

To: Pinellas County Transportation Task force
From: Don Crane
Re: Pinellas County Transportation Funding
Date: October 14, 2003

The PCTTF, at the first meeting in June, requested that Brian Smith, staff support to the Task Force, schedule a meeting with Secretary Hartmann & Richard Gehring, land use consultant to Pinellas County. The purpose of the meetings was to understand from Gehring where future commercial developments are most important for improving the County's economy. From Hartmann, we wanted to learn about highway capacity improvements that would attract new businesses to commerce centers.

Since the Task Force was created to give advice to the Pinellas Assembly on how to spend additional Pinellas County transportation funds from various sources, it was my suggestion that all proposed transportation capacity improvement projects (state and local) be identified to:

- Show on a map **state** capacity improvement projects in one color
- Show on a map **county** improvement projects in a different color
- The cost of each project
- When the project is scheduled for construction (don't need PD&E or R/W)
- Each project would be numbered and listed on a spreadsheet.

NOTE: This is top priority for planning a transportation system that will improve the County's economy and should be an on-going process.

It is almost impossible to understand and implement a long-range highway program without this information. Secretary Hartmann and staff have been very helpful. They reviewed my spreadsheet and made corrections and determined that the estimated cost of proposed highway capacity improvement projects in Pinellas County will exceed \$1.1 billion.

The \$1.1 billion funding needed for Pinellas County becomes significant when measured against the cost of FDOT capacity improvement projects for the next 15 or 20 years. Many of the projects in the Pinellas County program are listed as "cost feasible". They are not "cost feasible" if FDOT does not have the funds. About 1996, FDOT estimated that they would experience a \$22 billion transportation funding shortfall for Florida's Intrastate Highway System over the next 20 years. They have revised the shortfall to \$29 billion. That does not include highways not on the FIHS. FDOT District 7 had estimated their shortfall to be \$6 billion. The District's shortfall is being reviewed.

The point of this time consuming exercise is this. If the County staff does not know what state projects are scheduled and funded, how can the County Commissioners make the best decisions for spending a potential \$100 million derived over the next 5 years from an increase in the local option gas tax of 6-cents?

It is my understanding that the County and FDOT will allocate about \$50 million from Skyway toll funds to U.S. 19. They would be taking toll road revenue funds to pay for non-toll road improvements. A better use of the Skyway funds would be to secure funding for a toll road from the 49th Street Bridge to 118th Avenue. I make this observation because at the last PCTTF meeting, we were told that *it has not been determined who will pay for the cost of the Roosevelt Connector, the County or FDOT. That is hard to believe.* Every highway in the Roosevelt Connector area must be given an estimated cost and then a funding source.

NOTE: Counties tell the FDOT what their program of work is (projects and schedule) and FDOT builds the projects with funds that are available. It is my opinion that the Pinellas County MPO staff does not give any consideration to selecting projects based on economic considerations. They do not equate a better economy with a better quality of life.

Either the U.S. 19 corridor to 118th Ave or the 49th Street Bridge to 118th Avenue will be the backbone of the County's north-south highway system. Therefore it is important to decide now which options will have the greatest chance of being funded and what funds will guarantee the funding.

Four months after our request to meet with Hartmann & Gehring, we are scheduled to meet with Gerhing in October and Hartmann in November. The foundation for all decisions from the PCTTF should have been based on these two meetings being scheduled in July.

From my review of FDOT funding over the next 15 years, U.S 19 north of Countryside through Pasco County will not have any capacity improvement funds. Pinellas County does not plan any capacity improvements to McMullen-Booth Road. That means that upper Pinellas County will not have a limited access highway to the North Suncoast Road or I-75. That is a huge negative for Pinellas County's economic opportunities. How can that be left out of a regional transportation plan?

The four local MPOs say they have a regional transportation plan. BUT do they? Add to the two highway corridors above the two different light-rail plans (over \$1 billion each) plus several billions of dollars for unfunded highway capacity improvement projects. *A transportation plan is not a plan unless there is a funding source.*

It seems to me that every county highway program should be re-evaluated based on the information suggested in this memo. With help from District 7, we may be able to sort out the real funding shortfall...at least in Pinellas County.

I think this is a serious problem because the MPO's have too much control, the CCC does not have a defined long-range transportation plan that addresses funding and FDOT is not going to get into a battle with the MPOs. MPOs guard their turf and object to anyone questioning their programs so no one wants to be the lead dog.

Pinellas County can help solve the funding for their highway program but it will require a plan that is tied to state and county funding, which includes a toll road.

When we don't know what we don't know, it is hard to ask the right questions. The staff should present *all* of the information, good or bad, in a manner that is easily understood. We should not have to dig for information.