

Southern Blvd Bridge PD&E Study Public Kick-Off Meeting, March 29, 2007

Responses to Public Comments

The following responses are provided to address the concerns and requests received from the public following the Project Team's "Kick-Off Meeting", held on March 29, 2007. The responses are organized in the same manner as the Summary of Public Comments Received.

The project team is currently developing alternatives for rehabilitation or replacement of the existing bridge which minimize adverse impacts to the community and environment to the greatest extent practicable. All bridge replacement alternatives are likely to have some adverse impacts. The extent of these impacts will be evaluated for all alternatives – including replacement of the existing bridge, rehabilitation of the existing bridge and the "No Build" alternative. The "No Build" alternative would include only routine maintenance and repair of the existing bridge for the remainder of its useful life.

Concerns about Potential Impacts on West Side of Bridge

If a bridge replacement alternative is selected as the "Recommended Alternative", the replacement bridge will be wider than the existing bridge to meet current design and safety standards. Accordingly, there will be some changes to Southern Blvd just west of the bridge to tie the wider bridge into the existing roadway. Impacts to the existing buffer area between the roadway and Southbridge Condominiums will be minimized to the extent practicable.

Widening the bridge without adding additional lanes will not increase the number of vehicles that "back-up" on the west side of the bridge when the bridge is open.

Access will be maintained to Flagler Drive from Southern Blvd throughout construction. Impacts to the surrounding property will be minimized.

Measures to discourage vagrants from using areas under the bridge will be considered in the conceptual design.

The project team understands the importance of avoiding impacts to St. Catherine's Church. A meeting will be held with members of the community who desire to discuss their concerns with project team staff.

The alignment of a new bridge may shift to the north or south, but it will be generally located in the same location. Accordingly, construction of a new bridge will not isolate any portions of the community.

General Concerns

A comparison of the estimated construction time required for each alternative can be an important factor when evaluating alternatives. It is acceptable to estimate construction time, prior to receiving contractor bids for construction.

An evaluation of potential natural environmental impacts for each alternative will be conducted. Minimizing these impacts will be considered during alternative development.

Potential visual impacts will also be considered as alternatives are developed. If a bridge replacement alternative is selected, aesthetics of the bridge will be an important aspect of the design. A design that reflects the character of the surrounding community will be developed with input from the community.

Temporary noise and air impacts during construction are unavoidable. Efforts to minimize these impacts will be implemented to the maximum extent practicable. Construction noise will be subject to local community noise restrictions.

The Department understands the concern of residents that their property values will be negatively impacted by construction of a new bridge. However, based on experience with other projects in the County, it is not anticipated that this will occur. A deteriorating bridge with weight limit restrictions is more likely to negatively impact the community.

Specific Requests for the West Side of the Bridge

A traffic study is currently underway which will determine the need for additional turn lanes at the west end of the bridge. If it is determined that additional turn lanes are needed to accommodate existing and future traffic, minimizing impacts to adjacent properties will be considered in developing conceptual alternatives.

The existing pedestrian signal at the intersection of Southern Blvd. and Flagler Blvd. will remain to serve pedestrians using the Flagler Walking Trail.

If a bridge replacement alternative is selected as the “Recommended Alternative”, the replacement bridge will be wider than the existing bridge to meet current design and safety standards. Accordingly, there will be some changes to Southern Blvd just west of the bridge to tie the wider bridge into the existing roadway.

Specific Requests for the East Side of the Bridge

A traffic study will be conducted to determine if modification of the round-a-bout (traffic circle) at the east end of the bridge in the Town of Palm Beach is needed.

Requests – General

Adding additional travel lanes across the entire length of the bridge is not anticipated at this time. However, it is possible that traffic studies will indicate a need for additional turn lanes at the intersection of Flagler Blvd and Southern Blvd.

A tunnel is not under consideration at this time because of the high cost and substantial anticipated impacts.

Bridge height options appropriate for a movable (basculer) bridge will be evaluated. A minimum vertical clearance of 21 feet is the U.S. Coast Guard guideline for a moveable bridge in the closed position at this location. Alternatives that provide greater vertical clearance will be evaluated to determine the optimum height which will substantially reduce the number of required bridge openings with minimal impacts. The vertical clearances for the existing Royal Park Bridge and proposed Flagler Memorial Bridge will be considered in this evaluation.

At this time, a specific “stakeholders advisory group” involving all stakeholders affected by the project has not been assembled. However, the Project Team is available to meet with neighborhood and other special interest groups to discuss specific concerns and issues, and to answer questions. If your group is interested in scheduling a meeting, please contact Miguel Vargas, P.E., FDOT Project Manager, for this project. After viable alternatives are presented to the public at the Alternatives Workshop, the need for a “stakeholders advisory group” will be reevaluated. This meeting is expected to be held in the Spring of 2008.