner Herston seconded the Motion, and it carried unanimously.

16. Public Comments

Emily Chidester thanked MPO Board members for her election to the BPAC. She stated to FDOT staff that on US 17 cyclists would benefit from the cleaning of the roadway shoulders. She noted that repaving is upcoming which will be an upgrade from the current roadway patchwork.

Rick Braun thanked MPO Board Members for considering his BPAC application. He remarked that the County overall is a wonderful place to ride bicycles, but roadway maintenance is needed. He stated that it is common to have flat tires, since whenever a bicyclist enters a curve, there can be shoulders which have collected roadway debris following a rain.

17. Staff Comments

Dan Quick requested that FDOT consider improving the I-75 SB off ramp alignment at Kings Hwy to join up with the dual right hand turn lanes at Veterans Blvd. to eliminate traffic weaving. Since a Limited Access zone is involved, approval by the Federal Highway Administration would be necessary. Commissioner Deutsch thanked Mr. Quick for raising this issue.

Bob Herrington noted the recent passing of Commissioner Dick Loftus who served on the MPO Board from 2007-2010 and was a former MPO Chair. Mr. Herrington reviewed a list of recent staff activities. He noted that the USDOT rule entitled “Metropolitan Planning Organization Coordination and Planning Area Reform” was repealed recently. He also noted that the MPO’s Legislative Policy Statement would be developed earlier this year, given an early State legislative session start in 2018.

18. Members Comments

Commissioner Constance responded to Mr. Braun's bicycling concern about debris on the roadway, noting that the MPO had been proactive on the frequency of US 41 Bridge sweeping and the reduction of traffic speed limits.

Commissioner Constance noted the recent pedestrian death of Dr. Gus Collado, who was walking across Olean Blvd from Fawcett Hospital to the Virginia B. Andes Clinic when he was struck by a vehicle. He stated that a great deal of pedestrian traffic crosses in the middle of the block at this location, as well as in the middle of the block on Harbor Blvd between Fawcett Hospital/medical arts building and Bayfront Port Charlotte Hospital. He stated that as a safety matter, the County should consider mid-block pedestrian crossings in these two areas.

Commissioner Herston thanked the advisory committee members and MPO Administrative Coordinator Bekie Leslie for a job well done. He stated that he was honored to serve on the MPO Board.

Commissioner Doherty reinforced Mr. Quick's request to make improvements at the area of the I-75 SB off ramp, stating that a short piece of asphalt would remedy the issue in the short term. He also expressed regret at being unable to attend a recent MPO farewell event for Ms. Naomi Manning, and noted that he greatly appreciated her volunteer service for more than two decades.

Councilmember Prafke thanked the MPO Board for considering the City of Punta Gorda's LRTP Amendment request.

Commissioner Deutsch thanked staff and citizens for their efforts.

19. Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:47 P.M. The next scheduled meeting of the MPO Board will be held on Monday, August 7, 2017.