Introduction

The purpose of this item is provide an overview of the Southeast Florida Regional Greenways & Trails Plan, which was completed in December 2015. Funded by the Palm Beach Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) on behalf of the seven-county Southeast Florida region, the Greenways & Trails Plan includes regionally significant hiking, bicycling, and equestrian trails and is synchronized local plans as well as the statewide Greenways and Trails Plan maintained by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. Council was the project manager for the plan’s development, which included extensive public participation from local governments, MPOs, state agencies, advocacy groups, and the public.

Overview and Analysis

As part of the evolving transportation landscape, greenways and trails facilities play an increasing role as non-motorized transportation facilities. Well-developed greenways and trails networks are hallmarks of many of the most successful regions and communities. Intended for use by pedestrians, cyclists, and equestrians, these links provide mobility, expand recreational opportunities, connect community destinations, contribute to healthy lifestyles, and add value to communities.

Greenways and trails projects are funded through a variety of sources, with grant funding as an increasingly important component. Projects identified within a regional plan, such as the Southeast Florida Regional Greenways & Trails Plan, are inherently more competitive for securing grant funding, which has been maintained as a baseline consideration in the development of the network. This advantage is especially timely given the State of Florida 2015 establishment of the SUNTrails program, which provides $25 million annually for the development of regionally significant greenways and trails projects.

The Greenways/Trails Plan is intended to serve as a conceptual guide for MPOs, local governments, state agencies, and others for prioritizing and advancing projects over time to help develop an integrated network of non-motorized connections throughout the region. In addition, the regional
The perspective is designed to further inform facility development in an effort to align facilities across county lines where feasible.

The Palm Beach MPO initiated the Greenways/Trails Plan as part of its long-range planning activities, with a request to Council to manage the project. The initial planning scale was focused on the network within the Treasure Coast Region, and subsequently, the scale was expanded to encompass the larger seven-county Southeast Florida region. The Florida Greenways and Trails System Plan, which is developed and maintained by Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), was utilized as a baseline plan. This statewide plan includes “opportunity maps” that indicate existing, planned (funded), and conceptual facilities, with locally identified “priority corridors” for land trails, paddling trails, and ecological greenways. The FDEP corridors represent preferred alignments within which implementing agencies, such as local governments and user groups, are expected to develop the actual facilities. The East Coast Greenway which is a unique 3,000-mile facility from Maine to Key West that traverses Southeast Florida, was also incorporated into the baseline maps.

Working on behalf of the Palm Beach MPO, Council developed a regional scale planning effort that began with identification of existing greenways and trails facilities within the seven counties. Extending roughly 300 miles from Indian River County to Monroe County, this area includes five MPOs and one TPO, two water management districts, two Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) districts, seven county governments, and 119 municipal governments. Three regional workshops were conducted at the regional scale, with participation from all MPO/TPOs, many local governments, scores of representatives from federal and state agencies, utilities, user groups, and the public. Existing greenways/trails data for each county was compiled by the MPO/TPOs and refined with input from local governments and other users.

With input from a broad array of stakeholders, it was determined that regionally significant facilities appropriate for inclusion in the Greenways/Trails Plan would be required to meet the highest standards established by the U.S. Forest Service. These include three types of facilities:

- **Multi-Use Paved Trails**, which are a minimum of 10 feet in width, and for use by pedestrians and cyclists;
- **Multi-Use Unpaved Trails**, which are a minimum of 10 feet in width, and for use by pedestrians, cyclists, and equestrians; and
- **Unpaved Hiking Trails**, which are a minimum of 5 feet in width and for use by pedestrians exclusively.

Following the determination of facility types, criteria were developed to identify those facilities considered to be “facilities of significance” enabling a connected and meaningful greenways/trails system. These criteria include the following:

- Multi-county facilities that cross into adjacent counties
- Connections to regional parks and recreational facilities
- Connections to state or federal parks or preserves
- Connections to regionally significant educational, cultural or historic destination (e.g., colleges, universities, historic landmarks, museums)
• Connections to locally designated downtowns or central business districts
• Connections to premium transit stops or hubs (e.g., Tri-Rail stations, intermodal facilities, West Palm Beach trolley, MetroRail in Miami-Dade)

The resulting county maps along with the regional seven-county map are included as Attachment 1. The complete plan is included as a supplement on Council’s Website.

In addition to the land-based facilities, the Greenways and Trails visioning process included a high-level focus on “blueways,” which are water trails for non-motorized watercraft such as canoes, kayaks, and paddleboards. This aspect of the planning process included coordination with FDEP, a review of the Florida Paddling Trails Opportunity Map, and a broadly-attended regional paddling trails workshop. The plan includes preliminary blueways maps for each county (Attachment 2). A separate concerted effort among the environmental resource entities will be needed to further define paddling trails, launch facilities, and paddling amenities such as stopovers and portages.

The Greenways/Trails Plan represents thousands of miles of facilities that require implementation by a number of different entities for the vision to be realized. The complex nature of facilities that cross municipal boundaries and multiple property owners, along with the potential for multi-county facilities, requires coordination among many partners. Further, while the plan provides a regional perspective for Southeast Florida, the most effective implementation will occur within individual counties, often at the initiative of local governments, agencies, and user groups. FDEP has volunteered to maintain the regionally developed maps on the FDEP website for access by all users.

It is anticipated that annual updates to the Greenways/Trails Plan will be initiated annually by the participating MPOs and TPOs with participation by stakeholders identified to-date. The Palm Beach MPO has indicated that it intends to continue working with Council to facilitate annual regional workshops to help assemble new and updated information, modify the maps as appropriate, and identify projects for regional collaboration. Updated maps would then be transmitted to FDEP for assembly and posting. A separate effort is anticipated to advance the planning of a regional paddling trails system, which will require further definition, consideration of environmental features and constraints, and upland access points.

The most recent opportunity to advance a regionally significant project from the Greenways/Trails Plan involves the SUNTrails network, which is being determined by FDEP with input from the Florida Greenways and Trails Council. SUNTrails represents a new $25 Million annual funding source established by the Legislature in 2015 for the development of regionally significant trails in Florida. In addition to the “Coast to Coast Connector,” which is a central Florida trails connection between St. Petersburg and Titusville, one other regionally significant trail will be selected for funding through 2020. At its February meeting, the Florida Greenways and Trails Council preliminarily selected the East Coast Greenway as one of seven potential trail networks for funding. Council provided a letter supporting this selection (Attachment 3). A final selection for SUN Trails funding will be made at the Florida Greenways and Trails Council meeting on March 31 in Tallahassee. The inclusion of the East Coast Greenway as a hallmark facility within the Southeast Florida Greenways & Trails Plan has been significant in advancing the competitiveness of the project and provides strong evidence for the value of the Greenways/Trails planning effort.
Conclusion

The identification of a regionally significant network of greenways and trails is a complex, multi-disciplinary effort that requires extensive coordination among a number of governments, agencies, and organizations. Advance planning at a broad scale is necessary to identify and secure multi-jurisdictional alignments across municipal or county boundaries and maximize the utility of greenways and trails networks. In addition, knowledge of desired alignments for regional facilities provides greater efficiency for transportation investments, enabling the greatest leverage of facility funding with other transportation and land use projects. Implementation of the Greenways/Trails Plan will help create a more competitive, better connected region and healthier communities.

Recommendation

For information only.

Attachments
Indian River County

IR1, Indian River Connector Corridor
IR2, Ten Mile Ridge / Sand Lakes
IR3, East Coast Greenway
IR4, Central Indian River Greenway Corridor
IR5, St. Sebastian River Greenway
IR6, Trans-Florida Central R.O.W.
IR7, Indian River Lagoon Greenway
St. Lucie County

SL1, C-24 Extension
SL2, C-24 Greenway
SL3, Crosstown Parkway Corridor
SL4, East Coast Greenway
SL5, Florida Cracker Trail Corridor
SL6, Florida Cracker Trail Corridor
SL7, Green Swamp
SL8, Kings Highway Corridor
SL9, Martin/St Lucie Connector
SL10, McCarty Connection
SL11, Midway Road Connector Corridor
SL12, North Fork/Ten Mile Creek Trail
SL13, North Savannas Greenway
SL14, Okeechobee Trail Corridor
SL15, SFVMD Canal C-25 ROW
SL16, Treasure Coast Loop Trail
SL17, US-1 North Connector Corridor
SL18, US-1 North Connector Corridor
SL19, Western Greenway
February 26, 2016

Christine Small
Division of Recreation and Parks
Florida Department of Environmental Protection
3900 Commonwealth Blvd., M.S. 795
Tallahassee, FL 32399-3000

Subject: Inclusion of East Coast Greenway – Southeast Segment as part of SUNTrails Priorities

Dear Christine:

This letter is written in strong support of the inclusion of the East Coast Greenway/Southeast Segment – as part of the Florida SUNTrails priorities. This facility will provide a unique seven-county continuous trail facility from Indian River County south to Monroe County. Upon completion, this seven-county trail will encompass roughly 320 miles of uninterrupted connectivity for non-motorized users, connecting to nationally recognized natural areas and resources, historic and cultural landmarks, historic downtowns, and educational institutions including K-12, colleges, and universities. The East Coast Greenway/Southeast will also provide access for millions of residents, businesses, and visitors, providing enhanced mobility, economic enhancement, and improved quality of life.

It is important to note the East Coast Greenway/Southeast is a highlighted priority within the recently adopted Southeast Florida Greenways & Trails Plan, which was completed in December 2015. The Plan was developed over the past four years, with broad participation from local governments; metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs); state agencies including the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Florida Department of Transportation, Florida Department of Health; tourist development councils; chambers of commerce; community and advocacy groups; the private sector; and the public. The East Coast Greenway/Southeast Segment is the only continuous facility identified in the plan.

Advancing the East Coast Greenway/Southeast Segment accomplishes a key strategy within Council’s Strategic Regional Policy Plan, which is to develop a balanced, complete, and fully integrated transportation system which includes complementary pedestrian and bicycle connections (Transportation Strategy 7.1.1). Accordingly, this facility will complement southeast Florida’s transportation network by providing a superior non-motorized connection throughout the growing region in a manner that celebrates and enhances the unique environmental, economic, historic, and cultural characteristics of the corridor.
Ms. Christine Small  
February 26, 2016  
Page Two

Thank you for considering the inclusion of the East Coast Greenway/Southeast Segment as a part of the SUNTrails priorities. If you need any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact the Council.

Sincerely,

Michael J. Busha, AICP  
Executive Director

Attachment: Southeast Florida Greenways & Trails Plan (Adopted December 2016)

cc: Michael Davis, TCRPC Chair  
    Beth Beltran, Martin County MPO  
    Peter Buchwald, St. Lucie County TPO  
    Phil Matson, Indian River MPO  
    Nick Uhren, Palm Beach MPO  
    Pat Steed, CFRPC