



WELCOME TO SR 87 Connector PD&E Study INCORPORATED 1844

SPECIAL POINTS OF IN- TEREST:

NEWSLETTER 3

FEBRUARY 2014

State Road 87 Connector—What's Been Going On?

While you haven't heard much from us lately, we've been keeping quite busy with Federal Highway Administration reviews and site visits; preparing multiple documents including the Biological Assessment and the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS); and getting ready for an upcoming Public Hearing.

What is a Public Hearing?

So far, the public has been invited to a Kick-off Meeting and an Alternatives Public Workshop concerning the S.R. 87 Connector PD&E (Project Development and Environment) Study. The third and final meeting will be a Public Hearing. Public Hearings are required on all federal and state funded major transportation improvement projects. Much like federal projects, in Florida, public hearings are required for projects that are considered to be major transportation improvement projects. In accordance with Chapter 339.155, F.S., one or more public hearings must be held during the development of major transportation improvements. Major transportation improvements are capacity increases, construction of new facilities, or new access to limited access facilities. The primary differences between a public hearing and a public meeting are that a hearing requires:

- Specific timelines for meeting notices and comments;
- An official hearing officer and transcription of comments; and
- Comments are a formal part of the public record.

Public meetings are often scheduled at intervals throughout the decision making process of a PD&E Study, allowing early input. Public hearings are often at the end of the process. In short, the objective of a public hearing is to involve the public and gather official input!

Bicycle/Pedestrian Update

Since our last newsletter, it has been determined that due to budgetary constraints and the rural nature of portions of the proposed corridor, the multi-use trail and sidewalks will not be provided for the entire project length. The new trail and sidewalks will be included from the intersection with U.S. 90, north to the Blackwater Heritage State Trail (BHST). This will connect the Old S.R. 1 brick path with the BHST.

Website available at
www.sr87connector.com

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

What is a Public
Hearing?

What is a
Commitment?

DEIS Update

PD&E Phase 2
Update

What's Next?
Contact Us



Wildlife Coordination Update



As outlined in the previous newsletter, the S.R. 87 Connector Team has been coordinating with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Agency (USF&W), and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to develop environmentally sound design solutions for two Threatened and Endangered (T&E) Species in the study area. The two species are the Reticulated Flatwoods Salamander (RFS) (*Ambystoma bishop*) and the Gulf Sturgeon (*Acipenser oxyrinchus desotoi*). Our Project Team environmentalists prepared a Biological Assessment (BA), which is a report that analyzes the site conditions, habitat, and effects the proposed roadway may have on the T&E species. The report also formulates potential mitigation measures if and where needed.

The status of this coordination is that the BA has been prepared and submitted. USF&W has reviewed the document and has prepared the Biological Opinion (BO) outlining the mitigation measures. The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) has reviewed the information submitted by USF&W, and is in concurrence with their findings. The final BO was submitted in December to FHWA for their review to determine that the proposed action is in compliance with Section 7(c) of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973, as amended. FHWA finished their review and are in concurrence with USF&W findings as well.

Final Environmental Impact Statement

The DEIS report is the primary report for this PD&E Project. It provides a summary of all of the reports and analysis completed throughout the course of this study. The DEIS is in its final stages of completion. It has been submitted to FDOT District 3 for their review and comment. After the District's review, the report was submitted to the FDOT Central Environmental Management Office (CEMO) in Tallahassee. CEMO has finished their review, and the document has been updated based on their comments. In February, the DEIS will be submitted to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) for their review and comment. Lastly, the report incorporates FHWA's comments, and is ready to be presented to the public as part of the public hearing process. Once the public hearing is held, the public comments are incorporated into the document and it becomes a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). The FEIS is then forwarded to FHWA for the project's final approval.



It should be noted that both Alternatives 1 and 2 are still in consideration. Based on the information in the Environmental Impact Statement combined with the public input from the public hearing, and the desires of the local jurisdictions, a determination will be made by FHWA on the preferred alternative.



Pictures provided by:
Metric Engineering,
Inc.

FHWA Stops by for a Visit

On Tuesday, November 19, 2013, Mr. Joseph Sullivan with the Federal Highway Administration, arrived in Milton for a site visit with the Project Engineer. Mr. Sullivan was interested in a proposed pond site location south of Blackwater River. According to U.S. soil survey maps, the area at the proposed pond site has a low water table (greater than six feet below ground) and has fairly well-drained soils. Mr. Sullivan wanted to field verify that this designation is correct. While at the proposed pond site, a hand auger was used to determine the soil type and actual ground water elevation. The soil type was as expected, but the water table was higher than the U.S. soil survey maps, as Mr. Sullivan predicted. While in the field, it was discovered that a portion of the area wetlands had been destroyed due to sediment flowing into the area and submerging the wetland. It was estimated that between three to five feet of sediment had washed into this location.



Due to the proximity of the Blackwater River and wetlands to the proposed pond site, Mr. Sullivan discussed the options for providing secondary treatment. Secondary treatment is used to enhance water quality and provide additional treatment for discharge from a storm water pond. It was determined that the area to the east of the Gulf Power easement may be an area in which secondary treatment could be provided. In a low area surrounding the proposed pond site, a soil type was found that is normally encountered in large floodplain areas, verifying the floodplain maps.

What's Next?

Coming up on our agenda will be the submittal of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement to FHWA and the public hearing to be held in the summer of 2014.

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