

Meeting Summary

Volusia County Expressway Authority Coalition

January 24, 2001

Thomas C. Kelly Administration Center, Training Rooms 1-2
123 W. Indiana Avenue, DeLand, Florida

Members Present:

Maryam Hosseini Ghyabi
Richard McMahan
Lori Campbell Baker
Brad Blais

Jon Cheney
James Ely
Karl Welzenbach
Linda White

Members Absent:

Joe Benedict (excused)
Doug Daniels (excused)

Charles Lydecker (excused)

Others Present:

Darla Zakaluzny
Derek Catron
Melissa Booker
Tom Donohoe

Glenn Storch
Dave Castagnacci
Carolyn Hyland Ismart
Bob Nix

1. Welcome and Introductions

Chair Maryam Ghyabi called the meeting of the Volusia County Expressway Authority Coalition to order at 10:10 AM. It was determined that a quorum was present.

Chair Ghyabi stated that this should be the last meeting prior to presenting the report to the County Council. She noted that at the last meeting the committee unanimously approved the recommendation to the County Council on creating an expressway authority depending on the report.

Chair Ghyabi stated that Mr. Welzenbach has put together the report. She stated that he had worked very hard to get the information together.

Chair Ghyabi noted that three members of the committee (Mr. Lydecker, Mr. Daniels, and Mr. Benedict) could not be in attendance today and she believes that each of those members submitted comments to Mr. Welzenbach. She noted that comments by Mr. Daniels had been transmitted to the members of the committee via fax and they along with the comments by the other members of the committee are a part of the record.

Chair Ghyabi recommended that the report be reviewed page by page to see if there are any comments. Mr. Welzenbach apologized to the members as some of the graphics did not print correctly when the document was downloaded from the web site or via email. This problem will be corrected.

2. Approval of November 29, 2000 Meeting Minutes

Mr. Cheney moved to approve the November 29, 2000 meeting minutes. Mr. Ely seconded the motion and it carried unanimously.

3. Discussion of Draft Report: Finalizing Report to Volusia County Council

Comments by the members were provided during the course of the meeting. [Mr. Welzenbach made note of the changes recommended and agreed upon by the committee.]

Mr. Blais noted that his comments were sent via email to Mr. Welzenbach. Chair Ghyabi asked that copies of Mr. Blais' comments be forwarded to the members of the committee. Mr. Welzenbach stated that he would make copies of the comments, but the comments would be kept by the members at this time and noted in the meeting as the document is being reviewed.

Chair Ghyabi stated that comments had been forwarded to all members of the committee; therefore all other comments received should be sent out as well. Ms. Campbell Baker noted that she would provide Mr. Welzenbach with the comments noted on her copy of the report.

Mr. Welzenbach noted that the informational handouts received during the various meetings of the Coalition will be included as part of the appendices and noted in the Table of Contents. He noted that there will be two different documents provided. The first is the report that is being discussed and the second would be the appendices which includes the supporting documentation (minutes, presentation material, etc).

Mr. Ely stated that he had looked at an earlier draft of the report and his comments were submitted to Mr. Welzenbach. He noted that his comments have been incorporated into the report. Chair Ghyabi stated that the comments need to be on the record and the members need to receive a copy of the comments. Mr. Welzenbach replied that this was a phone conversation that took place in order to clear up facts as he had misnamed some of the expressway/turnpike sections.

Ms. Campbell Baker referenced the opening paragraph of Section V, Alternative Strategies. She stated that she does not want to suggest having an expressway authority as an alternative strategy to the formation. Mr. Welzenbach stated that at the November meeting he had argued that an expressway authority be formed with the principal idea of being able to obtain funding. He stated that Mr. Ely had noted at that meeting that he was not sure if that was necessary and believed that cities and counties could tap into the

Toll Facility Revolving Trust Fund. Mr. Welzenbach pointed out that this was the case as noted in the report.

Mr. Welzenbach noted that the County could tap into this trust fund and if formed, the expressway authority would proceed with research to identify need, feasibility, and viability of a facility. He stated that the County would borrow the money from the Toll Revolving Trust Fund to do so and if at the end they determine that it is not feasible or viable, then the question would be who would pay the money back. Mr. Welzenbach stated that it would be up to the County as the expressway authority would not have any money.

Mr. Welzenbach stated that if that were the case, then why should an expressway authority be formed. He went on to say that the County could access the funds, hire consultants, and do the research and once the research had been completed, an expressway authority could be created. Mr. Welzenbach stated that that is the reason he included the research and decide section in the report. He noted that this is a viable alternative that the County should be aware of.

Ms. Campbell Baker replied that a different slant is thrown on the issue. Mr. Welzenbach replied yes, but in writing the report and learning more about this, this became apparent to him. Ms. Campbell Baker clarified that the County could access the funds for feasibility and environmental studies. Mr. Welzenbach replied yes.

Chair Ghyabi stated that that is why the group recommended creating the authority for 2-3 years. It would provide a focus group that would go through the **word unclear** model studies and that is why we said let's create this group that would really focus on this and we would work with the special group. Chair Ghyabi stated that she knows that the County could get the money to do it.

Ms. Campbell Baker stated that there should be a statement in the report that says while the County has access to the funds, we feel that an authority should be formed because Mr. Welzenbach asked what the "because" would be?

Chair Ghyabi replied that it is the focus group that would work on this because the County has done their study, the County has a comprehensive plan and you will see all of the roads that are deficient so this is our **words unclear**. Chair Ghyabi stated that there would be a group that would be responsible for these studies and would be focusing on creating an expressway authority and they would work hard with the special interests and we would have a voice for this.

Ms. Campbell Baker added that it would be taking a proactive stance. Mr. Welzenbach replied that he wanted everyone here to be comfortable knowing that you do not need to form an expressway authority in order for the County to find out that they need to build an expressway.

Mr. Ely stated that he had spoken to Mr. Lowell Clary, FDOT's Chief Financial Planner, yesterday about this same question. Mr. Clary responded that there are two examples of counties going forward with a toll road or bridge. The two counties are Osceola County (Osceola Expressway) and Lee County which built bridges but did not form an expressway authority.

Mr. Ely noted that Mr. Clary had suggested (from his standpoint with FDOT) that by forming an expressway authority, focusing on the issue of transportation, working with the Department of Transportation and others that that was a better model to go forward with and use the Toll Revolving Trust Fund dollars on an exploratory nature versus going the County route and then later considering whether or not an expressway authority was needed. Mr. Ely stated that you could always suspend the expressway authority in 2-3 years but you have a group of people focused and accountable for that exploration versus just assigning it to available County staff.

Mr. Ely made mention of the Seminole County Expressway Authority. He stated that you are not forming a large organization, you are using existing staff and working with county people and others. Mr. Ely went to say that yes, you could go a route that says you do not want to form an expressway authority and just use the county, but he does not think that that is the better model. Mr. Welzenbach replied that that is not what he was recommending. He stated that he was recommending a hybrid which is that the County would borrow the money, they would hire a consultant, and through the consultant they would do the research. Mr. Welzenbach stated that the County could form an expressway authority after the traffic and revenues and economic development projections come in and say that there is a viable alternative and/or a toll or user finance facility would perhaps work.

Mr. Welzenbach stated that in every presentation that was given it was stated that the authorities were formed in order to build something. He stated that this is not being formed to build anything. Chair Ghyabi replied that is why we are saying that we are creating something.

Mr. Welzenbach stated that the group was asked whether or not it was needed. Chair Ghyabi replied no, but we are creating something for 2 years to look into it. She went on to say that we are doing it different and we are saying to create something that would be accountable to the public to look at the transportation, economic development, and the environment. Mr. Welzenbach agreed, but stated that you do not need to form an expressway authority to do that.

Mr. Welzenbach noted that the County is responsible and they are an elected group and they must answer to their constituents. Chair Ghyabi replied that she understands. Mr. Welzenbach stated that he does not see the benefit of forming an expressway authority without having identified a viable product.

Ms. Campbell Baker replied that that was not what we were **words unclear**. Chair Ghyabi stated that we did not have to go through this whole process and she knew that way before this group was started. Mr. Welzenbach noted that the question posed to us is an expressway authority needed. Ms. Campbell Baker stated that the question is would you recommend, with all the research, the formation of an authority and why. She asked Mr. Welzenbach how he had voted [at the last meeting]? Mr. Welzenbach replied that he had voted for it, with caution, but that he can not now answer why. He asked what the benefit of an expressway authority is right now?

Chair Ghyabi replied it is a focus group and accountability. She emphasized the word focus - we are going to focus on transportation issues around I-4. Chair Ghyabi stated that no money is needed to prove that we do need something. Mr. Welzenbach replied you need money to prove that it will pay for itself. Chair Ghyabi replied that you need to have a group that would look into this in detail and that is why we said to create an expressway. She asked why not create an expressway? Mr. Welzenbach replied the county could do whatever they need to do without it.

Chair Ghyabi stated that it would be a focus group that could be made accountable. Mr. Welzenbach replied that with his experience from the Illinois Toll Authority and meeting with Team Florida, most of the people on boards of the expressway authorities are not highway engineers or traffic engineers; therefore they would be going on the recommendation of the study. He went on to say that the County board could do that.

Mr. Ely stated that the executive director of an expressway authority is knowledgeable about toll roads, highways, feasibility studies, and county staff may not be that familiar with **words unclear due to background noise**. Mr. Ely noted that the individual would manage the study and would work with the bond rating agencies, traffic and revenues studies and with that experience and background on effort versus saying the county is responsible for this - he stated that is the focus of management **word unclear**.

Mr. Welzenbach stated that the idea raised here was that an expressway authority would be a focus group, and he does not understand how they would be more focused than the County Council would be when this issue is brought to them.

Ms. White stated that the authority could provide more focused community participation than just having county staff. Mr. Welzenbach stated that he does not disagree, but the stage you are talking about is when you have made a decision to proceed. Ms. White voiced her disagreement with that statement. She stated that community participation is necessary from day one. Mr. Ely added that we are talking about the environmental advisory group working at the very start. Mr. Welzenbach questioned what they would be working on when they **word unclear**, they work on a proposed project.

Chair Ghyabi stated that they work on the study and would discuss traffic, environment, and traffic and revenue. They would be involved from day one of the study.

Mr. McMahan stated that the County Council members have a million things to do and everything they do is spread out in political implications and all of the other implications that go with it. They have to satisfy the constituents. Mr. McMahan went on to say that he does not believe any of the County Council members would have time to focus on any one issue very stringently. He stated that Mr. Welzenbach is saying that the County should count on the staff to make all the decisions on spending the money rather than a civilian group. Mr. Welzenbach disagreed. Mr. McMahan stated that the County Council would not do anything other than respond to the staff. They would not have the time to go out and meet with everyone.

Chair Ghyabi stated that an executive director for the expressway would know and would be aware of how to go through the studies and how to run the expressway. She stated that it is not an easy task to go through the traffic and revenue studies.

Mr. Blais stated that the recommendations presented at the end of the report and in the executive summary are in keeping with what is discussed here. He stated that the paragraph being described is an assessment of the alternatives. Mr. Blais stated that this is a good section and it is valuable to have a section in the report that says this is what was evaluated and here are the pros and cons.

Mr. Blais noted that by including this section in the report, it gives the County Council the alternatives. He went on to say that the conclusions and recommendations are varied and firmly grounded. Ms. Campbell Baker stated that the feel of the report changed at this point (the direction that is being recommended seems to be that you do not need this expressway authority).

Mr. McMahan suggested listing the alternatives as A, B, or C. Chair Ghyabi stated that they know that they do not have to create this [authority]. Mr. Welzenbach noted that that was not in the report so he does not know how they would know that.

Discussion continued.

Mr. Ely stated that the chapter that says recommendations could say that there are several paths that could be taken, but the Coalition recommends forming an expressway for these reasons. He stated that that the rationale is not clearly expressed in the last chapter.

Mr. Cheney suggested going to the alternative strategies and work through that to the recommendations. Mr. Blais stated that it is a good section and it needs to be included, but structuring **statement not completed**.

Mr. Cheney recommended rewriting the first intro. Ms. Campbell Baker stated that we need to stick with the original premise of the report, which is that we believe that this is a good idea.

Chair Ghyabi noted that February 22nd was the date chosen to present the report to the County Council. She asked if the report could be completed in time? Mr. Welzenbach replied yes. Chair Ghyabi asked that it be placed on the agenda. Mr. Cheney noted that the committee wanted to have a time certain for the morning. He noted that he would recommend that the Chair give the report to the County Council.

Chair Ghyabi asked those members appointed by the County Council to get with their representatives and go through the report and the recommendations. She stated that this would help rather than just throwing the report at them to study.

Mr. McMahan asked if the authority was formed, would this group be considered to be the authority? Chair Ghyabi replied no, it is usually the County Council members that serve on it.

Mr. Welzenbach reported that if it is formed under the Expressway Authority Act, it has to have a minimum of five, but no more than nine members. Two of those members would be appointed by the Governor for four year terms.

Chair Ghyabi asked that she be notified of when the members plan to meet with their respective County Council members. She stated that she would be meeting with Senator Burt as she was appointed by the Legislative Delegation.

Ms. Campbell Baker asked when the group would be able to see a finalized copy of the report? Mr. Welzenbach replied that he would try to have the report out by next Friday.

Mr. Cheney stated that he would need the final report by February 12 so that it could be placed on the February 22 County Council agenda.

Mr. Ely stated that he would like to provide assistance to Mr. Welzenbach on completing the last section. Mr. Welzenbach replied that there needs to be some discussion on that today.

Chair Ghyabi asked everyone to mark the February 22 County Council meeting date on their calendars. She stated that Mr. Cheney would contact everyone with the time that the report will be on the County Council agenda.

Mr. Welzenbach asked if Ms. Campbell Baker had new wording for the first paragraph? Ms. Campbell Baker replied that her suggestion was that although the County Council could tap into these funds on their own, we recommend forming an authority which is and then go into the authority would be focused, unique based, accountable in all of those **words unclear.**

Mr. Ely asked which section that would be included in? Ms. Campbell Baker replied that she would include it after alternative strategies.

Mr. Cheney provided his additional changes to the report and noted that he would provide his comments to Mr. Welzenbach. He expressed his thanks to the members at this time. Chair Ghyabi thanked Mr. Cheney for his time and effort on serving this committee.

Mr. Cheney stated that he would forward a copy of the agenda item to everyone or through someone who could transmit it to the members. Chair Ghyabi asked that she be sent a copy.

The members provided additional changes to the report.

Discussion took place about including an expected cost in the report. It was suggested that a model of the Seminole County Expressway be included along with its cost. Mr. Blais also suggested including a statement that the composition of the authority would be determined by the County Council.

Chair Ghyabi stated that if the County Council decides to move forward, they will want to find out the costs, etc. but noted that they should not be included in the report. Mr. Ely noted that there would be administrative costs. Chair Ghyabi stated that she would be uncomfortable including costs in the report.

The members were asked to provide their written comments to Mr. Welzenbach so that they could be forwarded to the members of the Coalition.

Chair Ghyabi expressed thanks to Mr. Welzenbach for his hard work on putting the report together.

Mr. Ely expressed his pleasure on having worked with the members of the Coalition. He gave a brief history of Team Florida which is an association of all of the authorities in Florida. Mr. Ely stated that Mr. Welzenbach had attended the last meeting of Team Florida and recommended that if an expressway is formed, they join Team Florida as well.

4. Discussion

5. Public Comments

No comments were noted.

6. Other Business

7. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 11:40 AM.