

NORTHWEST FLORIDA TRANSPORTATION CORRIDOR AUTHORITY MONTHLY MEETING

Meeting Minutes

May 21, 2009

1. Call To Order: Chairman McElheney called to order the meeting of the Northwest Florida Transportation Corridor Authority at 10:00am CDT on May 21st at the Fort Walton Beach Public Library, 185 Miracle Strip Parkway, Fort Walton Beach, FL.

Members Present:

Randall McElheney/Chairman

Jay Odom/Vice Chairman

Robert Montgomery/Secretary/Treasurer

Eddie Dixon

James Anders

Stephen Norris

Cheryl Sanders

Jason Alderman with FDOT

Staff Present: Nick Beninate, General Counsel

Members Absent: T.W. Maurice Langston

2. **Welcome** Chairman McElheney welcomed everyone to the NFTCA meeting in Fort Walton Beach, FL.

3. Approval of Minutes

- A. Regular Authority Meeting & Executive Committee Meeting February 19, 2009
- B. Regular Authority Meeting April 16, 2009

Motion by Cheryl Sanders To approve Items A & B – Meeting Minutes
Second by Eddie Dixon
Approved 6-0

4. New Business

A. 2009 Master Plan Updates & Priority Projects

Mr. Ray Reissener requested Board comments and suggestions for the 2009 Master Plan updates. The Pensacola Bay Bridge was noted to be upgraded on the priority list, and Mr. Reissener stated that HDR Engineering has met with the Northwest Florida Regional Planning Council, and they have requested a copy of the NFTCA updated priority list for 2009.

Mr. James Anders inquired as to whether the West Bay Connector would be on the 2009 Master Plan Map. Mr. Reissener responded that it would be included and that the Florida Department of Transportation was working with HDR Engineering, and that the West Bay Connector could be built by the Authority as a toll road.

Vice Chairman Odom commented that Hwy 331 has been a priority for the NFTCA, and has seen much activity and attention since the beginning stages of planning, and recommended that the board select another project to focus attention on. Mr. Odom recommended looking at the eight counties and selecting the top priorities.

Ms. Cheryl Sanders commented that before the board chooses to make that decision, she would like the information on how much work has been completed on Hwy 331. Ms. Sanders also requested that the board look at North 67 and North 65 routes all the way to Liberty County, when reviewing Franklin County alternatives.

Vice Chairman Odom made a recommendation to the board to re-prioritize the project list.

The representative from the Department of Transportation stated that the FDOT would be buying the right-of-ways on Hwy 20. The representative also commented that the Freeport Bypass is open and they are currently trying to multi-lane the section where Hwy 20 intersects, but currently the bridge is the roadblock to that process.

Chairman McElheney suggested that the Eglin Bypass be listed as board priority.

Mr. Robert Montgomery inquired as to where the Pensacola Bay Bridge was on the priority list. Mr. Ray Reissener responded that it was currently on the 10-year plan. Mr. Montgomery requested that the project be moved up in priority. Mr. Reissener responded that the priority list could be re-ranked at the next meeting and the Pensacola Bay Bridge could be addressed at that time.

Mr. Reissener commented that due to gaining momentum, he would recommend that the Eglin Bypass be moved to number one on the updated priority list.

Mr. Eddie Dixon inquired what the current rating was for the Pensacola Bay Bridge.

The representative from the Department of Transportation commented that the Project Development & Environmental (PD&E) report was completed a few years ago, and that the bridge structure does have integrity. The current level of service is an issue, and that the rating is most likely a D rating.

Mr. Reissener recommended looking at other alternatives, maybe further north around the airport and stated that the area around I-10 & southern bridge alternatives would be a good place to look.

B. Update on US 98 Franklin County

Mr. Reissener gave an update on US 98 Franklin County and commented that the project has reached a major milestone; the Efficient Transportation Decision Making (ETDM) process is complete and a technical advisory has been sent to all agencies. The agencies will have 45 days to review and then a scoping meeting will be planned.

C. Update on Eglin Bypass

Vice Chairman Odom gave an update on the Eglin Bypass and stated that the workshop meetings held in Panama City were productive, and all agencies were there and put their input in for potential alternatives. Mr. Odom stated that Hulk Field evaluated mission impacts on Eglin, and then held a meeting with Hulbert Field to discuss current status of project. The Air Force has requested the Authority to continue studies on three key issues including environmental impacts with burning being a major concern. HDR is currently reviewing all the mentioned issues. Mr. Odom commented that all alternatives would be brought into the environmental impacts. Mr. Reissener inquired about the road closure issue. Mr. Odom responded that they were currently addressing burn issues and how the road closures would affect the toll road feasibility. Mr. Odom stated that the overall willingness from Eglin Air Force Base is currently very positive.

D. Proposed June Meeting in Bay County for approval of 2009 Master Plan

Chairman McElheney stated that due to the lack of quorum at the April 2009 meeting, the board would need to schedule a special meeting in June to adopt the 2009 Master Plan, before the July 1st 2009 deadline.

Ms. Cheryl Sanders stated that she would not be available during the third week of June.

Mr. McElheney recommended calling all board members individually so they could agree on a date for the June meeting.

Mr. Robert Montgomery requested that updated priorities are included on the updated Master Plan.

Mr. McElheney encouraged board participation in order to meet legislative deadlines.

E. Request Approval to add Eglin Bypass to the Strategic Intermodal System (SIS)

Mr. Ray Reissener gave details on the Strategic Intermodal System (SIS) proposed by the Northwest Florida Planning Council; they would like to include the Eglin Bypass on their SIS plan. Mr. Reissener stated that much research has been conducted and that a lot of turnpike is included, and the inclusion on the SIS could assist in obtaining priority with the Department of Transportation. Mr. Reissener recommended the board submit a letter of support to include the Eglin Bypass on the planned SIS.

Mr. Jason Alderman with the FDOT stated that a planned SIS corridor can be used on a new system that has not yet been built and discussed the process in which it would be included.

Vice Chairman Odom stated that he supported making a motion to support being included on this planned SIS, and recommended doing so through proper procedures.

Mr. Alderman responded that the DOT has seen a lot of success with the Strategic Intermodal System, with a most recent example being the Port of Port St. Joe.

Motion by Jay Odom To support including the Eglin Bypass on the SIS
Second by Eddie Dixon

Public Comment: Member of the public recommended considering national security issues.

Ms. Cheryl Sanders recommend Mr. Odom amend his motion to include national security.

Mr. Jason Alderman with the FDOT stated that Commissioner Goodman could explain a little more detail regarding the security issues and that the FDOT would be holding some public workshops.

Motion by Jay Odom To support including the Eglin Bypass on the SIS, and adding any criteria that would assist with national security issues.
Second by Eddie Dixon
Approved 7-0

Public Comments:

Jim Devees with the FDOT stated that it was not the West Florida Regional Planning Council who have asked that the Eglin Bypass be included on the SIS, but rather the Okaloosa Walton Transportation Planning Organization who made the request.

Andy Smith with Riverkeepers inquired when the updates to the Master Plan would be available for the public to view, as well as the updated priority list. Mr. Ray Reissener commented that they both would be posted on the website for public viewing. Mr. Smith requested a copy of the ETDM, once available.

Linda Young with the Clearwater Network of Florida asked the NFTCA where they received their funds, and what the board budget was, and if the board got federal funds.

Chairman McElheney stated that there were no new appropriations and that all project activities have been working off of original allocations. Original allocations consisted of State funding, Federal funding, and additional TRIP funding.

Ms. Young asked to whether this information was provided on the website. Mr. Alderman with the FDOT responded that all financial information is maintained on the FDOT website. Mr. Ray Reissener stated that a link to this information would be uploaded on the NFTCA website.

Ms. Young asked if the public would have an opportunity to be part of this process in order to take part in the Master Plan adoption, and asked if the board or general council believed there is an opportunity to have a legal challenge or if the board felt they were exempt from all state citizen opposition.

General Council, Nick Beninate, responded that the board will remain in the same legal position as before. Ms. Young requested a more specific answer. Vice Chairman Odom asked Mr. Reissener to give a 30-second overview of the process that each project undergoes during public participation workshops. Mr. Ray Reissener discussed the example of US 331, and mentioned that Franklin County would also be a good example. Mr. Reissener explained the certified public process and the Environmental Impact Study (EIS) phase, where citizens can challenge in court once the project is voted to proceed. Mr. Reissener stated that the process will not be changed. The board is still in the beginning phases of Master Planning, and that once project were voted to proceed that any challenges made would be made to individual

project. Ms. Young asked when citizens could challenge any board decisions. Chairman McElheney responded that legal council would address her questions in more detail and submit a letter of explanation. Ms. Young requested the letter to address the appropriate place to challenge under Chapter 120.

Linda Young with the Clearwater Network of Florida also gave comment on the alternative to the Pensacola Bay Bridge, and stated that the Bo Johnson Bridge that was sold as an alternative to the Pensacola Bay Bridge, in order to alleviate traffic, is a toll bridge – but has not achieved what it was meant to achieve. She stated that the bridge was a political bridge and did not serve the traffic needs of citizens. Ms. Young commented that it would be nice to have roadways planned to serve citizen needs and not political agendas, and asked the board to be mindful of these things as they move forward.

Mary Medigo from the US Fish & Wildlife inquired if once the Franklin County studies were complete if the agencies would be able to review. Vice Chairman Odom responded that all agencies would definitely be given the opportunity to review.

Franklin County Resident – an unnamed Franklin County resident asked if Ms. Sanders could attend the June meeting via conference call if she is unable to attend. General Council, Nick Beninate, responded that conference calls were allowed under extenuating circumstances.

Mr. Stephen Norris thanked the Department of Transportation District Three for all their help with the Port of Port St. Joe, and placing it on the SIS. Jason Alderman with the FDOT responded that this project would open up trade and is a huge impact for the area, becoming one of the largest ports in the State of Florida.

Chairman McElheney called to adjourn the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 10:54 am CDT