



Memorandum

Memorandum No: 24-006

Date: January 10, 2024

To: Honorable Mayor, Vice Mayor, and Commissioners

From: Greg Chavarria, City Manager 
Greg Chavarria (Jan 10, 2024 17:11 EST)

Re: **New River Crossing – Short Tunnel Concept Update**

City staff and BDO continue to work on advancing the short tunnel concept as directed by the City Commission on December 19, 2023. Last week the City, BDO, and County management met to review the short tunnel concept, the work that was completed to date, and the next steps. The County provided valuable feedback, including areas of concern, during the meeting and memorialized it via a letter sent January 9, 2024 (Exhibit 1).

The project team is focused on completing level four cost estimates for the current conceptual design and is working on potential funding opportunities. BDO anticipates returning to Fort Lauderdale at the end of January to conduct additional stakeholder meetings and plans to provide the City Commission with a formal update in February.

Aside from the BDO effort, City staff received the draft agreement from the United States Department of Transportation for the Regional Infrastructure Accelerator (RIA) grant. The RIA grant was awarded to the City in the amount of \$974,000 and the grant funding is limited to specific elements (Economic Development, Environmental Review, Public Benefit, Property Impacts, Traffic & Congestion) that were identified in the grant application. Staff is reviewing the grant agreement which will dictate the next steps, procurement processes, and project deliverables. Staff are hopeful that the RIA grant will be finalized and on a February agenda for City Commission consideration.

If you have any questions, please contact Ben Rogers, Director of Transportation and Mobility, at brogers@fortlauderdale.gov.

Exhibit 1 – Broward County Letter - January 9, 2024

c: Anthony G. Fajardo, Assistant City Manager
Susan Grant, Assistant City Manager
Thomas J. Ansbro, City Attorney
David R. Soloman, City Clerk
Patrick Reilly, City Auditor
Department Directors
CMO Managers



KEVIN B. KELLEHER, Assistant County Administrator

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January 9, 2024

Mr. Ben Rogers, Transportation and Mobility Director
City of Fort Lauderdale
100 North Andrews Ave.
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33301

Re: Follow-Up to Meeting of January 3, 2024

Dear Ben,

This is a follow-up to the January 3, 2024 meeting you requested between the County, the City, and the City's Consultant (BDO) to discuss New River crossing alternatives, specifically a new shorter, shallower tunnel alternative. Participants in the meeting from Fort Lauderdale's delegation included yourself, Mr. Umer Yaqub and Mr. Sana Dadabhoy of BDO, Mr. Nasri Munfah of Gall Zeidler, Mr. Thomas John of Ice Miller; Broward County's participants included myself, Coree Cuff-Lonergan, George Tablack, Richard Tornese, Vince Ruddy, and Ahn Ton. The stated purpose of the meeting was for the City and its Consultants to provide an overview of their efforts, share presentation materials from the December 19th City Commission meeting, and to discuss County feedback and next steps.

While the conceptual design of a new, shorter tunnel alternative presented by the City's consultants initially appears to offer certain advantages, the County has identified several concerns that have not been addressed and could significantly increase the estimated cost of a tunnel and otherwise further confirm our Board of Commissioners' view that a tunnel alternative is not feasible. Specifically:

1. Horizontal alignment. Cross sections of the new shorter, shallower tunnel alternative presented by the City's consultants show tunnel borings passing through the piles that support the existing New River train bridge. The City's consultants indicated the possibility of placing new piles and removing impacted existing piles. This would require FECR approval as it is their property and would likely impact their operations. Based on previous discussions with Brightline and FECR, we understood that neither of these parties would accept such an alignment, and that tunnels would most likely need to be spaced a minimum distance from the bridge piles. This would require the tunnel alignment to go outside the FECR right of way, necessitating private property acquisition and

Broward County Board of County Commissioners

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underground easements that would add significant costs and time delays to the tunnel design and construction process. Absent Brightline's and FECR's agreement to such a modification of existing rail infrastructure, the latest tunnel proposal cannot be confirmed as technically or financially feasible. Based on the presentations, we understand that the City's consultant has not received confirmation that FECR and Brightline would accept this tunnel proposal. Accordingly, we do not believe it is an accurate statement to say that the tunnel has no right of way costs. We also do not believe it is appropriate for the City to characterize all bridge alternatives as having right of way impacts and high associated costs, since the County is still exploring bridge designs that could possibly be built within the existing right of way, which would minimize or negate such additional costs.

2. Vertical alignment. The conceptual designs shown by the City's consultants assume a 4% grade for at least 600 feet toward the south side portal of the proposed short tunnel. This exceeds the 3% maximum incline grade specified by Brightline. Again, the City's consultant has not obtained confirmation from Brightline that they would accept a 4% grade. The alignment proposed by the City's consultant also creates potential pedestrian and vehicular line of sight problems at the grade crossing adjacent to the south portal, resulting in increased safety risks. As indicated by the City's consultants, adjusting the vertical alignment to accommodate a 3% or less grade would require permanently closing off the existing rail crossing at SW 7th Street. Before concluding that such an adjusted vertical alignment is feasible, the City would need to perform a study of the traffic impact of closing SW 7th St., because such closure could increase the division of communities and would very likely worsen traffic flows.
3. Resiliency issues and other risks. The presentations did not address resiliency issues, let alone those conditions specific to the South Florida area. During the meeting we discussed the risk of flooding, which is high in the area proposed for the new tunnel and was clearly demonstrated during last year's serious flooding event. The City consultant's characterization of tunnel flood gate and other mitigation costs as minimal ("couple million dollars") is not consistent with information provided previously by FDOT's consultants. We would recommend the City obtain complete cost information (design, construction, commissioning, operation and maintenance) based on flood gates used at the Port of Miami tunnel and other similar projects, including a break-down and separate line items for such costs in revised cost estimates adjusted for 2024 dollars to confirm what those actuals costs may be. We would also recommend including information concerning risks caused by tunneling through fragile geological formations in close proximity

to new and historic buildings. The risks of ground movement/settlement caused by vibrations during excavation are of particular concern, given the recent Champlain Towers disaster in Surfside, Miami-Dade.

4. Environmental and traffic impacts associated with excavated material handling. One of the most challenging issues affecting the construction of the Port of Miami tunnel was the processing and disposal of excavated materials, including some materials that may be contaminated by hazardous substances. During the meeting, you indicated that the originally specified staging area of Sistrunk Park was “premature” and could be substituted by other locations in the vicinity of the proposed northern tunnel portal. This notwithstanding, the anticipated impacts associated with the processing and transfer of excavated materials in the vicinity of the tunnel portals, including de-watering, treatment of any contaminated material, and the traffic impacts caused by the large number of dump trucks (estimated at 10,000 or more) that would need to circulate in the vicinity of the staging areas during construction, would need to be addressed, which would likely add more costs and time to the proposed project. It would also be important to make a preliminary identification of permanent sites for depositing excavated material. It is important that all stakeholders, local community leaders, impacted residents in the area are aware of the potential impacts and any proposed mitigation measures, and have an opportunity to express their views, as this will likely cause significant disruption to their quality of life during an extended construction period.
5. Station design and cost issues. Previous cost estimates for the tunnel and bridge alternatives (including those done under the County’s and City’s joint study) included the cost of a commuter rail station in the vicinity of the existing downtown Fort Lauderdale station of Brightline, together with the costs of any modifications required to the Brightline station itself. However, during our meeting, the City’s consultants indicated that they only included the cost of a new underground Brightline station, leaving out cost estimates for a commuter rail station. To compare “apples to apples,” it is necessary to account for these differences, either adding commuter rail station costs to tunnel estimates, or removing these costs from any past or future bridge cost estimates.

We were surprised to hear that the City’s consultants are being asked to review grant funding and other financing opportunities for tunnels, given the City’s and County’s previous investment to perform this same task as part of our joint study. On a related note, we are also concerned about the risk of sending conflicting signals to potential federal and state funding agencies for a County project, especially as we continue to hear

January 9, 2024
Ben Rogers, Director of Transportation and Mobility
City of Fort Lauderdale
Follow-up to Meeting of January 3, 2024

about the City's plans to seek grant funding from federal and/or state agencies in the April 2024 timeframe. The joint study consultants (and the Broward MPO) made it clear that submitting capital grant applications for federal funding prior to completing preliminary designs and starting required environmental reviews would not be appropriate nor productive. In this regard, we strongly encourage the City and its consultants to consult both with us and the Broward MPO, to ensure that our efforts are coordinated and consistent with all relevant requirements.

In the meantime, County staff plans to continue following our Board's directives and develop preliminary technical analysis for a low to mid-level bridge. Given the above highlighted concerns and uncertainties with the newly proposed tunnel alternative, we see this as the most prudent approach. As we advance with our respective efforts, we look forward to continuing to share information and coordinate, in the best interests of all local stakeholders and the broader regional community.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide feedback. We are encouraged by the resolution adopted by the City Commission on December 19, 2023, and look forward to continued collaboration as the County moves ahead with our preliminary technical studies and conceptual designs for an iconic bridge alternative.

Sincerely,



Kevin Kelleher
Assistant County Administrator

Cc: Monica Cepero, County Administrator
Coree Cuff Lonergan, Director, County Transportation Department
George Tablack, County Chief Financial Officer
Vince Ruddy, County Chief Negotiator
Trevor Fisher, County Director of Public Works
Richard Tornese, County Director of Highway and Bridge Maintenance
Anh Ton, County Director of Streets and Highways
Greg Chavarria, City Manager, City of Fort Lauderdale



Commission Memo 24-006-New River Crossing-Short Tunnel Concept Update

Final Audit Report

2024-01-10

Created:	2024-01-10
By:	Donna Varisco (dvarisco@fortlauderdale.gov)
Status:	Signed
Transaction ID:	CBJCHBCAABAAhUUhQJGv3QvAD8HFFWdnrhVt6EqJMgQD

"Commission Memo 24-006-New River Crossing-Short Tunnel Concept Update" History

-  Document created by Donna Varisco (dvarisco@fortlauderdale.gov)
2024-01-10 - 9:35:01 PM GMT
-  Document emailed to Greg Chavarria (GChavarria@fortlauderdale.gov) for signature
2024-01-10 - 9:35:40 PM GMT
-  Email viewed by Greg Chavarria (GChavarria@fortlauderdale.gov)
2024-01-10 - 10:06:02 PM GMT
-  Document e-signed by Greg Chavarria (GChavarria@fortlauderdale.gov)
Signature Date: 2024-01-10 - 10:11:43 PM GMT - Time Source: server
-  Agreement completed.
2024-01-10 - 10:11:43 PM GMT

