

Waterways Plan for Martin & St. Lucie Counties

Waterways Forum 1: Marine Transportation

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2013

2:00 P.M.

*Indian Riverside Park * Frances Langford Dockside Pavilion (2nd floor)
1707 NE Indian River Drive, Jensen Beach, FL 34957*

Forum arranged by the Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council (TCRPC)
as part of the Waterways Plan for Martin & St. Lucie Counties.

NOTE TO READERS: This document reflects general meeting notes and key questions and points of discussion raised during the Forum on Marine Transportation that occurred on Thursday, December 19, 2013. General meeting notes were prepared by TCRPC.

General Meeting Notes

The meeting was opened at 2:10 p.m. by Dr. Kim DeLaney, TCRPC. Meeting participants introduced themselves (copies of the forum sign-in sheet are included with these notes). Tom Lavash, WTL & Associates, an economic consultant for the Waterways Plan Project Team, participated by phone.

(NOTE: Each speaker, beginning with Dr. DeLaney and following with all other presenters, utilized power point slides. A copy of the merged presentation is included with these meeting notes.)

Project Overview:

Dr. DeLaney introduced the Waterways Plan project, indicating it was a planning effort funded by the Martin Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), St. Lucie Transportation Planning Organization (TPO), and Florida Inland Navigational District (FIND). The Forum on Marine Transportation is the first in a series of six educational forums on various topics related to the waterways. The forums are intended to broaden the general knowledge of waterways-related issues – for the project team, the steering committee, and the general public – and help inform the development of the Waterways Plan. Dr. DeLaney noted that she is the project manager for the Waterways Plan, and the project will be guided by the MPO, TPO, and a ten-member steering committee appointed by those organizations. The project covers the waterways in both Martin and St. Lucie counties (about 120 miles of waterways, including roughly 44 miles of Intracoastal Waterway, 25 miles of St. Lucie River, and 25 miles of canals). The genesis for the plan comes from the Martin MPO and St. Lucie County TPO. Each organization is responsible for guiding long-term transportation investments with a goal of maintaining high quality of life, high level of mobility, strong economic development, and sustainability.

Dr. DeLaney noted this is the first regional waterways plan in Florida to be funded by transportation agencies (the MPO and TPO) and FIND. FIND has enabled its funding to assist in the development of regional plans like the subject plan so they as an agency can have a better

understanding of the broad opportunities that exist on the waterways and to help further inform the agency regarding its funding and investment decisions.

The focus of the plan will be upon economic opportunities as well as land use patterns along the waterways, environmental systems, multi-modal transportation (not just on the water but people can get to the water), natural resources, parks and recreational facilities, and public access. Those main themes have been reviewed by the MPO, TPO, FIND, and project steering committee, and they are being used to frame the series of informational forums that are scheduled through mid-2014 as follows:

<i>FORUM 1</i>	Marine Transportation	December 19, 2013 Thursday (2 PM)	Indian Riverside Park Frances Langford Dockside Pavilion (2 nd Floor) 1707 NE Indian River Drive; Jensen Beach, FL 34957
<i>FORUM 2</i>	Land Use & Upland Transportation	January 8, 2014 Wednesday (2 PM)	Historic City Hall 315 Avenue A; Fort Pierce, FL 34950
<i>FORUM 3</i>	Regulation & Management of Waterways	January 29, 2014* Wednesday (2 PM)	Stuart City Hall (City Commission Chambers)* 121 SW Flagler Avenue; Stuart, FL 34994
<i>FORUM 4</i>	Natural Resources	February 19, 2014* Wednesday (2 PM)	Morningside Library* 2410 SE Morningside Blvd. (Room 103); Port St Lucie, FL 34952
<i>FORUM 5</i>	Recreation/Cultural/Educational Activities	March 6, 2014* Thursday (2 PM)	Port Salerno Community Center* 4950 SE Anchor Avenue; Stuart, FL 34997
<i>FORUM 6</i>	Economic Development	April 10, 2014* Thursday (2 PM)	Port St. Lucie Civic Center* 9221 SE Civic Center Place (Room Ruby 1-2); Port St. Lucie, FL 34952

Upon completion of the waterways forums, the next component of the plan will be a broader public input process with a series of public workshop charrettes anticipated in late April or early May 2014. These events will be scheduled in Martin and St. Lucie counties, and subsequently, the project team will utilize all the information garnered during the forums and the public workshops to develop the actual narrative and illustrative plan for the waterways. The main concepts, findings, and recommendations are scheduled to be presented back to the public by early June. A handout of the project schedule (copy attached) was made available to the participants and will be available on the project website.

Presentations on Marine Transportation

Mark Crosley, Executive Director, Florida Inland Navigation District

Mark Crosley provided an overview presentation (copy attached) of the Florida Inland Navigation District (FIND), which has authority in the counties along Florida's east coast with the exception of Monroe County. The FIND Board includes twelve commissioners (one appointed for each county by the governor), and the agency has six staff members. Agency funding is provided by a small ad valorem tax across the twelve counties. FIND operates four main programs: land management and acquisition, operations, a grants program, and public information. Mr. Crosley provided a history of the Intracoastal Waterway (ICWW) and noted the basic philosophy of the agency was to maintain the ICWW and expand access to and use of this resource.

FIND's main focus is managing land for the federal government. The agency helps manage 22,000 acres of right of way that are in public ownership; 35,000 acres of dredge material; and 3,500 acres that are dredge material management sites. Mr. Crosley described the agency's long-range dredge material management plan, marine commercial activity in Florida, boating activity, and mega-yachts and their economic benefit. Other FIND-funded activities include waterway access and projects requested by local governments and agencies. FIND also removes debris, litter, and derelict vessels; funds spoil island enhancements, and distributes extensive literature regarding safe boating, protection of listed species such as the manatee. Through the waterways planning effort, Mr. Crosley noted FIND's interest in the opportunities to increase commercial traffic on the waterways and identify additional boating destinations.

Discussion topics following Mr. Crosley's overview focused on the number of registered boats in Martin and St. Lucie Counties, cargo volumes, freight movement and distribution, and the potential need to deepen the waterway to move larger vessels and increase boating opportunities. Mr. Crosley noted projects to deepen waterways are long-term in nature due to the extensive planning and permitting requirements. Additional discussion focused on the needs of recreational boaters and discharge of waste materials. Mr. Crosley noted although FIND does not focus on water quality, the agency does operate programs to support proper discharge and waste management. Dr. DeLaney noted this issue would be addressed as part of the waterways plan.

A. Jeffrey Weidner, Strategic Development Manager, Florida Department of Transportation (District IV)

Jeff Weidner talked about the Florida Department of Transportation's Strategic Intermodal System (SIS), which is a statewide network of transportation facilities including airports, seaports, railroads, waterways, and highways identified as key economic drivers. The ICWW is identified as an existing SIS facility, with the Okeechobee waterway as an emerging SIS facility. Mr. Weidner discussed the types of projects that can be funded through the SIS program as well as the small county dredging program. Mr. Weidner also provided a brief overview of the Port of Fort Pierce, its recent master planning activities, and the Port's maritime industries, including an overview of U.S. maritime academies and the related potential at the Port of Fort Pierce. He discussed the potential for ferry service operations, public/private land development opportunities, barge operations, and mega-yachts, with emphasis on the potential for FDOT funding to assist in the development of economic engines. In addition, Mr. Weidner identified a variety of recreational and tourist-based activities, such as Olympic-scale events, that could potentially be considered as part of the waterways planning effort.

Discussion topics following Mr. Weidner's included further detail regarding the characteristics of maritime academies, their similarities to college programs as well as vocational academies, and the potential for a Fort Pierce-based academy to emphasize rail, logistics, and port-related activities. Mr. Weidner emphasized FDOT's support and interest in participating in the waterways planning effort, as well as the opportunity for the plan to help identify key infrastructure improvements that could receive FDOT funding for their implementation.

Michelle Miller, Director of Operations, Marine Industries Association of the Treasure Coast

Michelle Miller provided an overview of the Marine Industries Association of the Treasure Coast (MIATC). The association exists to serve, protect, and promote the marine industry. While a primary focus is recreational boating, MIATC also serves commercial fishing and boating, freight and cargo, and commercial hospitality. In addition, MIATC promotes maritime education, marine research, engineering, and eco-tourism. The association provides member training regarding business operations and sponsors events to encourage boating activity. In coordination with FIND, MIATC helps clean 125 miles of waterway from Martin to Indian River.

Ms. Miller discussed the MIATC's noted transportation concerns regarding boat building, as the transport of boats from inland locations often requires FPL to temporarily relocate power lines. Accordingly, prior discussions have focused on the potential for a marine transportation route from the boat builders to the waterways. MIATC has also noted concerns regarding the loss of marine service areas. Ms. Miller described the association's work regarding sea grass mitigation, and the MIATC has expressed strong interest in a more clear delineation of navigable areas to enable stronger protection of sensitive areas.

MIATC offers marine career education and training, with an interest in promoting and training individuals in the marine industries. The association supports clean boater programs and clean marina programs, both of which emphasize proper boating, pump outs, and highlight water quality. Ms. Miller noted the association's concerns regarding development policies that restrict marine construction, emphasizing the desire for streamlined permitting for these uses. Ms. Miller provided marine industry links in her presentation, including the state Marine Industries Association, National Marine Manufacturers Association, and Association of Marina Industries.

Don Donaldson, P.E., County Engineer, Martin County

Don Donaldson discussed a variety of projects completed by Martin County, including beach renourishment, dredging improvements, as well as the on-going challenges the County faces regarding its dredging priorities. These challenges included management of the St. Lucie inlet, its shallow draft characteristics, and the strong recreational nature of inlet use, which does not provide the type of economic benefit required by federal funding criteria. Mr. Donaldson noted the high cost of dredging, and further, the dredge material failed to provide a beneficial use of the muck sediment, limiting its viability for economic use.

Don West, P.E., County Engineer, St. Lucie County

Don West noted that St. Lucie County's role regarding to water transportation is highly limited, and further, the County lacks a funding source for those types of maintenance operations or even to build a facility. He noted that the inlet and turning basin in Fort Pierce are federally designated, and therefore, federally maintained. Because the Army Corps of Engineers is the primary agency, St. Lucie County does not play a key role in dredging activities. Historically, St. Lucie County has not been highly active regarding transportation on the waterways, but Mr. West highlighted the extensive opportunity presented by the waterways planning effort and noted the County's desire to stay involved.

Michael Williamson, Principal, Cambridge Systematics, Inc.

Mike Williamson introduced himself as a member of the project team who would be working with TCRPC, the MPO, TPO, and others in the development of the plan. Mr. Williamson posed a series of broad questions regarding waterway planning, including the scope of visioning, various decision factors to help inform the plan, different types of uses and marine transportation options, navigational limitations, and cargo/freight opportunities.

Mr. Williamson described different types of ports in Florida, including the Port of Fort Pierce as well as Port Everglades (Fort Lauderdale), Port of Palm Beach, Port of Panama City, and Port of Pensacola. Many of the showcased ports are located within downtowns and constrained within the urban environments. Mr. Williamson also provided an overview of water taxis and ferries, the mega-yacht industry, and tourist-related opportunities.

Panel Discussion

Participants were assembled into a panel for discussion amongst themselves and an opportunity to field questions from forum attendees. (Janet Zimmerman, FIND Assistant Executive Director, replaced Mr. Crosley for the panel discussion.) Dr. DeLaney initiated the panel discussion with a general question regarding the most beneficial outcomes (projects and/or programs) that could be provided by the waterways plan to best advance the mission of the individual agencies, increase productivity, efficiency, and quality of life.

Mr. Weidner (FDOT) identified economic development and good paying middle class jobs. Ms. Zimmerman (FIND) indicated maintenance of the waterways and the land facilities necessary for the accommodation of dredge material. She further suggested the FIND grants program places high priority on maintaining or increasing access to the waterway, and measures to promote access by non-boat owners as well – such as eco-tours, boat rental operations, and waterfront parks – would help expand public access. Mr. Donaldson (Martin County) suggested this plan could help identify links to other modes of transportation, opportunities for eco-tourism, commercial fishing, and water taxi access to key destinations and natural areas. While Martin County does not desire a commercial port facility, the plan could help identify what should be preserved, how to optimize existing resources and strengths, and how to relate all the different players (e.g., FDOT, FIND, Martin County, local governments) for collaborative projects and work together. Ms. Miller (MIATC) suggested economic development, jobs, and a well trained workforce. Mr. West (St. Lucie County) suggested streamlining to avoid permitting challenges and the need for funding non-ICWW maintenance and dredging, which are outside FIND's jurisdiction and have deteriorated in recent years.

Dr. DeLaney indicated these are the types of ideas that make sense for evaluation in the waterways plan. Further, she noted the waterways plan will include a series of map layers to understand navigational depths and navigational restrictions to help inform which types of users are able to use different portions of the waterways. Additional discussion focused on revenue sources and the lack of indexing certain infrastructure sources, which has constrained revenues. Dr. DeLaney indicated the plan would include a broad evaluation of funding sources and make realistic projections as to funding and project implementation.

Regarding the Port of Fort Pierce, public discussion raised questions regarding the broader regional economic impact of the Port and the potential impact on the roadway network that could result from increased activity. Mr. Weidner indicated preliminary evaluations had been conducted that acknowledged the high value of Port property. The resulting recommendations focused on residential and commercial uses. Increased rail activity could offset roadway impacts.

A focused question was raised regarding an identification of a key activity that could jump start redevelopment in the City of Fort Pierce and the Port of Fort Pierce in particular given its characteristics. Mr. Williamson suggested taking advantage of the planning effort to help build consensus for a plan of action. Further, the City could maximize the use of publicly-owned property to expedite the initiation of a non-controversial business. With City partnership, a near-term business opportunity could be tied to the Port, which could create broader opportunity for expanded economic activity. Regarding zoning, Rebecca Grohall, Planning Manager for the City of Fort Pierce, explained the City's control over most of the zoning and land use. Mr. Donaldson noted the Waterways Plan is not intended to become a port master plan, which has already been created by the port. Instead, it has a different and broader purpose. Additional discussion focused on the differences between publicly and privately owned marinas, the economic benefits provided by each, and their points of contrast.

Additional discussion focused on boating traffic within each county and across county lines, with a request for additional information regarding the type of boating traffic that exists within each county and how that traffic crosses counties to different hubs and destinations.

Dr. DeLaney indicated one of the tasks to be addressed in the waterways planning effort is the identification of the various destinations and how they vary by scale, market, type of boater, and type of access. The team will map and try to quantify the destinations for motorized traffic and non-motorized traffic, identifying the locations of hubs, and then try to determine the reasonable ranges – or catchment areas - for individuals wanting to access those destinations. Mr. Williamson noted the varying channel depths and characteristics could limit access by certain types of vessels. For a water taxi analysis, the evaluation will include destination points, main attraction points, navigational considerations, and then estimates of what could potentially be accessed via a water taxi service.

Dr. DeLaney mentioned one of the tasks in the plan is to look at marina villages and marina nodes. The project team includes Tom Lavash who will determine the reasonable demand for development of different types in those nodes. She noted the focal redevelopment areas in St. Lucie County and Martin County have existing robust redevelopment plans, and the challenge of the plan will be to determine what quantity of development is reasonable, what would the demand be for patrons, and how they might access these areas.

Dr. Peter Merritt pointed out that Martin and St. Lucie County produced Manatee Protection Plans several years ago. These plans included boating activity data, which was taken from other reports referenced in these plans.

There was additional discussion regarding statewide challenges for parking along the waterfront to provide access to potential water taxis as well as upland transit access. Florida's insurance

restrictions were also discussed, particularly with regards to insurance impacts during hurricane season that encourage boaters to relocate vessels out-of-state.

Mayor Linda Hudson, City of Fort Pierce, asked about the bridge openings on the north bridge in St. Lucie County, as the bridge currently opens on demand, and she questioned whether or not it could become a timed opening. Mr. Donaldson noted that approval would be necessary from the Captain of the Coast Guard in Miami, which is highly difficult to obtain. Dr. DeLaney noted to the Mayor that the third forum will focus on regulation and management and the Coast Guard would be invited to participate on a panel along with the other agencies that help regulate the waterways.

Mr. Donaldson suggested the plan should address transportation on the waterway as well as how the waterway relates to the commercial fishing industry, how people connect to the waterway, and consider how limited access to the waterway is for the general public.

In concluding the forum, Dr. DeLaney directed participants to the project schedule and pending forums. She indicated the steering committee had selected “Marine Transportation” as the most appropriate topic to begin the forum series, and the next forum would be focused on Land Use and Upland Transportation, scheduled for January 8, 2014 (2 p.m.) at the Historic City Hall, 315 Avenue A, Fort Pierce, Florida.

The meeting forum adjourned at 4:46 p.m.