

**PUBLIC INFORMATION WORKSHOP
TECHNICAL MEMORANDUM**

**PLANTATION / PALMETTO CORRIDOR
FROM
SIX MILE CYPRESS TO COLONIAL BOULEVARD
WORKSHOP #2**

LEE COUNTY PROJECT #4065

The Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and the Lee County Department of Transportation (DOT) held a public information workshop on September 26, 2002 at the Celebration Family Church, 12400 Plantation Road, Fort Myers, Florida. The purpose of the meeting was to present the results of the MPO traffic modeling generated for the Plantation/Palmetto Extension and other roadway facilities in proximity to Plantation Road and Palmetto Avenue. The traffic modeling was conducted as a result of the Lee County Department of Transportation public involvement process for the Alternative Alignment Study for the Plantation Road extension from Idlewild to Abbott Street.

The Lee County MPO is made up of the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), Lee County and all incorporated cities within the county. The Lee County Metropolitan Planning Organization is responsible for conducting a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive transportation planning process for all of Lee County. In order for projects to be eligible for federal funds, the federal law requires that the MPO endorse a transportation improvement program and set priorities identifying projects to be completed over the next five, ten and twenty years. The MPO provides the public with complete information, timely public notice, and full public access to decisions and documents. It supports early and continuing public involvement in the development and review of its transportation plans and programs. The MPO provides a formal public hearing process for the adoption of transportation plans to allow the public to provide their input to the MPO Board members.

The Lee County Department of Transportation (DOT) is responsible for implementing the County roadway projects that are shown on the MPO's adopted 2010 and 2020 Long Range Transportation plans. The Lee DOT has an in depth, comprehensive public involvement process and makes it a practice to hold public meetings on all new roadway alignments and major roadway improvement projects. These public meetings are held to inform and solicit input from the public regarding the specific project being presented. The Plantation to Palmetto Extension and the four-laning was originally adopted by the MPO on the 2020 Long Range Transportation Plan in January of 1999. The Lee County Department of Transportation held a public information workshop on May 23, 2002 at the Life Church in Fort Myers to gather public opinion regarding the three alternative alignments developed for the extension of Plantation Road from Idlewild Street to Abbott Street. This project is Phase I of the implementation of the extension of Plantation Road to Palmetto Avenue. The four-laning has not been programmed. The main goal of the public workshop was to determine what alternative the public preferred. A total of 118 people attended the meeting and approximately half of the attendees objected to the Plantation/Palmetto Extension project and the future four-laning of Plantation Road.

Based on recent traffic model runs presented by the MPO staff, the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) at the June 21, 2002 MPO meeting recommended placing the Plantation/Palmetto Extension on the 2010 Long Range Transportation Plan. Due to objections from the public the MPO temporarily withdrew the project from the 2020 plan until the public was allowed to provide input on the entire extension and widening project from Six-Mile Cypress Parkway to Colonial Boulevard. The Plantation/Palmetto Extension Public Information Workshop was held to present the results of the MPO's traffic modeling as requested by the public and to solicit public input regarding the modeling results and the future proposed improvements to Plantation Road.

Requests from the public (generated as a result of the public workshop) led to the model runs consisting of the following roadway network configurations:

- **Alternative A** (2020 Long Range Plan adopted February 2002)
Plantation Road = 4 lanes with a connection to Colonial Blvd.
Six Mile Cypress Pkwy. = 4 lanes
Metro Pkwy. = 4 lanes
- **Alternative B** (No Project)
Plantation Road = 2 lanes with no connection to Colonial Blvd.
Six Mile Cypress Pkwy. = 6 lanes
Metro Pkwy. = 6 lanes
- **Alternative C** Plantation Road = 2 lanes with a connection to Colonial Blvd.
Six Mile Cypress Pkwy. = 6 lanes
Metro Pkwy. = 6 lanes

The Plantation/Palmetto Corridor public workshop was advertised in the September 19, 2002 edition of the News-Press as a ¼ page display ad. Letters announcing the public workshop were mailed on September 16, 2002 to persons owning property lying within 300' of the right-of-way along Plantation Road and its proposed extension, from Six Mile Cypress Parkway to Colonial Boulevard. In addition, a brochure about the Lee County MPO and their planning process was included with the meeting notification. The Lee County Department of Public Resources transmitted a press release to local media on September 19, 2002. Two variable message boards were placed within the project limits for a period of one week prior to the workshop to inform the traveling public. Copies of the notification for the workshop, mailing list and MPO Brochure are attached in Appendix A. In addition, two newspaper articles were published in the News Press concerning the project and are also provided in Appendix A.

The meeting format consisted of a slide show presentation and four stations that contained graphical representations of the project material with MPO and county representatives present to explain the project data and answer questions. The meeting was held from 6-8 pm, which allowed the public to attend and view the materials anytime between those hours. The slide presentation was approximately 15 minutes long and ran continuously throughout the two-hour period. A project hand-out that summarized the history of Plantation Road, the MPO planning process for the extension and the modeling efforts was provided to the public at the registration table. Copies of the slide show presentation and project hand-out are provided in Appendix B. A total of 257 people signed in at the registration table. Copies of the sign-in-sheets are attached as Appendix C.

During the meeting several neighborhood associations were gathered outside the entrance to the church. They identified themselves with placards that included the name of their neighborhood association. As persons arrived the neighborhood association representative would offer their opinion regarding the future improvements to Plantation Road and persons were offered cards which asked them to choose Alternative B (No Project) and ask several pre-drafted questions to the DOT representatives inside. The associations were against any proposed improvements to Plantation Road. A copy of the "Choose Alternative B" card is included in Appendix D. This activity is being documented in the Public Workshop Technical Memorandum at the request of a member of the public who supported the Plantation/Palmetto Extension and felt that this activity was unfair to members of the public who had not yet made a decision on the proposed extension or widening.

Appendix D also contains a copy of a petition that was submitted to the County Commission that was signed by 561 persons which states "We the citizens and homeowners from the neighborhoods contiguous to Plantation Road, due hereby petition Commissioners of Lee County, Florida not to extend Plantation Road. The construction of the proposed extension will forever damage the character, tranquility and safety of our collective neighborhoods."

The public was provided with comment forms in order to have their opinion recorded as public record. A total of 175 comment forms were received from the meeting and during the two-week comment

period following the meeting. Comments that were received at the public workshop verbally, in writing and during the two-week comment period are summarized below. If two people signed a comment form, their opinion was counted individually. Copies of the comment forms are attached as Appendix D.

Against Plantation/Palmetto Extension and widening – 159

Favor Plantation/Palmetto Extension and widening – 30

Requests for information or other – 5

Comment: Please widen Metro Parkway and Six-Mile Cypress Parkway. Suggest looking at eight lanes for Six-Mile Cypress Parkway and/or eight lanes for Metro Parkway.

Response: The model does not indicate a traffic demand for Six-Mile Cypress Parkway that would warrant eight lanes. There are several reasons why eight laning Metro Parkway and Six Mile Cypress Parkway would be inappropriate. One reason is safety concerns--it is almost impossible for a pedestrian or a bicyclist to cross an eight lane roadway. The second is performance. Once an arterial with cross streets becomes eight lanes, weaving traffic tends to impact the ability for volumes to get through intersections and weaving traffic might increase safety concerns for vehicular traffic. There might also be right of way issues related to widening Metro Pkwy by more than six lanes. Even with the six-laning of both of these roads the model predicts that without the improvements to Plantation the level-of-service on Metro Parkway will be LOS F by 2020, which is unacceptable. Currently the extension of Plantation Road to Palmetto at Colonial is scheduled before the six laning of Metro Parkway from Daniels to Winkler. The widening of Plantation Road to 4 lanes from Idlewild to Colonial would probably occur at about the same time as the six laning of Metro Parkway. Metro Parkway is not being widened first because the cost to six lane Metro Parkway is substantially more and has not been funded by the FDOT.

Comment: Six lane Six-Mile Cypress Parkway with overpass at Colonial, Daniels, US 41, - send traffic around on beltway even into southwest Cape Coral

Comment: Six lane Six-Mile Cypress Parkway from Palm Beach Blvd to US 41 gives you a corridor that goes somewhere.

Comment: The MPO is just making a guess about future traffic on Plantation, Metro, and Six-Mile Cypress Parkway.

Response: MPO's transportation planning process currently predicts that the north-south travel demand in the vicinity of Metro Parkway and Plantation Road can only be met by the six-laning of Metro Parkway and the extension and four-laning for Plantation Road. The travel demand cannot be met by six-laning Six-Mile Cypress Parkway as this roadway system does not provide access to the areas that generate the demand.

Comment: By not four laning Plantation traffic will be forced to use Six-Mile Cypress Parkway.

Comment: Already difficult to get on Plantation from Brookshire

Response: As north-south traffic demand continues to grow, it will be increasingly more difficult to travel Plantation Road. Six-Mile Cypress Parkway does not provide access to the areas in central Fort Myers that the model predicts is needed.

Comment: You need to concentrate on I-75. Why aren't you ten laning I-75?

Response: Construction is programmed for 2007/2008 for the six laning of I-75 from Daniels Parkway south to the County line. However the ten laning determined to be necessary by 2030 is not funded.

Comment: Four lane McGregor

Response: The four laning of McGregor Boulevard is cost prohibitive due to right-of-way costs. In addition, the travel demand in the Plantation/Metro Parkway area could not be satisfied by the four laning of McGregor Boulevard. McGregor is constrained because of right-of-way and the royal palms are protected by State law.

Comment: A better alternative would be to hook-up the Palmetto Extension east-west to Airport Road.

Comment: Maybe Palmetto could turn east off Colonial meet up with Six-Mile Cypress Parkway

Response: An east-west connection would not satisfy the north-south travel demand. Also a connection to Airport Road would conflict with the Page Field runway protection zone.

Comment: It will decrease value of property

Response: No detrimental effects to market values have been recorded on the majority of Lee County DOT completed projects. In several instances property values have increased after project completion.

Comment: Want sound barriers of some kind

Response: Lee County does not build noise walls since they must typically be 14 feet or higher to make any appreciable reduction in noise. At these heights, they are cost prohibitive and create a number of problems on their own.

Comment: Recommend traffic light at Crystal and Idlewild intersections

Comment: Will there be a light at Idlewild and Plantation?

If the project is constructed, traffic signals will be evaluated in the design phase of the project and constructed where warranted.

Comment: If Plantation is four lanes it creates more traffic, speeding, accidents, truck traffic and not safe for children

Comment: You speak only of LOS for traffic nothing about on existing neighborhoods

Comment: If you build the Extension make sure you address noise, left turns, and child safety with ample bus stops

Response: If Plantation is four laned, sidewalks will be constructed on at least one side of the road. Landscaped medians, which improve traffic safety, would also be constructed. The speed limit would remain the same. Bus stops for children are established by the Lee County Schools Transportation Division and would be adjusted to provide maximum safety for children.

Comment: Plantation was not designed to be four nor six lanes

Comment: Some areas do not have enough easement and land to widen Plantation

Response: If Plantation is widened to four lanes (as shown on the 2020 Long Range Plan adopted in February 2002), the County would acquire right-of-way needed to construct the road.

Comment: Extending Plantation would bring in crime

Comment: The County should stick with land use plans instead of zoning changes to people with money. It is time the county placed its' citizens ahead of developers

Comment: Allowing Plantation to be widened will bring big new apartment projects and other commercial/residential development

Response: These comments are not germane to the need for the project. The need for the project is based on the adopted land use plan and the area wide growth projections.

Comment: Block off access to Plantation Road for industrial business. Commercial traffic already unbearable and uncontrollable

Response: This would exacerbate the traffic problems on Metro Parkway. Plantation is currently signed for "No through trucks".

Comment: We should join together to hire an attorney to help find another route

Response: Other routes have been evaluated over the past ten years. Due to environmental and socioeconomic impacts, Plantation four laning and extension to Palmetto was determined to be the alternative that would least impact the surrounding areas.

Comment: *Please keep Plantation a residential area and leave alone*

Response: Plantation Road is not strictly a residential area from a land use perspective. Land uses also include industrial and commercial uses.

Comment: *If you need to four lane Plantation to Colonial don't put Extension thru to Hanson*

The Palmetto Extension from Colonial to Palm Beach Boulevard is being designed and constructed by the City of Fort Myers with funding from a State of Florida TOPS Grant. This project has also been identified as a needed project.

Comment: *The development process should be required to inform any potential homeowner of possible extension*

Comment: *How will our comments count? Or when will our comments count?*

Comment: *We would like a town hall meeting with the commissioner and the planning council*

Comment: *Other neighborhoods (Oakbrook and Highland Pines) were given the "option" before we were – very unfair.*

Response: The "other neighborhoods" used the MPO's public involvement process to voice their concerns about having an alignment bifurcate their subdivisions. The MPO public involvement process did not exclude property owners in the vicinity of Plantation from being involved in this process in 1995 when the other neighborhoods requested the Highlands route be abandoned. All comments are being transmitted to the MPO and will be taken into consideration by the MPO at the November 22, 2002 Public Hearing on this project. The MPO Public Hearing will allow property owners to voice their opinions to the County Commissioners and the other MPO representatives.

Comment: *Rezone conservation area rather than disturb homes.*

The conservation area cannot be used for a roadway alignment. Through the transportation planning and public involvement process this alignment was eliminated from further consideration in 1998 due to environmental and socioeconomic impacts.

Comment: *Why does the County want to connect Plantation Road to Colonial Boulevard?*

Response: The model used for predicting traffic conditions shows a need for additional north-south capacity based on traffic volumes predicted for the year 2010. The connection to Colonial will establish a corridor that runs continuously from SR 80 (Palm Beach Boulevard) to Six Mile Cypress Parkway.

Comment: *When is the extension to Colonial expected to be constructed?*

Response: If the MPO puts the project back on the 2020 plan then the construction of at least the 2 lane extension is funded for the fiscal year 2006.

Comment: *If the extension goes through as planned will any of the existing neighborhood streets in Oak Brook be connected to the new facility?*

Response: No connections are proposed to be established as a part of this project.

Comment: *What is the status of the portion of the road from Abbott Street to Colonial?*

Response: The County has budgeted for the design for this portion of the road in Fiscal year 2004/05 and two lane construction in Fiscal year 2005/06. Originally, it was expected that private development would build this portion of the road. At this time, it is uncertain how it will happen. However, the County likely cannot obtain a permit for the extension unless it includes the connection to Colonial.

Comment: *Request a study be done to close off Garland at Deer Run Farms Road*

Response: Deer Runs Farms Road is a private road and Garland is a public non-County maintained road. The Oak Brook residents could petition the County to vacate the Garland Road right-of-way and close the road.

Comment: *Please make Idlewild/Ranchette/Highland a three way stop.*

Response: This request has been forwarded to the Lee County Traffic Operations Division

The attached Appendices contain all documentation received and generated for and by the public involvement process as of October 29, 2002. However, additional public input is accepted at any time after the date of this technical memorandum.

On November 22, 2002 the Lee County MPO voted to incorporate the extension and four-laning of Plantation Road into the 2010 and 2020 transportation plans.