



PRFSC April 10,2018 Meeting Minutes

Twenty Years ago, when a property was purchased in Poinciana, the purchaser was told that soon there would be a Southport Connector road connecting Poinciana to the Florida Turnpike. The Osceola Expressway Authority is the government entity who built the Poinciana Parkway, now they are stepping up to build the Southport Connector. Atlee Mercer is the Chairman of the Osceola Expressway authority who was our April 10, 2018 guest speaker.

Atlee opened his presentation by describing in building the Poinciana Parkway they wanted to start construction across the Reedy Creek Swamp in the winter time when the swamp was relatively dry as opposed to waiting to start until the Florida Wet Season. Because they were not able to go to Wall Street to sell the bonds required to finance the project until March, just before the start of the wet season, he actually had to go to Osceola County to borrow \$15M to allow them to start construction in the winter dry season. The reason for telling the story is to show how committed both he and the Osceola Expressway Authority is to building the additional toll roads including the Southport Connector that Poinciana so desperately needs.

He opened his presentation by describing the mission of the Osceola Expressway Authority to build a beltway around the southern part of Orlando in Osceola County. He showed on the map how Poinciana resides in such a key location for those projects. He described how Poinciana Parkway was the first successful leg of that project and how the next phases of the project would include the I4 Connector to connect the north end of Poinciana Parkway to I4 and the Southport Connector to connect the south end of Poinciana Parkway to the Florida Turnpike. He stated that the Poinciana Parkway was exceeding the traffic and revenue estimates by 40% which put Poinciana in good position to seek financing for the next two phases. His talk focused on the much needed Southport Connector

project. He then described the objective of the project basically to allow the people living in the Poinciana area to have access to and from the south and east via the Florida turnpike.

He spent quite a bit of time explaining the time consuming and costly work that must go into the planning for these projects. He explained why the final route alternatives that were selected.

Why not build a bridge across Lake Toho?

Questions were asked about why a route going directly across Lake ToHo was rejected and also why it was not possible to build a bridge over Reedy Creek to connect Reeves Road to KOA? In response to the bridge over Lake ToHo question he stated that the answer was money. He described the extensive costs for driving pylons deep into the ground under water to support a bridge. He stated that in the case of the Poinciana Parkway some of the pylons had to be sunk 150 feet below ground level. To do that across the length of Lake Toho that would add millions of dollars in costs over the other alternatives.

How about a bridge connecting Reeves Road to KOA?

As to building a bridge across Reedy Creek connecting Reeves Road to Koa it was explained that the Environmental Protection Agency would not allow it. Atlee explained that there already exists a bridge crossing Reedy Creek connecting Cypress Parkway to Pleasant Hill and that the proposal would simply be an enhancement to the existing bridge at the narrowest point of environmentally preserved Reedy Creek. Construction of a new bridges either to the north at Reeves/Koa or farther south would not be approved by the EPA. Thus the only alternative to crossing Reedy Creek between center Poinciana and the Turnpike would be crossing Reedy Creek where the existing bridge exists.

New Cypress Parkway, Noise abatement and Access?

Atlee described the proposed plan for expansion of Cypress Parkway between the southern end of Poinciana Parkway to the Reedy Creek Bridge. The challenge is to enhance the existing 4 or two lanes of Cypress Parkway to provide 4 lanes of 70

MPH toll road plus an upgraded 4 lanes of local traffic. The proposed solution is to provide 4 elevated toll lanes down the center with two ground level lanes. The two ground level local lanes to the north will run westward while the two lanes on the south would run eastbound. Each existing Cypress Parkway intersection would be preserved with a bridge under the toll lanes thus allowing local traffic to flow east or west having access to get on or off the toll road at multiple on/off ramps. He explained that noise tends to be heard up or sideways along traffic so by elevating the toll lanes along the Cypress Parkway segment it would abate the impact of additional traffic noise on the businesses and houses along the side of Cypress Parkway. Between Reedy Creek Bridge and Florida's Turnpike the proposed toll road would be initially 2 lanes at ground level with future expansion to 6.

What about crazy drivers crossing double solid lines?

Concern was expressed about the situation on the existing Poinciana Parkway where accidents are caused by traffic trying to pass on the double solid lines. Similar concerns were expressed about people trying to avoid tolls by going through toll gantries in the wrong lanes. Atlee described how the existing Parkway would soon be enhanced to provide camera coverage the full length of the parkway so that law enforcement could be provided with pictures of lane violations so that problems could be addressed.

Challenges

After describing what the road would look like he then discussed some of the challenges faced and overcome in selecting the location where the road would be placed. After much consideration for wetlands, preservation areas and future building plans a final route to provide the full connection between the south end of Poinciana Parkway and Florida Turnpike was selected. Once the route was selected and reviewed by the public the engineers began the task of coming up with the cost estimates for the project. The cost estimate projections are shown on the charts for the entire length of the road between Poinciana Parkway and the Turnpike and also for just the segment between Pleasant Hill Road and the Turnpike. These costs along with the projected toll revenues over a 30 year period

were presented to the Central Florida Expressway Board at a meeting March 8, 2018. The reason why they had to be approved by the CFX board is that the Central Florida Expressway system under Florida law will be absorbing the projects from the Osceola Expressway authority after this year.

The problem in the eyes of the Central Florida Expressway Board was that there was not enough projected toll revenues from the project to pay for the costs. Even though the Poinciana Parkway is currently returning 40% more toll revenue than what was originally projected the CFX board would not sign off on the revenue vs expense projections. So what could be done? That ended the formal slide part of the presentation.

Plan to solve the problem?

So how to come up with a plan to solve the revenue vs expense problem so that the road can be built in our lifetime? Based on experience it would be difficult to successfully challenge the projected revenue estimates. So a better plan would be to figure out ways to cut the costs to the Central Florida Expressway Authority to build the road. A number of options are being considered? One option suggested was to see if the Florida Turnpike Authority could be convinced to kick in some additional money since the turnpike would benefit from the additional tolls paid by the Southport Connector traffic being sent onto the Florida Turnpike? Another option might be to convince some of the developers and land owners to pony up some funding to allow them to benefit from having the road built sooner as opposed to later? That possibility is being explored. Another solution might be to enlist Osceola County to contribute more towards the cost of improving Cypress Parkway? Any or all of these options might be possible? Nothing is settled. All are being worked on. In the meantime the best that the residents of Poinciana can do is to keep those cards, letters, emails, tweets and whatever flowing towards our elected government leaders telling them that Poinciana has a traffic problem and the only reason why we elect these people is to solve our problems.

PRFSC wants to thank Chairman Mercer for his excellent presentation and the work he is doing for Poinciana.