

# City of Fort Lauderdale

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## Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, January 18, 2022

11:30 AM

Joint Workshop with Florida Department of Transportation

City Hall - City Commission Chambers

100 North Andrews Avenue, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33301

### **CITY COMMISSION WORKSHOP**

*FORT LAUDERDALE CITY COMMISSION*

*DEAN J. TRANTALIS Mayor*

*HEATHER MORAITIS Vice Mayor - Commissioner - District I*

*STEVEN GLASSMAN Commissioner - District II*

*ROBERT L. McKINZIE Commissioner - District III*

*BEN SORENSEN Commissioner - District IV*

*CHRIS LAGERBLOOM, City Manager*

*JOHN HERBST, City Auditor*

*JEFFREY A. MODARELLI, City Clerk*

*ALAIN E. BOILEAU, City Attorney*

**CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Trantalis called the meeting to order at 11:38 a.m.

**ROLL CALL**

**Commission Members Present:** Vice Mayor Heather Moraitis, Commissioner Steven Glassman, Commissioner Robert L. McKinzie, Commissioner Ben Sorensen and Mayor Dean J. Trantalis

**QUORUM ESTABLISHED**

**Also Present:** Gerry O'Reilly, District 4 Florida Department of Transportation Secretary, Phil Schwab, P.E., Florida Department of Transportation Project Manager, Vincent Ruddy, Broward County Finance and Administrative Services Department Chief Negotiator, Phil Purcell, Marine Industries of South Florida President

**Charter Officers Present:** City Manager Chris Lagerbloom, Deputy City Clerk David R. Soloman, City Attorney Alain E. Boileau and City Auditor John Herbst

**OLD/NEW BUSINESS****BUS-1** [22-0077](#)

Florida Department of Transportation Update on the New River Crossing and Broward Commuter Rail - (Commission Districts 1, 2, 3 and 4)

Mayor Trantalis provided an overview of this Agenda item and Workshop. Members of the Commission requested additional information related to a Resolution presented to the Commission in support of a tunnel as the locally preferred option versus a bridge to accommodate the proposed expansion of commuter rail service from Miami to West Palm Beach through the City on the eastern railway (Project). The Project's Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) tunnel option would lessen the impact of a New River railway crossing on the Marine Industry, a significant part of South Florida and the City's economy.

Mayor Trantalis recognized Gerry O'Reilly, Florida Department of Transportation District Four Secretary. Secretary O'Reilly remarked on the importance of this Project to the City and the South Florida Region. The Project Team for commuter railway expansion includes individuals from the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) and Broward County. FDOT Staff will provide the Project's technical portion of the presentation. Broward County will provide the financial portion of the

presentation, followed by questions and discussion.

Secretary O'Reilly provided an overview of the Project and its history. The genesis of the Project began ten (10) to fifteen (15) years ago, prior to Brightline high-speed rail (Brightline). Miami-Dade County wanted to build a commuter rail from downtown Miami to Aventura. Palm Beach County wanted to extend Tri-Rail along the Florida East Coast Railway (FEC) Corridor (Corridor) up to Jupiter.

In 2019, the State Legislature directed FDOT to examine the New River crossing, which FDOT delivered to the State Legislature within approximately six (6) months. Broward County began conversations regarding FDOT taking the lead with the Project Development Study. Miami-Dade took a different course and is doing this with Brightline.

FDOT is only funding and performing the Project Development Study. Broward County committed to funding operation and maintenance costs of the commuter rail if it had a feasible alternative with Brightline for commuter rail entry into the Corridor. Broward County is responsible for consensus-building around the stations and other items.

FDOT signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Broward County outlining their respective roles. FDOT took the lead technical role for the Project Development Study to achieve a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) for selection by the Broward County Commission. Broward County has taken the lead in financial planning presented to the Commission today.

Secretary O'Reilly clarified the importance of following the process to ensure the potential for federal funding is not at risk, which requires the Broward County Commission to bring forward four (4) alternatives with locals picking the LPA. He commented on the high cost of the Project. The Study has reached the point to review LPAs for station location and the New River crossing.

Secretary O'Reilly explained that when attracting federal funding and State funding, items considered include the Project being financially feasible.

In response to Mayor Trantalis' question regarding the Broward County MPO partnering with Broward County to secure financing, Secretary O'Reilly said Broward County is responsible for developing the financial plan to assemble Project funding. There could be multiple funding sources, i.e., the State, the federal government, municipalities and others, based upon building Project support.

In response to Mayor Trantalis' question, Secretary O'Reilly explained that FDOT defines each approach's costs, including identification of underlying cost estimates and details described in its engineering study. Secretary O'Reilly reiterated FDOT's responsibility for Project design, not Project financing. Further comment ensued.

In response to Commissioner Sorensen's question about the timing of the Commission's LPA, Secretary O'Reilly noted an important Project meeting scheduled for the end of the month where FDOT would present all Project design information, and Broward County would discuss the financial plan developed to date. Significant public input is anticipated. This meeting would be a pivotal time to present the Commission's LPA, but municipalities can approach as they choose. Further comment ensued.

Mayor Trantalis recognized Phil Schwab, P.E., Florida Department of Transportation Project Manager. Mr. Schwab provided an overview of the Project, Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) considerations and related processes, illustrated in the presentation.

***A copy has been made part of the backup to this Agenda item.***

The New River crossing is a significant aspect of the Project requiring a decision. FDOT met with stakeholders and conducted related special workshops. The four (4) alternatives for consideration addressing the New River crossing LPA include:

- A low-level bascule bridge
- A mid-level bascule bridge
- A high-level fixed bridge
- A tunnel

Following the public workshop scheduled for later this month, FDOT will make a recommendation. FDOT anticipates the Broward County Commission will select and approve an LPA later this month, which needs to be followed by approval or endorsement from the MPO. Further comment ensued.

In response to Commissioner Sorensen's question regarding the upcoming timeline, Mr. Schwab explained FDOT anticipates the MPO endorsing or approving the LPA this spring, allowing FDOT to submit and proceed with Project Development.

Mayor Trantalis commented that the County Commission would likely

look to municipalities for the preferred LPA before deciding.

Commissioner Sorensen recommended reaching out to the Broward County Commission well before February 22, 2022 and commented on related details. Mayor Trantalis concurred. Further comment and discussion ensued.

Mr. Schwab explained costs listed in the presentation associated with the New River crossing options are only for the cost of construction and expounded on technical details of the four (4) New River crossing design alternatives. Mr. Schwab said the tunnel alternative would allow trains to bypass Davie Boulevard.

In response to Mayor Trantalis' question, Mr. Schwab said the tunnel could connect before Sunrise Boulevard, allowing trains to bypass Sunrise Boulevard. Further comment and discussion ensued. Mr. Schwab said starting a tunnel north of Sunrise Boulevard would need to be evaluated.

Mr. Schwab said the Marine Industry had indicated a preference for a mid-level bascule bridge, a high-level fixed bridge, or a tunnel. He said a tunnel would provide the best benefit from a boating perspective and expounded on related details.

In response to Commissioner Sorensen's questions, Mr. Schwab confirmed the likelihood that the same navigable width of the waterway with the current bridge would remain. FDOT would continue to coordinate with the U.S. Coast Guard. Further comment and discussion ensued on details related to taking portions of properties required for the bridge alternatives.

Mayor Trantalis commented on the need to contemplate the significant impact of takings of portions of properties required for the bridge alternatives, cited examples, and expounded on details.

Mr. Schwab explained that FDOT defines what is needed and anticipated impacts at this study level. As the Project moves forward, there are efforts to reduce the effects as much as possible. If eminent domain is necessary, property owners are given full rights, and property owners are compensated. Further comment, discussion, and questions ensued on details of Project illustrations.

The LPA process requires the County Commission to receive feedback regarding selection of a rail station location, an alternative to the New River crossing, and whether the region can afford to move forward given

the estimated cost of a tunnel or bridge based on what is being received.

Mayor Trantalis commented on his support of the concept of commuter rail. He remarked on the need for discussions to include ridership estimates impacting the LPA selection of a tunnel or bridge. Mr. Schwab said the County Commission would evaluate the Project's impact on the County and make a decision.

Mayor Trantalis remarked on selecting an LPA that is best for the community and seeking federal infrastructure funding.

Mayor Trantalis recognized Vincent Ruddy, Broward County Finance and Administrative Services Department Chief Negotiator, explained his role on behalf of Broward County. The next portion of the presentation includes key aspects from Broward County's perspective, including an analysis of funding, ridership and the cost-benefit ratio. He noted a high degree of support by the business community. Project ridership is expected to be greater than what is currently on TriRail, and most municipalities are on board to share costs for station development. Miami-Dade County has officially entered into the Project Development Phase, from Aventura to downtown Miami.

Mr. Ruddy said the Project is not included in the original Broward Surtax (Surtax) Budget. He commented on related Surtax funding details and projections and the need to be cautious. Other funding options include federal grant opportunities in addition to synergies and economies of scale associated with Florida Regional Transit Authority (FRTA) and TriRail absorbing the Project operations.

Mr. Ruddy discussed another parallel transportation initiative, Broward County Systemwide Transit Study, Planning and Preliminary Design (Systemwide Transit Study) for twenty-six (26) miles of light rail transit, seven (7) bus rapid transit corridors, and several other items. The Systemwide Transit Study did not include this Project, and the Project and Study are parallel planning initiatives.

Mr. Ruddy commented on the need for clarity regarding the Project's governance. He discussed details associated with TriRail as an option because it is an established regional entity with representation from Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach Counties. Although they participate in meetings and planning, Palm Beach County has not been identified as a funding source for the Project.

Mr. Ruddy noted similar commuter rail projects had included State entities intervening upfront and purchasing existing railway tracks and

rights-of-way, which allowed the operator to not bear those costs. The current owner of the passenger easement for any passenger service over the rail tracks is Brightline, which expects to receive a track access fee.

The New River crossing adds a significant amount of capital expenditure to the Project that needs to be considered. Mr. Ruddy discussed details and options for federal, State, local, and private funding sources. There are several options that local cities or municipalities can use to raise those funds as shown in the presentation.

Private developers participate in joint development projects associated with commuter railway stations leveraging the higher value of these new types of commuter transit systems. Some municipalities have launched competitive tenders inviting bids from private developers. Broward County would seek to leverage as many complementary sources of funding as possible.

Mr. Ruddy discussed presenting the New River crossing, whether a tunnel or a bridge, as a separate project outside the *Federal Transit Administration (FTA) New Start Grant*. When included as part of the Project, the cost is high, and the *FTA* would give a low score on cost-effectiveness. As a separate project, the New River crossing, whether a bridge or a tunnel, could be considered an enrichment with benefits beyond immediate transportation needs. He remarked on the possibility of developing some cost-sharing with Miami-Dade and Palm Beach counties due to benefits to its passengers utilizing the New River crossing.

Mr. Ruddy confirmed the continued promotion of joint development opportunities with private developers to leverage investment and expounded on related details. An estimate of detailed programming costs cannot be determined until implementation of a concept design plan progresses.

Mr. Ruddy remarked that programming costs would not fund required aerial or ground rights-of-way, public art, or cultural enhancements. Mr. Ruddy expounded on related funding opportunities.

Mr. Ruddy said assumptions built into this model for a preliminary operating cost estimate will need to be revisited and revised and would include a cost-sharing formula between Miami-Dade and Broward.

In response to Commissioner Sorensen's question regarding projected cost of operations being similar for each type of New River crossing, Mr. Ruddy discussed operational costs associated with New River crossing

options. The model assumes that all of the various options are relatively similar. At this stage, updated cost estimates for New River crossing options have not been differentiated with an in-depth study.

In response to Commissioner Sorensen's questions, Mr. Ruddy said the numbers in this financial analysis are FDOT estimates with an added inflation factor of two point seven percent (2.7%). Mr. Ruddy confirmed the heights of the mid-level and high-level bascule bridges in the presentation are accurate. Funding for the entire Broward County commuter rail project, including the New River crossing, is not included in Broward County Surtax (Surtax) funding. For this project to be viable, unallocated residual Surtax funds are needed. Mr. Ruddy said estimates in the presentation do not assume this and explained details related to Surtax funding. Further comment and discussion ensued.

Mr. Ruddy discussed nationwide transit tunnel designs and cost estimates included in the presentation and reviewed resiliency details related to sea-level rise.

In response to Mayor Trantalis' question regarding retaining walls around tunnel portal areas mitigating flooding, Mr. Ruddy confirmed. Mr. Ruddy noted the anticipated lifespan of a tunnel or bridge. Further comment ensued. Mr. Ruddy acknowledged many letters from various stakeholders, community groups, and developers expressing a preference for the tunnel. He also commented on the viewpoint of academia and the resiliency of the community, and cited examples. Further comment and discussion ensued.

Mayor Trantalis noted this Workshop was an opportunity for FDOT and Broward County to present information to the Commission to decide how to proceed. Comment and discussion ensued on extending this Workshop and delaying the start of the Commission Conference Meeting.

Mayor Trantalis narrated a presentation and explained his perspective regarding a New River crossing bridge. He discussed the social costs and the impact on neighborhoods, infrastructure, investments in downtown redevelopment, and the proposed Joint Government Center.

***A copy has been made part of the backup to this Agenda item.***

Mayor Trantalis expounded on his perspective opposing a raised bridge and support of a tunnel as the locally preferred alternative.

In response to Vice Mayor Moraitis' question, Secretary O'Reilly said the



New River crossing is the only river crossing navigated by large vessels with masts within the eighty-five (85) mile Corridor. Fort Lauderdale is the only municipality currently discussing a raised railway.

In response to Vice Mayor Moraitis' question regarding pursuing funding with more than one (1) LPA, Secretary O'Reilly said the Commission could do whatever it chooses. However, one (1) LPA needs to be presented to pursue federal funding. Further comment and discussion ensued.

Vice Mayor Moraitis explained her perspective and the need for more details regarding the costs of a tunnel and information on bridge and tunnel locations. Further comment and discussion ensued regarding a bridge or tunnel not impeding traffic at Davie Boulevard, Broward Boulevard, and Sunrise Boulevard.

In response to Vice Mayor Moraitis' question regarding other sources contributing to capital or maintenance and operation funding, i.e., an Enterprise Fund, Secretary O'Reilly confirmed the need for as many funding sources as possible.

In response to Vice Mayor Moraitis' question regarding adding additional stations, Secretary O'Reilly noted the ability to add additional stations but, typically, there are set distances addressing train speed and meeting time schedules.

Vice Mayor Moraitis confirmed her support of the tunnel and said doing nothing is not an option. She suggested a Commission conversation regarding the inclusion of a second alternative in a Commission Resolution. Vice Mayor Moraitis discussed a compromise and possible opportunities for a linear park under a bridge. Further comment and discussion ensued.

Commissioner McKinzie discussed his support for a tunnel or a bridge. He confirmed the region would have to present a unified front for the LPA to capture federal government and state government funding.

Commissioner Glassman confirmed the need to be unified and his support to pursue a tunnel as the LPA.

In response to Commissioner Glassman's question regarding the status of the FDOT project for an overpass from the *Gateway Cinema* at the intersection of Federal Highway and Sunrise Boulevard and its connections with this project, Secretary O'Reilly said it is in a project development study and commented on details.

In response to Commissioner Glassman's question regarding separating the New River crossing from the commuter railway to meet cost-benefit aspects, Secretary O'Reilly confirmed.

Commissioner Glassman concurred with Vice Mayor Moraitis' perspective for a tunnel as the LPA and the need to have another option. He expounded on the feedback from stakeholders in support of a tunnel. Further comment and discussion ensued.

Commissioner Sorensen confirmed his support of a tunnel as the LPA.

Commissioner Sorensen noted the parties involved, including FEC, Brightline, Broward County and FDOT. He inquired about freight railway traffic utilizing a tunnel. Mayor Trantalis commented on his outreach regarding this subject.

Secretary O'Reilly clarified the proposed Project is only for commuter passenger railway and explained details related to tunnel design modifications necessary for freight traffic to utilize the tunnel. Further comment ensued.

Mayor Trantalis commented on the significant amount of increased railway traffic comprised of commuter railway traffic and Brightline along the Corridor.

In response to Commissioner Sorensen's questions, Mr. Ruddy confirmed upcoming workshop dates. Secretary O'Reilly explained Project estimates would be available at that stage, and workshops would include rights-of-way maps and staff to explain related details.

In response to Commissioner Sorensen's question, Secretary O'Reilly remarked that if the Commission's position states it would prefer option A but are open to option B, it would not matter to the Project. Broward County would ultimately choose among the four (4) alternatives. The Broward County Commission would need to determine funding.

Mayor Trantalis recognized Phil Purcell, Marine Industries Association of South Florida President. Mr. Purcell confirmed his support of a tunnel as the LPA option. He explained the importance of not delaying and addressing this subject now. The no-build option would negatively impact the marine industry.

In response to Commissioner Sorensen's question, Mr. Purcell said an eighty (80) foot high-level bridge or a fifty-six (56) foot bascule bridge

would not impede marine traffic and remarked on related details.

In response to Commissioner Sorensen's question, Mr. Ruddy said the Broward County Commission has the authority to make a final decision in choosing an LPA option. The County Commission has the financial responsibility to look at this Project and the rest of its portfolio of projects under consideration to determine whether or not they can support this Project.

Mr. Ruddy commented on his viewpoint that this Project would not go forward without a single unified LPA. There would be a clearer understanding of available funding when the System-wide Transit Study results become available in June 2022. Further comment and discussion ensued.

Mr. Ruddy explained that the most significant portions of the current Surtax budget are bus transit, operating costs and subsidies to cover the deficit for buses and other forms of transportation benefiting segments of the population with lower income. Funding for this Project may need to come from other projects and other modes of transportation and different types of initiatives. Further comment and discussion ensued.

In response to Commissioner Sorensen's question, Mayor Trantalis explained that the Commission could exchange ideas at tonight's Commission Regular Meeting, and individuals could participate in public comment.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

Mayor Trantalis adjourned the meeting at 2:04 p.m.