



MEMORANDUM

To: Council Members

AGENDA ITEM 14

From: Staff

Date: October 12, 2018 Joint Council Meeting

Subject: U.S. Highway 27 Multi-Modal Corridor Project Update and Resolution of Support – Thomas J. Lanahan, Deputy Executive Director, Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council

Introduction

The purpose of this item is to provide the Councils with: 1) information related to prior planning efforts and current discussions about an alternative freight rail route using the U.S. Highway 27 corridor and beyond to link Miami and Orlando; and 2) an opportunity to execute a joint resolution urging Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) to expedite the process for transforming U.S. Highway 27 into a new multimodal corridor, including a new freight rail line from Miami to Orlando and beyond

Background and Analysis

In 2013, FDOT completed a Planning and Conceptual Engineering (PACE) study regarding utilization of the U.S. Highway 27 corridor between Miami and Lake Okeechobee to accommodate rail in addition to the current roadway. The study identified that a number of factors would drive the need for adding the rail mode:

1. A desire to shift existing freight rail traffic from the east coast to the new corridor
2. Increased intermodal traffic at PortMiami
3. Shifting freight from trucks to rail to improve efficiency, reduce congestion, and achieve environmental benefits
4. The construction of new Intermodal Logistics Center(s) (ILC) near Lake Okeechobee

A number of routes were studied and the most feasible was identified as connecting with the Florida East Coast Railway (FEC) west of Hialeah, running along U.S. Highway 27 to South Bay, and connecting to the existing South Central Florida Express (SCXF) / FEC tracks which run along the south side of the lake. To the west, the SCXF tracks connect to CSX tracks in Sebring, and to the east the tracks connect with the FEC mainline in Ft. Pierce. The study estimated the cost of adding

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Subject to Modifications

railroad tracks to a project to widen the U.S. Highway 27 roadway to be an additional approximately \$490 million and concluded that there are no fatal engineering or environmental flaws in the concept and that it is feasible.

On February 28, 2017, Council staff convened a meeting of representatives of Martin County, the Port of Palm Beach, the Palm Beach Metropolitan Planning Organization, the FEC Railway, and other interested parties to revisit the results of the study and explore the possibilities of running railroad tracks along U.S. Highway 27 between Miami, South Bay, and beyond to Orlando. The group learned that such a route could: 1) serve to relieve congestion at the three ports in southeast Florida (PortMiami, Port Everglades, and Port of Palm Beach – all served by FEC), which may reach a crisis point in 10 years; 2) allow the diversion of up to 80 percent of the freight traffic off of the coastal route of the FEC; and 3) improve the efficiency of freight movements into and out of the entire southeast portion of the state. The group also learned that FEC would be willing to undertake the construction of the line, if funding was provided, and that they would be willing to operate the line. Because of the controlled access nature of rail, it would be able to provide freight transportation without triggering urban sprawl as often happens with roadway expansion. There was a consensus that the idea is worth pursuing and that a stakeholder group should be constituted similar to what FDOT has done with the U.S. Highway 27 corridor north of Lake Okeechobee.

Since then, Council staff have conducted additional stakeholder meetings with similar findings. These included presentations to Council on April 21, 2017 and July 21, 2017; a meeting held at the South Florida Regional Planning Council (SFRPC) offices on June 12, 2017; and presentations to various existing stakeholder groups such as the Treasure Coast Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Committee on July 13, 2017; MPO Advisory Council Freight Committee and Governing Board on July 19, 2017; the Palm Beach County BDB Logistics Task Force on September 6, 2017; the Miami-Dade TPO Freight Technical Advisory Committee on October 11, 2017; joint meeting of the TCRPC and SFRPC on October 20, 2017; Martin County Commission on October 24, 2017; and the Regional Transportation Technical Advisory Committee of the Southeast Florida Transportation Council on December 13, 2017.

Current Overview

Recognizing regional interest in the concept, FDOT's Central Office began an effort in late 2017 to collect all of the U.S. Highway 27 studies done to date; examine relevant Strategic Regional Policy Plans, Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies, and Intermodal Logistics Center studies; and gather existing physical conditions information. A project-specific website has been set up at www.us27florida.com. The collected information will be used to support policy choices in coordination with the affected FDOT Districts (I, IV, V, and VI). Council staff met with FDOT and their consultants in March 2018 to review early data and impress on the study team the importance of looking at transportation challenges in the entire southeastern peninsula of Florida.

As of now, the extensive background and existing conditions study including dedicated aerial mapping is nearly complete. The next step for FDOT's Central Office is to meet with staff of each District to seek input on next steps on if, what, and how to advance a new freight corridor between Miami and Orlando utilizing FDOT's general transportation network evaluation framework of Conservation, Countryside, Centers, and Corridors.

Conclusion

The project would have a positive impact regionally because of these potential benefits:

1. Reducing freight traffic through the population centers of the coast between Ft. Pierce and Miami
2. Freeing up capacity on the FEC for commuter passenger trains
3. Diverting truck traffic from U.S. Highway 27, I-95, and the Turnpike
4. Supporting economic development and job creation for the distressed communities along the south, east, and west sides of Lake Okeechobee
5. Providing transportation without triggering sprawl

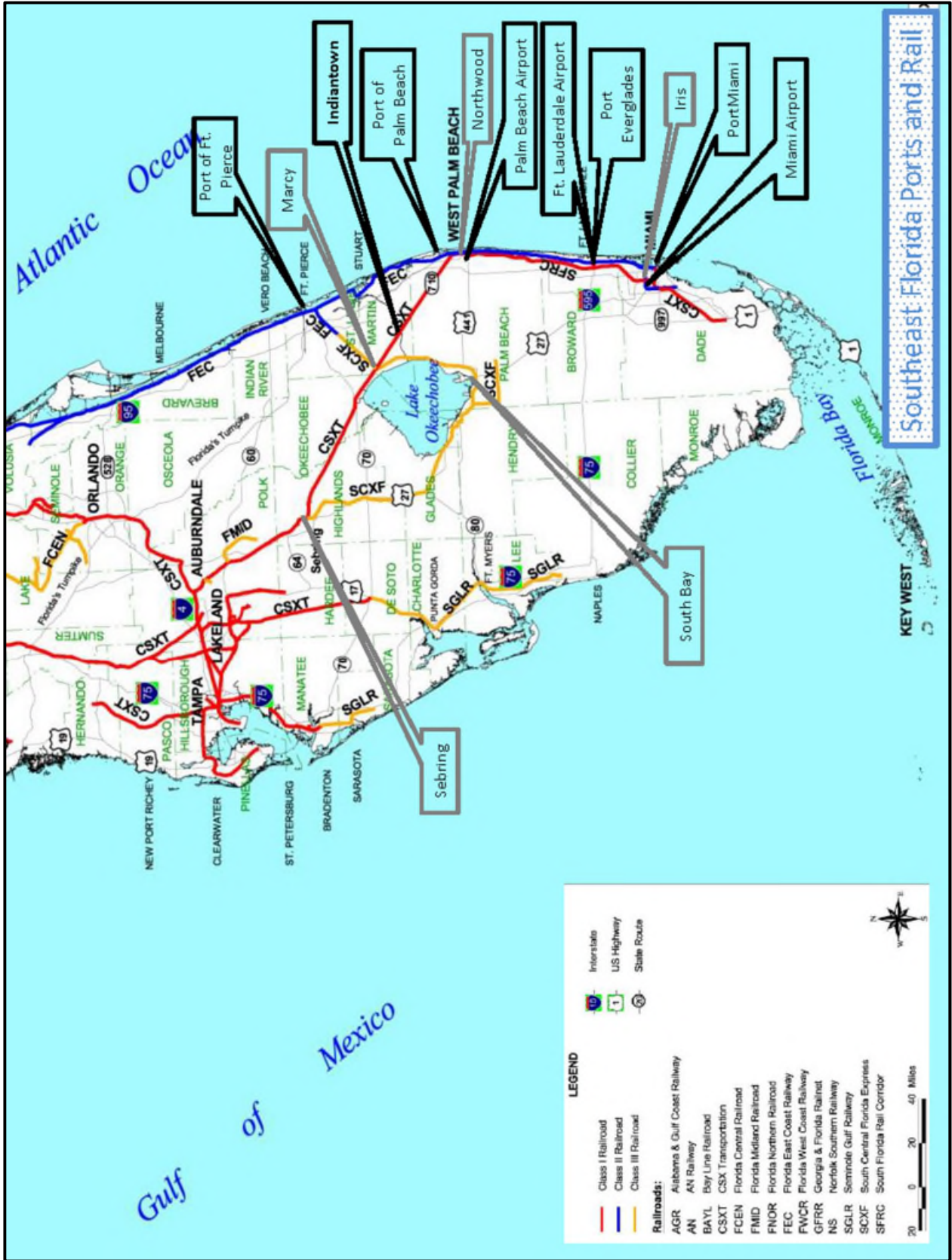
FDOT should, therefore, be encouraged to expedite the process to advance the concept, leading to inclusion of scheduled funding to undertake a Project Development and Environment study and construction for the U.S. Highway 27 Multimodal Corridor. This, at a minimum, should examine an alternate freight rail project between PortMiami and the I-4 Corridor.

Recommendation

Authorize the chairs of the Treasure Coast and South Florida regional planning councils to sign and transmit the attached joint resolution encouraging the Florida Department of Transportation to expedite the process for advancing the concept of a new freight route along U.S. Highway 27, including undertaking a Project Development and Environment study for the U.S. Highway 27 Multimodal Corridor which, at a minimum, examines an alternate freight rail project between PortMiami and the I-4 Corridor.

Attachments

Regional Map





RESOLUTION TCSF #18-05

A JOINT RESOLUTION OF THE SOUTH FLORIDA AND TREASURE COAST REGIONAL PLANNING COUNCILS REPRESENTING THE LOCAL GOVERNMENTS OF MONROE, MIAMI-DADE, BROWARD, PALM BEACH, MARTIN, ST. LUCIE AND INDIAN RIVER COUNTIES, FLORIDA, URGING THE FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION TO EXPEDITE THE PROCESS FOR ADVANCING THE CONCEPT OF A NEW FREIGHT RAIL ROUTE ALONG U.S. HIGHWAY 27 MULTIMODAL CORRIDOR BETWEEN PORTMIAMI AND THE I-4 CORRIDOR

WHEREAS, U.S. Highway 27 has long been identified by the Florida Department of Transportation and several regional transportation planning organizations and providers as an important future corridor between Miami and Orlando critical for improving Florida's global competitiveness, economic development and multimodal mobility opportunities, and safety; and

WHEREAS, advancing the project would provide several important regional benefits, including:

1. Reducing freight traffic through the population centers of the coast between Ft. Pierce and Miami; 2) Freeing up capacity on the FEC for commuter passenger trains; 3) Diverting truck traffic from U.S. Highway 27, I-95, and the Turnpike; 4) Supporting economic development and job creation for the distressed communities along the south, east, and west sides of Lake Okeechobee; and 5) Providing transportation without triggering sprawl.

WHEREAS, the South Florida and Treasure Coast regional planning councils wish to urge the Florida Department of Transportation to expedite the process for transforming U.S. Highway 27 into a new multimodal corridor, including a new freight rail line between PortMiami and the I-4 corridor.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED JOINTLY BY THE SOUTH FLORIDA REGIONAL PLANNING COUNCIL AND THE TREASURE COAST REGIONAL PLANNING COUNCIL THAT:

The Councils request that the Florida Department of Transportation expedite the process to advance the concept, leading to inclusion of scheduled funding to undertake a Project Development and Environment study and construction for the U.S. Highway 27 Multimodal Corridor which, at a minimum, should examine an alternate freight rail project between PortMiami and the I-4 Corridor.

DULY ADOPTED by the South Florida and Treasure Coast Regional Planning Councils this 12th day of October, 2018.

Frank Caplan
Chair, SFRPC

Reece J. Parrish
Chair, TCRPC