

Courtney Campbell Scenic Highway
Corridor Advisory Committee (CAC)

MINUTES

Regular Meeting at
URS Corporation
7th Floor Board Room
7650 West Courtney Campbell Causeway
Tampa, FL

May 13, 2011
10:00 a.m.

Attending:

Lori Snively, Scenic Highway Coordinator, Florida Department of Transportation
Susan J. Miller, Bicycle/Pedestrian Planner, Pinellas County MPO
Ken Hoyt, Citizen, Hillsborough County
Councilman Bill Jonson, Clearwater City Council
Jessica Lunsford, Senior Planner, Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council
Chris Weber, Westshore Alliance
Linda Saul-Sena, Citizen, Livable Roadways Committee
Ron Gregory, Vice President, URS Corporation

Councilman Jonson reported that the group has received correspondence from the City of Tampa that Harry Cohen is now their official representative to the CASH Corridor Advisory Committee.

Mr. Hoyt made a motion to approve the minutes from the March 25, 2011 meeting, seconded by Mr. Gregory and carried unanimously.

Old Business:

1. Courtney Campbell PD & E Study

Ms. Snively reported they have received 282 responses for the PD & E Study. Some of them did come in after the comment period, but she doesn't have that broken out as yet. There were 131 for the project and 151 against. Out of the 151, 124 of them were for funding purposes only. They also include the tracker issues which tracker for DOT is usually sent directly to the governor, and then it comes back to our district for response, and Don Skelton did respond back to them. Ms. Snively stated those responses that were able to be attached to the PD&E Study to go to Federal Highway, they are but it is being noted that they were after the comment period, so in the official paperwork it will only state those responses that were received before the comment period ended. There was a big influx afterwards of supportive ones, which will still be included even though they won't be counted. Mr. Gregory asked if the FHWA division office made any comment, because, typically, they have to decide on the NEPA issues and not on not wanting to fund this? Mr. Hoyt stated that essentially they pulled those out. Mr. Gregory added that the decision regarding granting approval is supposed to be based on NEPA and the FHWA doesn't usually get into controversial issues like withdrawing funding and things like that. Their only criteria is having

money in the next phase of the project in order to receive approval from them because they will no longer approve a project that isn't funded. So, if it has funding, and it does, then they will make their decision based on the technical merits of the work completed. He also added he would be very surprised if the FHWA really cared about peoples' comments about not funding the project. Ms. Snively indicated that's why they did the color coding, because they separated out concerns about access to the water and fishing, etc., concern about funding, county taxes, etc., concern about plants, wildlife and safety, and then there was an "other" category. Out of that, there were 27 "no's" based on those three criteria, other than funding.

They are still working it although she doesn't know what the finalization date is, but she thinks they need approval by July 1st. Mr. Gregory asked if she thought the project was in trouble, and Ms. Snively replied that she didn't think so, they just had some issues with the grasses where the bridges are going to go, and then there have been some minor issues with regard to access into the water at different locations and possibly having to add more of those. Some of these things will come down when it's time to do the design phase. Councilman Jonson thought that was a valid comment, that for people who wanted to be able to fish, having a continuous fence along there would not be an option. Mr. Gregory indicated that is a safety design issue, and stated you can build it to offset the fencing a little bit where they have to walk in and go down where they can't run directly out or cast lines back into pedestrians.

Ms. Lunsford indicated she has been asked by some of the planners at the Regional Planning Council if there is any way the lights that are on the Friendship Trail Bridge can be moved over to be used on this project. The lights are beautiful and were specially ordered. Ms. Miller indicated she would attempt to find out, at least for the Pinellas side of the Trail. Ms. Saul-Sena indicated the group is supposed to have a representative from Kevin Beckner's office, and that would be a good follow up question for him.

Councilman Jonson asked about the July 1 date. Ms. Snively replied she believes that is the date they are trying to get the approval on the PD&E Study from Federal Highway. Ms. Saul-Sena asked if the new version of ICETEA has been approved. Councilman Jonson replied that it has not been re-authorized. Mr. Hoyt added there may never be another one, because it was created to do a certain thing and there are now other ways to do what they have to do to plan a transportation program. That one, by its very nature, led to that horrible earmark process.

2. Pedestrian safety project in the Rocky Point area.

Councilman Jonson asked if there is any update on this project. Ms. Snively reported that resurfacing project is moving forward. The contract letting is in December of 2011, which means construction will begin within three months following that, which would be March or April 2012. Ms. Lunsford asked if they still needed to find funding for the spillway. Ms. Snively replied, no, because part of the resurfacing they are going to do is not going to be a pedestrian bridge, but they are going to provide the access to come in and they are going to take the emergency strip in that area. They don't have the design for it as yet, but that is the plan.

New Business:

3. Update on the National Scenic Byways grant application for resubmission.

Ms. Lunsford reported she had the comments if anyone wanted them. Councilman Jonson stated the decision was delayed and then finally came out and they then opened up a period of application for the next year with a deadline of about three weeks later. As he read it, they are due in the Florida office next week, so there is a very quick turn around and the question for the group is do we want to resubmit? Ms. Snively reported that because they have this project already there, it's not necessarily to do the bridge, but because they are doing the access to go across the tidal gate and it will finish all the way from Landry's down and go across and then tie in on the other side, and it will be safe passage, it will be ten to twelve feet wide, it's just that that area will be a little pinched for vehicles, there just won't be an emergency strip right there. Since that is going to be part of the design of the project they are doing, which was technically going to be the matching funds on that, if the grant had come through we were going to design the bridge and the grant would have paid for building the bridge. That won't happen because this is in there for the letting in December with the construction in 2012, this won't even come about if it goes on the same letting, it won't even be here until May of next year, so it would be too late to do it because we've already designed. There is no reason to resubmit because DOT could not match anything. Ms. Lunsford wanted to confirm it's going to be done anyway. Ms. Snively confirmed it will be done, just not as a pedestrian bridge, it's going to be a pedestrian way.

Councilman Jonson asked if anyone in the group thought they should resubmit for this year.

Mr. Gregory reiterated what Ms. Snively had said, that there is now an issue about the timing, that it won't be possible to show a match back. Councilman Jonson suggested it would be appropriate to have some discussion with state folks on the process of submitting, e.g. online, so that, even though it doesn't help this time, perhaps it would help someone else. Ms. Snively added that at the Scenic Highways workshop being held this summer there is one session, the very last one, on grants and they are going to have someone from the America's Byways Resource Center. Mr. Hoyt asked if she knew if any other applications received similar treatment. Ms. Snively replied that of all the ones that were submitted for FDOT, only three out of twelve got accepted. Mr. Hoyt said he could appreciate that, but his question was did anyone receive a letter as bad as the one to the CAC? Ms. Snively replied that she wouldn't know what was written on the others. Mr. Gregory asked if these grants come up every year because at Ben T. Davis Beach, one of the issues there is that the restrooms and concession stand have never been replaced, and he mentioned when the trail is finally built, there will be thousands of people attracted to the area who will be in need of the public facilities. It would seem like the City of Tampa could seek a grant for these facilities and tie it to their criteria. Ms. Snively reported that the city is moving forward with the restrooms. Mr. Gregory said he felt the City of Tampa was basing the need for these facilities on the little usage at Ben T. Davis Beach and not on what is likely to be a problem in the future. It may be that there is need of a facility on the Pinellas side of the Causeway near the water treatment plant, and perhaps the City of Clearwater can cooperate there. It doesn't take a whole lot of land. He feels that is an issue that's going to come up, after 2012. He stated there is a problem with the concession/restroom area there now and when the trail is opened up it will be much worse. There is a finite limit on that beach now, on Sundays and weekends people are actually parking on the right-of-way when they're not supposed to because there are no spaces left, even though there is paved parking. If you go out there during the weekend, cars are parked all along there to try to crowd into that one available beach area. Ms. Saul-Sena stated big picture, long-term the CAC is supposed to be a planning group, so shouldn't they be suggesting things like URS offering parking at its building for the weekends for people who are bicyclists? Mr. Gregory stated people can park here any time they want there is no gate, but that doesn't

address the need for public restrooms. Councilman Jonson mentioned that was something the Visitors Center offered, public restrooms. Ms. Lunsford suggested taking that building and turning it into public restrooms. Mr. Gregory stated if they plan now for the next round of available grant money, because it won't be an issue until after the completion of the trail improvements in 2016, but there better be something in production before 2014 or 2015 because when the trail opens up it will be an issue. Ms. Saul-Sena asked if that is part of the Westshore Alliance plan? Mr. Weber replied, no, not the restrooms. Mr. Gregory indicated that Councilman Jonson will be speaking at their next meeting and could bring the issue up at that time. He felt the Alliance would be glad to support something like that. Ms. Saul-Sena asked if Cypress Point Park had restroom facilities and was told, yes, it does. Mr. Gregory added that the Alliance has been fighting to get vendors there, e.g. for kayak rentals. Ms. Saul-Sena asked if anyone had spoken to the new mayor about it? Mr. Gregory thought they did get some vendors, because he knew Ron Rotella was working on it personally. Mr. Weber wasn't sure. Ms. Saul-Sena remarked that it made a whole lot of sense. Mr. Gregory added that they weren't going to have a permanent stand, but they would allow vendors to come in over the weekends to rent kayaks, and also maybe some kiosk food sales, but he remarked that the City of Tampa's ordinances were dense. Ms. Saul-Sena reminded the group that they have a new administration interested in making things happen, so it's a great time to re-introduce all of this. She asked if it would be appropriate for the CAC to support kayak rentals, bicycle rentals and food and restrooms, keeping in mind the Annual Report will be completed soon. Mr. Gregory felt that when the trail opens up there will be a push to allow vendors to do things like kayaking and bicycles, too. She urged starting now. Mr. Gregory mentioned he chairs the Transportation Committee for the Westshore Alliance and he thought the committee and the Alliance would be very supportive of anything because eventually it comes down to generating some economic activity and drawing visitors. They're trying to attract visitors to come here in the future almost as a destination area, so you have to have a set of amenities other than just going to a meeting. He continued by saying you can visualize, once you get this whole thing built at the end of 2016, now you're linking the Westshore with Clearwater and the beaches. We all need to keep our eye on the prize and start doing things now that two and three years from now will be in place, and it's all about economic activity. The only problem right now is there isn't a comparable type of organization on the Pinellas side, there are the city and county staff, but there are limited things you can do. The chamber doesn't seem to be stepping up too much over there. Councilman Jonson reported that the chamber of the Clearwater side has really been struggling to rebuild its leadership. Over the last four years they have been in trouble and now that they are coming back we haven't reached out to them.

4. 2011 Annual Report.

Councilman Jonson reminded the group that the report is due in October. Ms. Snively confirmed that it is due in Tallahassee on October 1, but it needs to be submitted to the District at least three weeks prior to that. She stated the work program hearings have been moved up and FDOT's is October 13, not in December. Councilman Jonson expressed appreciation to Ms. Lunsford and Ms. Snively for completing the report last year. He suggested that today the CAC just identify issues to be included in the annual report and then ask Ms. Lunsford and Ms. Snively to supply what was submitted last year so the items can be dropped in. Issues to include would be the good news about the PD&E Study, the issue regarding the restrooms and concessions at Ben T. Davis Beach. Ms. Saul-Sena thought Ms. Lunsford's idea regarding re-utilizing the lighting from the Friendship Trail is a really good idea. Mr. Gregory thought the CAC could be catalyst for engaging other parties, for example, the lighting issue could be brought to the Westshore Alliance for its support.

Ms. Miller reported that she spoke to a colleague who works for the Friendship Trail Bridge, and she said the lights will go to the highest bidder. Right now the zoo and the university are considering the matter. Ms. Saul-Sena asked who paid for the lights initially? Ms. Miller stated it was the counties, that everything was given to the two counties. Mr. Gregory interjected that if you raise the public profile of the issue, sometimes things work themselves out. Ms. Miller stated her colleague had said they would be willing to negotiate. Ms. Saul-Sena stated the other point is, in terms of using political chips, is this something we want to go to the mat on, because what FDOT is willing to build will include lighting. Ms. Snively stated there is no lighting on the bridges. Mr. Gregory stated there is vehicular lighting. Councilman Jonson thought if they could get these lights and put them on the two new bridges, rather than the whole length of the trail. Mr. Gregory added that they could seek grant money for laying in the cable system for the power, because there is more to moving the lights themselves, you have the installation which will be significant. Councilman Jonson asked if this is an issue for which the CAC would want to use its political chips, and will this advance the group's agenda? Ms. Saul-Sena thought it is certainly worth raising the question and stated she would engage Commissioner Beckner's office on the Hillsborough side. Commissioner Seel would be the contact on the Pinellas side and Councilman Jonson agreed to contact her.

Regarding the Annual Report, Ms. Snively advised that when they get the old one, look at the Goals & Objectives and also the comments that came back from the CMP Update last year. Ms. Lunsford and Ms. Snively decided to speak over the phone within the next week to plan and go over content for this year's report. The final of the Annual Report must be submitted to FDOT by September 1 in order to review it before submitting it to Tallahassee.

Councilman Jonson indicated that, before adjourning, the group needs to formulate a schedule of meetings for the rest of the year. The group has been meeting quarterly and it was agreed that continuing on that schedule would appeal to all members. Ms. Snively reminded everyone that she and Ms. Lunsford are working on the Annual Report, so until that is complete, meeting more often seemed the way to go. Councilman Jonson suggested setting up the quarterly meetings and then add meetings as necessary. Ms. Snively indicated that last year the group got together and did a draft report, came back and had everybody look at it and make comments, fixed it and updated it accordingly, then came back one last time and had everyone review it before finalizing it. She thought perhaps a meeting in July and one in August, and then another wouldn't be necessary until November or December. July 15 and August 19 were chosen as the next two meetings, and then November 18 to begin the quarterly meeting schedule.

Ms. Saul-Sena mentioned there is a bicycle coalition in the region and she suggested inviting a representative of that organization to come and speak at a CAC meeting.

There being no further business, Councilman Jonson adjourned the meeting.

Next meetings: Friday, July 15, 2011 and Friday, August 19, 2011, at 10:00 a.m. in the URS conference room. Also, as the first quarterly meeting, Friday, November 18, 2011.