

■ ■ *An Intermodal Transportation Hub For The Future*

An intermodal “hub” is envisioned in the Gateway Area, with its confluence at the 112 acre former “Speedway” and adjacent horse stables site. The area is seen as an ideal site for the co-location of several transportation-related uses, including the Roosevelt Boulevard/CR 296 connector and an intermodal/high speed rail terminal. According to the 2002 Airport Master Plan Update, “it is envisioned as a consolidated regional transfer center for passengers using the Airport, monorail, local/regional bus service, and rental cars” and would be designed to accommodate high speed rail. The monorail is currently proposed to connect the Airport to downtown St. Petersburg and downtown Clearwater. Funding has been earmarked for the Roosevelt Boulevard/CR 296 connector, and the Speedway site was recently acquired for this purpose. Construction dollars are not yet committed. Several segments of the CR 296 connector are already in design, but construction is not anticipated until the outer years of FDOT’s work program. There are also plans for integrating the rest of the intermodal plan, including elevated guideway and bus rapid transit, into the Area. Because of the suitability of the Speedway site, should a specific commitment be made to the intermodal projects, up to two thirds of the property is currently considered “reserved” for these uses.

As mentioned earlier, PSTA is interested in using a portion of the property for a Cross-Bay terminal, for commuter buses to and from Hillsborough County. The County, the FDOT and PSTA will be working closely during 2005 to evaluate the options, and develop a conceptual plan, for optimal co-location of uses at this site.

PSTA, FDOT and the MPO are currently evaluating Ulmerton Road to determine its suitability for Bus Rapid Transit strategies such as signal priority and “queue jumpers” (i.e., allowing the bus to advance first at intersections by using the right lane to “jump” around cars). Trolleys, or “loopers” are being considered in other locations around the County to move people around a limited area; an evaluation of the Gateway Area for such a service might be warranted to complete the mix of integrated mobility options.

Overall, this intermodal “hub” would be designed to support the economic, employment and transportation goals of the Gateway Area and the County as a whole, by optimizing mobility in and around the Area. Obviously, to achieve this will require coordination and a common interest among County departments, as well as federal, state and local agencies and governments. Therefore, in regard to planning and decision-making, the County should be a leader, as countywide interests are at stake with the commitments made to this project area, or mobility “hub.”

■ ■ *Implementing Airport Plans and the St. Petersburg-Clearwater Airport Master Plan Update*

Airport Operations

The Board approved the Airport Master Plan Update on December 21 of 2004. Because airport markets and climate are volatile, the County must plan for a future that recognizes the cyclical nature of the industry. The Master Plan contains specific funding

strategies for the needed capital improvements, initially focusing on a pay-as-you-go approach. Adoption of the Master Plan is the first step towards eligibility for State and Federal grants. Developing a plan for, and construction of, the terminal structure should be underway soon, contingent upon approval of a specific project by the Board of County Commissioners. Any short-term terminal improvements will be financed on a “pay-as-you-go” basis.

Airco Golf Course

The Airport’s Airco golf course property, at over 124 acres, is a focal point of the County’s redevelopment plans in the Gateway Area. The golf course use is planned to be phased out for development to a use with more countywide economic benefit. While specific plans are not formalized, the site is intended to be developed as a business and employment center. This property is required to be used to provide revenue for the Airport, according to the provisions of by the Federal transfer of property in 1947. Because of the size of the site, the County will need to determine if redevelopment plans are of a threshold requiring treatment as a Development of Regional Impact (DRI). Regardless, the site planning process will require that such things as compatibility with adjacent uses, the adequacy of roads and infrastructure, compatibility with the onsite and surrounding environment as well as the neighboring community be adequately addressed.

Airport Industrial Park and Business Center

As described earlier, the existing 42 acre Airport Industrial Park and Business Center is a successful business location, although several of the occupants are public sector uses. It is expected that the Center will continue to be an employment focal point, but will receive new attention regarding marketing, accessibility and visibility, particularly as the public sector uses onsite re-locate to the EpiCenter in the Rubin Icot Center.

Commercial Property to the South

There are several commercial properties to the south of existing Airport operations, under Airport ownership, totaling approximately 33 acres. Most of the properties have direct access to Ulmerton Road. While small commercial interests have expressed interest in developing the properties, and a Cracker Barrel restaurant is under construction now, there is benefit to looking at the remaining contiguous properties as a whole before parceling out opportunities individually. Ulmerton Road is already experiencing level of service deficiencies and additional commercial attractors along the roadway may not be the best development alternative.

Properties to the East

The Airport also owns the properties to the immediate east of Airco golf course and existing Airport operations. These properties are important for several reasons. They provide an excellent buffer between the planned activities at the Airport, along with the planned development of a business and economic center at the Airco Golf Course, and the residential areas to the east. Additionally, the proximity of the property to the nearby

Yat Kitischee archaeological site makes it likely that significant cultural resources might be found on this property as well. The site also offers potential for a stormwater management purpose associated with redevelopment of the Airco property. Overall, maintaining this County property in a largely natural condition, coupled with analysis of a compatible stormwater management function, and the potential for passive public access, is recommended. However, additional cultural exploration should be the initial priority in order to determine the level of activity and accessibility appropriate for this property.

■ ■ ***Plans for Other County Properties***

Solid Waste Operations

Solid Waste Operations will continue to develop its landfill operation. In fact, development will occur on a continuous basis for at least the next 50 years. New residential and industrial development planned in the vicinity may be impacted by this ongoing operation. It is imperative, however, that the landfill operation continue in this location, otherwise solid waste will need to be transported out of the County, resulting in an extraordinary increase in the cost of solid waste disposal for all County residents and businesses in the future. This is the reason for the reluctance to allow residential uses too close to the operating landfill, and the reason, therefore, for the creation of a buffer zone regulating development around solid waste operations. Anticipating that future residents would object to build-out of the landfill operation, the Board of County Commissioners adopted regulations that would control the location of residential and mixed-use development in proximity to Solid Waste Operations. In this manner, the Board can balance the economic objectives of the Gateway Area with the long-term needs of countywide solid waste disposal and management responsibilities.

Criminal Justice Complex and Jail

The Criminal Courts Complex is complete, and the Jail facility is in phase 2 of its 3 phase development, as described in the Florida Quality Development application for the Complex. Phase 2 includes a 432 bed health care facility for the Jail, and remodeling/reconstruction of the food service, dining and laundry facilities. Build out of the FQD is expected by 2012. However, additional land will still be required for some limited expansion associated with juvenile justice operations. The vacated PSTA site on 49th Street appears to provide the location for this expansion. Coordination with the City of Largo on use of the PSTA site will be required. As the entire Complex is in close proximity to the Cross Bayou Canal, any development and all future operations associated with this sizable operation should contribute to improving overall environmental quality and water quality in the Canal, consistent with the purpose of the Cross Bayou Watershed planning underway.