

TREASURE COAST REGIONAL PLANNING COUNCIL

MEMORANDUM

To: Council Members

AGENDA ITEM 11

From: Staff

Date: April 21, 2017 Council Meeting

Subject: U.S. Highway 27 Multi-Modal Corridor Project Update

Introduction

The purpose of this item is to provide Council with information related to prior planning efforts and current discussions about an alternative freight rail route using the U.S. 27 corridor.

Background and Analysis

In 2013, the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) completed a Planning and Conceptual Engineering (PACE) study regarding utilization of the U.S. 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. 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 in Sebring and to the east, the tracks connect with the FEC mainline in Ft. Pierce. The study estimated the cost of adding railroad tracks to a project to widen the U.S. 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 reconsider the results of the study and explore the possibilities of running railroad tracks along U.S. 27 and serving an intermodal center in Indiantown. The group learned that such a route and associated ILC could serve to relieve congestion at the 3 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, could allow the diversion of up to 80% of the freight traffic off of the coastal route of the FEC, and would 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 provided that funding was provided and that they would be willing to operate the line. 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. 27 corridor north of Lake Okeechobee.

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. 27 and I-95
4. Supporting economic development and job creation for the distressed communities along the south and east sides of Lake Okeechobee

Recommendation

For information only.

Attachment

US 27 Multi-Modal Corridor Update
Meeting Summary
February 28, 2017

At the request of Martin County Commissioner Ed Fielding, on February 28, 2017, Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council staff convened a meeting between representatives of the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), the Florida East Coast Railway (FEC), the Port of Palm Beach, the Palm Beach Metropolitan Planning Organization, Martin County, and staff of Congressman Brian Mast to discuss prior planning efforts and the future potential of utilizing the US 27 corridor to construct a rail line to move freight out of the congested coastal corridors in Southeast Florida and enhance import and export activity and distribution logistics.

The group learned that an extensive FDOT study found that utilizing the US 27 roadway corridor to also accommodate a rail line is feasible and can be moved forward to further engineering study, design and permitting if desired (and funded).

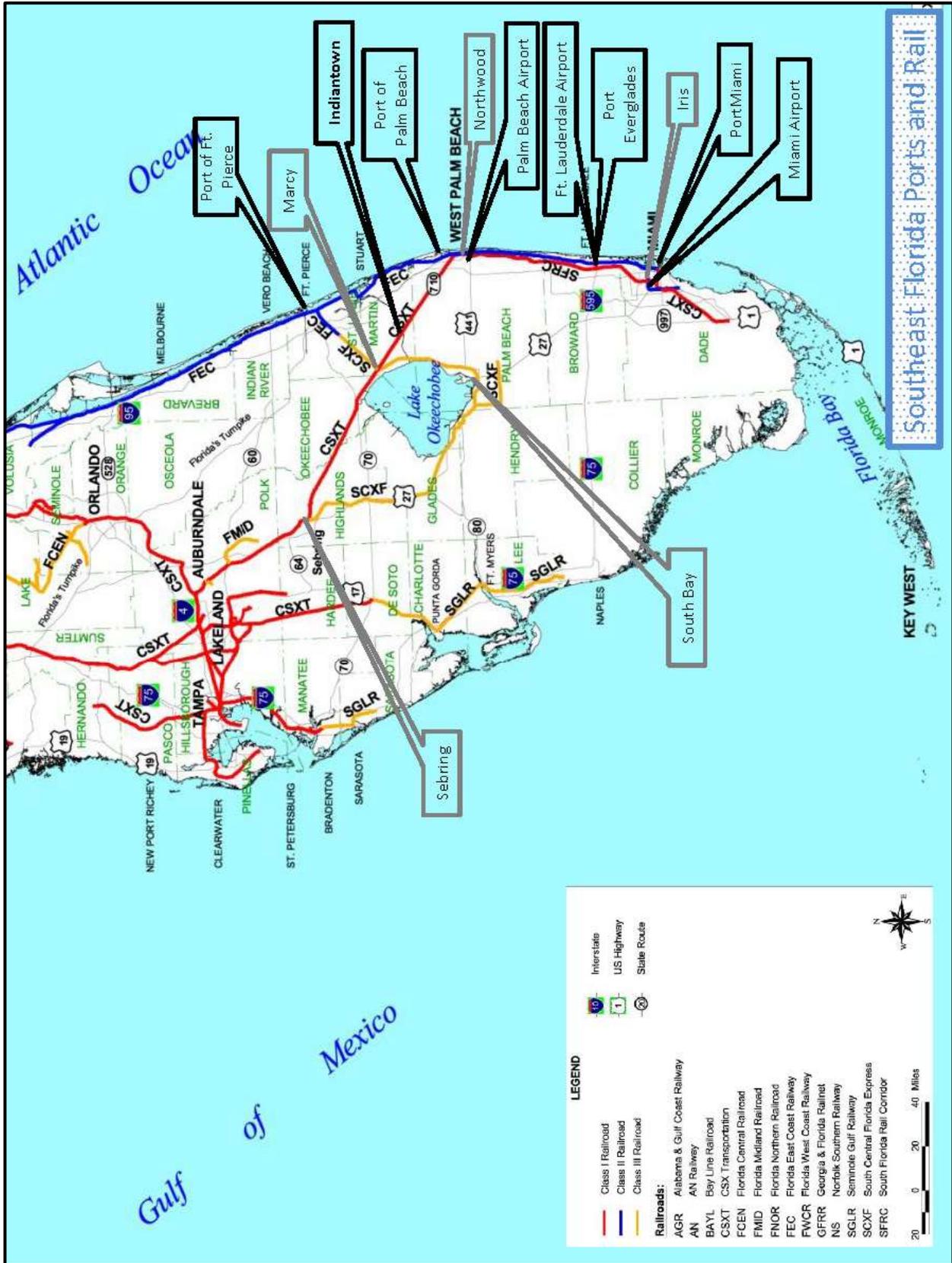
The group also learned that the Florida East Coast Railway recognizes that continued growth in freight traffic and the emergence of long distance, intrastate, and commuter passenger rail travel on their railroad has impacts on the communities it traverses and diversion of much of the freight movements to a new western corridor would address some of these impacts.

Port of Palm Beach staff shared that all 3 of the major ports in Southeast Florida (Port of Palm Beach, Port Everglades, and PortMiami) are running out of space to accommodate future growth efficiently and may be at a crossroads in 10 years. In addition, the freight operations at Miami International Airport are also running out of space. Given the time scale of the necessary projects to address this (new transportation routes, intermodal logistics centers, etc.), work needs to be moving forward now. A copy of Port Director Almira's paper on this topic is attached.

Congressman Mast's staff informed the group of the significant infrastructure spending promised by the President and suggested involvement of Congresswoman Frankel's office in these discussions as well.

A concept of running a rail line from the west side of Miami (near the FEC's Hialeah Yard) along US 27 up to the area along the south side of Lake Okeechobee, then to an Intermodal Logistics Center (and potential airport) in Indiantown, and then on to existing rails to the Orlando-Tampa corridor was discussed. Such an arrangement would accommodate freight traveling into Southeast Florida for distribution and for export as well as freight arriving from the ports for local consumption or national distribution.

The participants agreed that gathering more stakeholders and interested parties together to further explore the possibilities and benefits (local, regional and statewide) of a US 27 rail line, as well as reaching out to economic development staff in the area, would be necessary in order to move the project forward.



Southeast Florida Ports and Rail

- Port of Ft. Pierce
- Indianatown
- Port of Palm Beach
- West Palm Beach
- Northwood
- Palm Beach Airport
- Ft. Lauderdale Airport
- Port Everglades
- Iris
- PortMiami
- Miami Airport

Sebring

South Bay

Atlantic Ocean

Gulf of Mexico

Florida Bay

KEY WEST