



Southport Connector Q&A

On June 16, 2021 PRISC hosted a Zoom Meeting with Central Florida Expressway Authority presenting the status of their major construction projects in the Poinciana area. The meeting consisted of presentation made by CFX followed by a separate question and answer session. Both the presentation portion of the meeting and the Q&A portion have been stored on YouTube. The URL for the presentation portion may be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gziveLJYRqU> . The full Q&A session may be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yKhdwkW5z0> .

The purpose of this document is to provide a text summary of the questions that were asked and the answers that were provided. For each question the URL for the YouTube section of the Q&A session answering that question is provided.

Why must Southport Connector be a toll road?

The State of Florida is famous for being a low tax state. When it comes to roads, the public roads that do not charge tolls are provided by the State, Counties and in some places Cities using tax dollars paid by all taxpayers. The State philosophy is that expressway roads should be paid for by the people who use the roads, not by the general taxpayers. Because of this most new expressway roads built in the State of Florida these days must be built as toll roads.

That is especially true in Poinciana. Poinciana is split between both Polk and Osceola Counties. Poinciana is not a city so for public roads Poinciana must depend on state and county road construction dollars. As Poinciana has grown the state and county road construction dollars were not enough to build the roads that Poinciana needed. So Poinciana had to turn to toll roads as the only way to get the new roads desperately needed. First the State and Counties formed the Osceola Expressway Authority to build the roads Poinciana needed. The first of their road projects was the Poinciana Parkway. Then the State decided to combine the Osceola Expressway Authority into the Central Florida Expressway Authority serving the entire Orlando area so it is now the Central Florida Expressway Authority that has the ability to build the roads Poinciana desperately needs.

https://youtu.be/EXW_fBvc5Do

What about Impact fees?

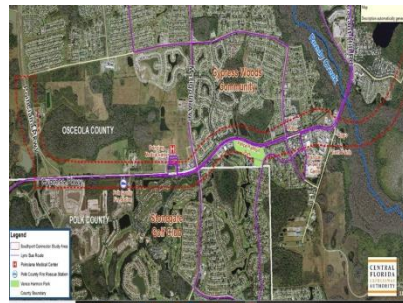
A follow up question was asked about why impact fees charged to the developers building all the new houses in the Poinciana area could not be used to build the new Poinciana roads needed to handle all the additional traffic added by the new construction? The simple answer is that the amount of tax

revenue brought into the two county budgets simply is not enough to cover the costs of the new road construction that is needed.

After the economic downturn in 2008 both Polk and Osceola Counties eliminated all impact fees on new construction in order to stimulate the economy and add new jobs. Only during the past few years have the counties put the impact fees back into place. In fact as of now Osceola County levies some of the highest new construction impact fees in the State of Florida. Unfortunately with all the other needed road projects in both counties the current impact fees still do not provide enough revenue to meet the needs of Poinciana. To make matters worse the State of Florida this year placed a cap on the amount of new revenue that counties can raise by adding new impact fees. So for the foreseeable future the only way to build the roads desperately needed by Poinciana is to add new toll roads.

<https://youtu.be/zrgYAp4rlpM>

Why does this road have to go down the middle of Cypress Parkway?



When looking at the options for building a toll road to connect from the Florida Turnpike to I4 running south of Orlando first the counties, then the Osceola Expressway Authority and now the Central Florida Expressway Authority were challenged by both Lake ToHo and the Reedy Creek Swamp as natural barriers that prohibited construction of such a road. The only solution was to build a bridge across the Reedy Creek Swamp which became the Poinciana Parkway and to construct a road either over or south of Lake ToHo. Either solution required building an expressway toll road through Poinciana. The map above shows what Poinciana looks like today.

Because Cypress Parkway is a heavily traveled road running through the center of Poinciana the first options looked at were to build a new expressway either to the north or south of Cypress Parkway. To the north the alternative would be to build the toll road along the right of way where KOA exits today. Several problems were identified with that option. A major problem is that the right of way along KOA is only 150 ft wide. That would not be wide enough to accommodate the new toll road lanes and the existing lanes needed for local KOA traffic. To build the toll road using the KOA road would require the expressway authority to invoke laws to condemn and buy private property along the sides of the existing KOA right of way. This is something the expressway authority did not want to do and something legally very difficult to do in the State of Florida. The second problem with selecting the KOA right of way for the toll road is that today KOA does not extend eastward crossing the Reedy Creek. Right of way would have to be acquired and a bridge would have to be built crossing not only Reedy Creek but the

environmentally protected wetlands on both side of Reedy Creek as are shown on the maps above. It became questionable whether or not a permit could be obtained to acquire the right of way and to build such a bridge. Even if it could be done the costs to do so would be very expensive.

To the south of Cypress Parkway it would require the toll road to be built crossing the Disney Wilderness Preserve. In order to do that the state would have to seize private property owned by the Nature Conservatory that is environmentally protected. Like with the KOA route, there would be many problems obtaining the required permits and right of way in addition to the expense required to obtain the right of way.

So that left as the only alternative to build the toll road using the existing 300 foot right of way along Cypress Parkway to connect between the Lake Toho segment and the existing Poinciana Parkway.

<https://youtu.be/-QWmOzaIvoc>

What is the primary goal of the project?

The primary mission of the Central Florida Expressway Authority is to build toll roads to improve the traffic flow in Central Florida. The primary goal of the Poinciana Parkway Expansion, the Poinciana Parkway Extension and the Southport Connector projects is to provide a toll road link connecting Florida Turnpike South of Orlando with I4 west of Orlando. These projects are being built in cooperation with both Polk and Osceola Counties as well as the Florida Turnpike Authority. Their contributions consist of both building of complementary roads and providing of right of way land. In the case of the Poinciana Parkway Extension Osceola County is building enhancements to both CR532 and the I4 intersection at Champions Gate. Florida Turnpike is providing a study to link the Poinciana Parkway Extension to I4 at the 429 interchange. For the Southport Connector project Polk County is building the local lanes between the Marigold Avenue Intersection and the Poinciana Parkway. On the Osceola side CFX will be building not just the toll lanes but the new local lanes and intersections so the Osceola taxpayers will not have to foot the bill. Both Counties are providing right of way land to build the toll road along Cypress Parkway.

In return for their partnership the Central Florida Expressway Authority is doing everything possible to relieve the traffic congestion in Poinciana.

<https://youtu.be/clkGg02-bKU>

What will be the impact on local traffic?

The intent by adding the 6 additional toll lanes through the center of Poinciana on Cypress Parkway will be to both allow traffic on the toll road to pass through Poinciana and also to relieve as much traffic as possible from the local traffic lanes and intersections passing through the center of Poinciana. In order to do this CFX will need to make it as easy as possible for traffic flowing through the center of Poinciana to get onto and off from the toll lanes freeing up traffic capacity on the local lanes and intersections.

CFX during their presentation stated that they are hoping to get suggestions from Poinciana drivers who are more familiar with the Poinciana traffic situation than they are as to where the entry and exit ramps between the local traffic lanes and expressway lanes should be located. An additional factor that will determine the amount of traffic that will choose to use the Cypress Parkway toll lanes as opposed to the local lanes will be where the tolls are collected (toll Gantries) and the amount of what those tolls will be. Determining factors that will go into the decisions will need to include vehicle safety, results from traffic studies and financial cost/revenue considerations. These are decisions that CFX will be making over the next several months based on their studies and input from the community.

<https://youtu.be/STKSMG9NYLg>

Can part of this project be made a non-toll road?

A question was asked as to if it would be possible to make the improved Cypress Parkway section of the Southport Connector a non-toll road? An example mentioned was the Osceola Parkway connecting the Florida Turnpike to Disney where the Loop section is a non-toll road.

CFX answered the question by stating that the Osceola Parkway was not constructed as a CFX project but instead as an Osceola County toll road project. Because Osceola County paid for the construction they were able to establish part of the roadway to be non-toll covering the costs with general tax dollars. CFX said that they would not have that option in constructing the Southport Connector.

It was also mentioned that from a traffic flow standpoint this would not be acceptable to traffic paying tolls to ride the Southport Connector Expressway to pay tolls to have to go through and stop at Poinciana local intersections.

<https://youtu.be/HyWRZYOJVgU>

What can be done to protect against noise? Privacy?

The last set of questions in the Q&A section had to do with the impact of the Southport Connector project on the adjoining residential neighborhoods regarding noise and privacy. Homeowners expressed serious concerns about the impact on their neighborhoods of the additional noise caused by the proximity of the new local traffic lanes and the additional traffic flowing on Cypress Parkway caused by the building of the Southport Connector project.

CFX answered the question by stating that for their Southport Connector part of the project they would be most happy to set up a procedure to evaluate the current traffic noise being experienced in the neighborhoods and then based on the traffic study evaluate up front the amount of additional noise expected to be generated by the project. After the project is completed at any time they could then monitor again the existing noise to determine if sound barriers might be needed. The way this could be done would be to have CFX work with the neighborhood HOA to identify the houses most likely to be impacted by the noise and to install noise measuring devices to monitor the existing noise levels at those homes caused by the traffic.

A concern was raised that the additional noise might be generated before the Southport Connector project is constructed by the construction of the new lanes that Polk County will be adding to Cypress Parkway prior to the construction of the Southport Connector. CFX stated that would need to be an issue discussed with Polk County. Polk County answered the noise question by stating that because Poinciana is classified as a rural unincorporated section of Polk County the county would not be constructing a noise barrier. Should the homeowners become concerned about the noise volume generated prior to construction of the Southport Connector then the homeowners would always be free to work with their HOA to construct noise barriers on their own community property.

An additional concern was raised about the sightlines impact on neighborhoods adjacent to the Cypress Parkway Southport Connector segment because the existing trees might be replaced and the houses would be backing up to an expressway with 30 foot overpasses. The answer provided was that if the existing trees were on the adjoining property they would not need to be replaced. If the trees were on the right of way portion where the new roads needed to be constructed then they would have to be removed. If the removal of the trees caused a concern among the neighboring property owners then it would be an option for the property owners or their HOA to add any additional visual enhancements they so desired.

<https://youtu.be/d87bqah3TT8>

<https://youtu.be/QAuHXm4kqow>

In summary CFX admitted that there were concerns regarding traffic volumes and toll cost for the Cypress Parkway segment of the Southport Connector project that needed to be addressed. They stated that the study was a work in progress and the they welcomed input and suggestions from the Poinciana community.

Input to CFX regarding the Southport Connector Project may be addressed to Kathy Putnam at the email address [Project Studies \(ProjectStudies@CFXway.com\)](mailto:ProjectStudies@CFXway.com).