CENTRAL FLORIDA EXPRESSWAY AUTHORITY

Stakeholder Meeting Summary

Southport Connector Expressway
Project Development & Environment (PD&E) Study

Solivita Neighborhood Block Captain's Forum

Date/time: November 14, 2024, 2 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.

Location: Solivita Riviera Spa Building, 2nd Floor – 395 Village Drive, Poinciana, FL 34759

Staff:
Will Hawthorne, Director of Transportation Planning & Policy (CFX)
Ralph Bove, Project Manager (Volkert)
Mary Brooks, Public Information Officer (Quest)
Simon Shackelford, Public Information Coordinator (Quest)

Total Attendance: 34 (see sign-in sheet attached)

Executive Summary

CFX and study team staff met with members of the Solivita Neighborhood HOA to discuss the latest progress on the Southport Connector Expressway Project Development and Environment (PD&E Study). Discussions included the project background and citizen questions and concerns about the proposed expressway project.

CFX staff presented the latest proposed improvements and renderings, including:

- Widening Cypress Parkway to six lanes with all build alternatives
- Elevating the expressway along Cypress Parkway using either a wall, bridge structure or hybrid alternative
- Upgrading eight (8) intersections including widening side streets to more easily process traffic
- Conducting a noise study as part of the PD&E and also revisiting noise during design
- Undertaking a community impact assessment
- Planning a multi-use trail for enhanced pedestrian and cyclist safety
- Considering landscaping and other amenities
- Reviewing potential air quality, light and other impacts



Some of the major concerns expressed by attendees included noise, visibility, property value and business impacts. Many attendees were relieved to see Cypress Parkway would be widened to six lanes – something that was not part of the previous plan.

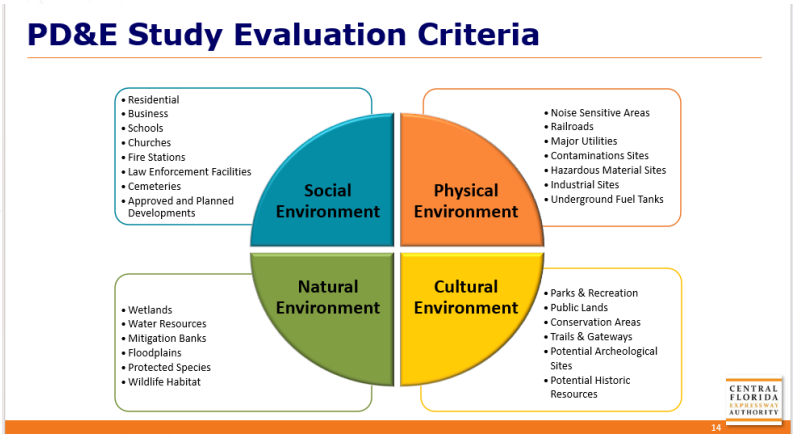
While some attendees were concerned about how the new roadway would affect the community and businesses, others expressed current challenges to residents and businesses with the increasing traffic congestion. Several attendees thanked CFX for the addition of the bridge structure alternative and other improvements based on community input, compared to earlier concepts.

A detailed recap of meeting discussions follows:

Detailed Meeting Discussions

Janet Nolan, Neighborhood Captains Program Chair, started the meeting by welcoming attendees and introducing Mary Brooks, who introduced Will Hawthorne, Ralph Bove and Simon Shackelford. Mary started the presentation with the Move Poinciana video featuring a summary of the growth and related traffic congestion in the area. She also provided an overview of the project history and proposed Southport Connector Expressway improvements.

Mary noted the status of the Project Development and Environment (PD&E) Study, mentioning the project is currently not funded for construction. She highlighted that as we continued to evaluate the alternatives and receive community input, a recommended alternative would be determined. The recommendation would ultimately be presented to the CFX Governing Board to review and decide whether the project moves forward. Ms. Brooks noted the PD&E Study criteria that was part of the evaluations.



Mary summarized the documentation developed for the PD&E study. She highlighted that CFX has heard in the past the concern about what impact this project will have on the community. In addition to looking at the concepts that would provide a full six-lane facility on Cypress Parkway, CFX is committed to doing a community impact assessment.

Mary followed with more details about how the project would connect with the rest of the region, as well as the benefits. The presentation showed the two proposed typical sections for the bridge and wall alternatives along Cypress Parkway. "We brought the bridge structure alternative forward to try and address concerns about more open community views," she noted, adding there is also a hybrid alternative that combines the two.

Mary explained that, with regard to Cypress Parkway, all of the build alternatives include widening to six lanes, improving intersections and having the elevated expressway along the median area. She noted the expressway would "help those commuters who do in fact have to make those longer trips do so more quickly."

Ralph Bove added the bridge structure concept would have piers at intervals "where you could have that visual atmosphere underneath the structure and you can see for the main line on top, we are providing a six-lane expressway." He noted Cypress Parkway would have three lanes in each direction and a multi-use path would be provided on both sides.

Ralph explained the mechanically stabilized earthen (MSE) wall concept from the previous study, where fill dirt would be used to elevate the expressway. “For simplicity, we are calling this the wall concept. It is also elevated, not quite as high as the bridge alternative,” he noted. “It does have some advantages in terms of reduced cost, but it does eliminate that open air atmosphere with the bridge alternative.”

Ralph presented the third option, the hybrid alternative, which was a combination of the two. “Are there areas along the project where we might be able to get the wall section and then transition to the bridge again? From a cost and impact standpoint, we need to evaluate that as another option,” he noted.

An attendee said, “You mentioned six lanes of local traffic and then you just said six lanes of expressway traffic. I had heard earlier that it would be six lanes of local traffic and four lanes of expressway. Is it now six lanes?”

Ralph and Will clarified that the expressway would now be six lanes; some of the original concepts were a four-lane expressway as recommended in the previous Concept, Feasibility and Mobility Study, or CF&M. Ralph noted both due to reevaluating traffic data and because of limited space to expand the expressway in the future – system expansion is an important part of CFX ‘s goals – the expressway will be six lanes.



“Improving that free option - the arterial down below - which gets you that additional capacity for those that do not want to use the expressway or are still making relatively shorter local trips, you've got that option,” he said.

A citizen asked if the widening would be done by CFX? Ralph confirmed CFX would widen Cypress Parkway as part of the overall improvement plan. Mary added that the traffic models are showing that “it’s not going to work unless we do six lanes below and six lanes on top.”

Ralph continued explaining, “The right-of-way is owned by Polk and Osceola County. So, there will need to be joint participation between both counties. Those conversations have been ongoing for many years, and they will continue to evolve as the concept moves forward.”

Other citizen questions and input during the presentation included:

1) Where will the six-lane expansion begin and end on Cypress Parkway?
   - Ralph Bove responded, “Pretty much through the entire study area. From the Solivita Boulevard West intersection, all the way through to Pleasant Hill Road.”

2) When construction begins, who would take over landscaping of Solivita?
   - Ralph Bove responded, “That's going to be something that we need to continue to talk about and investigate … We cannot make a final decision on that today, but it's definitely something that has been brought up recently and would be on the table.”

3) What is the difference in noise impacts between the wall and bridge options?
   - Mary Brooks and Ralph Bove explained the overall noise evaluation process and impacts in general, but mentioned that it would be determined when the noise analysis is done.

4) A citizen asked if it would be feasible to put the additional travel lanes underneath the bridge section?
   - Ralph Bove explained, "There is one portion of the project where we can tuck some of the lanes underneath the bridge structure. However, directly underneath - this is a challenge - based on the geometry." He added that there are different bridge options, including a single pier, but that structure would have to be so massive that it would require additional right of way. The resident insisted this was something that was done elsewhere and should be considered; the project team noted his comment.



Solivita Blvd East – Bridge Alternative



Solivita Blvd East – Wall Alternative

5) A citizen asked who would maintain the area under bridges? They expressed concerns about this possibly becoming an eyesore, with homelessness and/or graffiti. Mary and project team noted CFX's maintenance procedures and asked them to visit our system to see how well it is maintained. CFX would be responsible for the elevated expressway (walls, bridges, etc.) and local government would be responsible for the local road.

6) There was further discussion about possible recreational amenities under the bridge.
   - Ralph Bove clarified that such amenities would be decided based on a joint participation agreement between CFX, Polk and Osceola Counties. Those are details that will continue to evolve as the project advances. Examples of recreational areas under bridge structures, including what has been considered for under I-4, were discussed.



7) Air pollution concerns were also mentioned and the consequences to people's health.
   - Mary Brooks and project team confirmed that this concern is also being evaluated as part of the study.

8) How would construction affect home foundations?

- Mary Brooks noted if the project moves to construction, "vibration monitoring is a part of the process. They look at the distance from different structures to the roadway. Sometimes it's even included in the plans to do [monitoring]. They would do a baseline survey of what condition structures are in nearby and then, do vibration monitoring within a certain distance of where bridges go in."
- Ralph Bove explained that the current study will document the need to monitor and minimize vibration during construction, so that if the project moves forward, vibration would be addressed further in design and construction. There was also brief discussion about different construction techniques to limit vibration. It was noted CFX did not allow the use of vibratory rollers, for example, for compacting the roadway.

9) What would be the impacts for businesses?
   - Ralph & Mary mentioned that minor amounts of ROW are going to be needed in some locations, but CFX's intent is to minimize the impacts to the businesses in area. The project team is trying to maintain the right of way and avoid going into business parking and structures to the extent possible. However, CFX has a process for addressing affected businesses. "We have been in contact with the owners to make the transition is seamless when the time comes," Mary said.

     "For example, the Bravo Supermarket area would be impacted. CFX has a very good reputation and track record for helping those businesses that are displaced by a project. CFX and the owner of the Bravo Center have been in communication and are looking at options, like even setting up shop in a new location before the old location is really impacted; so, it could be seamless in terms of providing service to the community."

10) How wide is Cypress Parkway currently?
   - Ralph Bove confirmed there is currently 300 feet of available right of way.

11) How would drainage be handled?
   - Ralph Bove responded that most of the drainage conveyance would be underground to move it through the corridor. "We would need some off-site water quality retention areas and we're trying to minimize those footprints as well. … Off-site retention ponds still need to be evaluated. If there are some opportunities to expand some existing ponds or work with future development for joint-use ponds, we will investigate that during the design phase. Right now, there is a parcel that has been identified as a potential regional stormwater pond on the east side, on the north behind the Wawa."



12) Local traffic is the main issue now. What is the benefit of the bridge? How is the expressway helping? Who is using the expressway?
   - Mary Brooks explained that the expressway would connect with major roads like I-4 and Florida's Turnpike. This expressway would be part of a network around Osceola

County to accommodate the already increasing population. “The expressway will also give community members more options when you need to make longer trips.”

13) A resident asked whether the project would bring more truck traffic, affecting their quality of life? Residents mentioned they currently do not have that much truck traffic.
Mary Brooks affirmed this is a big change and that a big solution is needed to address the current growth-related congestion – as well as new development already underway. The citizen agreed that the bridge alternative was better than solid walls. “I'm glad that you're doing something about the local traffic, but it's like our quality of life will be affected with this six-lane highway going right through the middle of our community,” he added.

14) Noise concerns were brought up several times.
- Mary expanded upon explaining the noise evaluation criteria and gave examples of locations that met the criteria where CFX has built many noise walls. She gave the example of noise walls on State Road 408 that were built early during construction to protect residents from road work and traffic noise. Mary concluded this concern by stating, “It's a big change, but your community is changing. And with the growth, you have got to do something to make sure that change is going to be positive to the extent possible. You need something big to do that, just six lanes on Cypress Parkway is not going to do it.”

15) Several residents revealed they have avoided driving on Cypress Parkway for the last couple of years because of traffic congestion.

16) A citizen asked how would this impact home values?
- Mary Brooks stated that during construction, it may be tough to sell a home. But afterwards when you have got that level of improvement in your infrastructure, the ability to get to and from easily, more quickly and seamlessly, the property values typically do go up.

17) Has a community impact assessment been done? For example, on the minutes that somebody will be taking to get to the hospital - instead of stuck in traffic.
- Ralph Bove confirmed that a study will be completed.

18) Have bike lanes been considered?
- Mary explained yes, proposed improvements include multi-use trails along both sides of Cypress Parkway.



19) Is there data about how many of the local travelers would use the expressway?
- Ralph Bove said that the project team can check that data. However, he thinks the majority of the local traffic is going to stay local and then when those regional connections are made between I-4 and the Turnpike, then you'll see that growth up on the expressway.

20) What are the law enforcement considerations? The biggest problem is there are so many bad accidents on Cypress Parkway. The police and ambulances cannot hardly get there.
    - Mary Brooks confirmed that coordination with law enforcement and emergency medical services – including on the emergency crossovers – would be part of the project. Meetings with local law enforcement have been held and the project team is aware of the issue.

21) When would CFX break ground on the project?
    - Mary Brooks explained, "We've got a number of hurdles to get over between now and groundbreaking. It's not funded for construction. Right now, we have got to see where the study lands and what the CFX Governing Board decides … whether we'll move forward or not… We don't have that answer for you right now until we get to the end of the study."
    - Will Hawthorne added, "In the most optimistic scenario, it's still years before [a groundbreaking]. I mean this is not happening in a year or two. [If the project does move forward], it is still several years because then it would have to go through design. It's still quite a few years from now, even if everything goes perfectly."
    - Ralph Bove added, "If we had all the money to do this now, we have another year to finish the study. Then, probably at least two years for design. There is right of way acquisition that usually takes about two years … Then, anywhere from 24 to 36 months for construction – there is a lot of construction that is going to happen. So, in a perfect world, if we had all the money right now to do this, it is at least seven years to get there."



22) What is the timeline for the Poinciana Parkway Extension to connect with I-4?
    - Mary Brooks provided the timeline for the CR 532 widening beginning in 2026-2027 and the Poinciana Parkway Extension right after, in conjunction with FDOT.
    - Another citizen also highlighted that traffic also comes up Marigold Avenue, both from the north and south, especially from the north because Westview is pending to build 6,000 new homes, which would bring a big influx of traffic. He recommended a closer exit from the expressway, instead of shortly east of that area.

23) There was discussion that there currently is no exit planned at Pleasant Hill Road.

    - Ralph Bove noted that "we had options that provided those access ramps at Pleasant Hill Road, but it requires more right of way. So, that is when we started getting into some significant potential business damages and right of way impacts along that section. It is a tradeoff [not to include ramps there]."

24) Is the cost of bridge and wall alternative different?
    - Ralph Bove and Will Hawthorne noted the bridge is more expensive.

25) Citizens asked whether lighting from the connector will affect citizens?

- Will Hawthorne explained that lighting will be handled on a case-by-case basis. Lighting shields will be an option.

26) Citizens expressed concerns about eminent domain. Several were concerned that their homes would be bought to build the roadway and inquired whether they should start selling.
    - Project team explained the project process and what steps will need to be taken and at this point in the process, no one's home is in danger.

Mary Brooks concluded the presentation mentioning the benefits of the project, how it would help improve the quality of life. Likewise, future public engagement opportunities were mentioned, as well as next steps in terms of the PD&E study schedule.





[*Post-meeting Note:* The presentation was emailed to the Solivita HOA Block Captains on the evening of November 15, 2024, as well as the website link with all the other project assets.]

The meeting concluded at approximately 3:45 p.m. Staff remained to speak with attendees until the meeting space had to be cleared at 4:15 p.m.