

Black Trail - Corridor Planning Study

FPID # 436360-1

PROJECT VISIONING TEAM MEETING



Tuesday, May 22, 2018
2:15 p.m. to 3:45 p.m.



Astor Community Center
24148 Ann Street, Astor, FL 32102

I. Introduction

- Julia Holtzhausen welcomed attendees to the first Project Visioning Team (PVT) meeting for the SR 40 Black Bear Trail Corridor Planning Study.
- Attendees introduced themselves and their organizations to the PVT members.
- The PVT is a working meeting for stakeholders with public observation. Public comments were accepted solely through comment cards. The responsibilities and roles of the PVT were described for the members, including:
 - Attending three PVT meetings (including this meeting) which will be hosted as part of this study, and identify additional stakeholders that may need to be engaged in the study;
 - Provide input on the trail concepts and development;
 - Recommend alternatives to be advanced for further study; and
 - Share local knowledge and history.
- FDOT defines trails as “shared use paths [which] are paved facilities physically separated from motorized vehicular traffic by an open space or barrier, and are either within the highway right of way or an independent right of way. Shared use paths are used by bicyclists, pedestrians, skaters, runners and others” (FDOT Design Manual 2018 – Section 224).
 - Trails are typically 12 feet wide and are usually paved using asphalt.

II. Background/Project Goals

- The SR 40 Black Bear Trail is a large component of the Heart of Florida Loop, identified by the Office of Greenways and Trails. The Black Bear Trail has also been identified by this office as a priority land trail.
 - The Heart of Florida Loop is comprised of 257 miles of paved trails through Lake, Marion, Citrus, Sumter, Orange, Seminole, and Volusia counties. The Heart of Florida Loop also connects to the Coast to Coast Trail and the Florida National Scenic Trail.
 - The Black Bear Trail is currently the largest gap in the trail loop.

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- Other agencies are currently working to program and construct the trails that comprise the other areas of the Heart of Florida Loop.
- The PVT discussed the potential eligibility of the Black Bear Trail for SunTrail funding.
- The Black Bear Trail is planned to span 27 miles from Levy Hammock Road to US 17, generally following SR 40.
- The goals of the project are to:
 - Determine the best method to meet current and future needs of users;
 - Establish a long-term plan to guide corridor evolution; and
 - Balance land use and transportation planning effectively.

III. Project Approach/Schedule

- The study team began collecting data and evaluating existing conditions in January 2018, and has developed an Existing Conditions Technical Memorandum.
- The next steps include:
 - Defining the purpose and need;
 - Alternatives development and preliminary engineering analysis
 - Alternatives analysis and evaluation; and
 - Development of corridor concept plans.
- Two additional PVT meetings and one public workshop will be held as the study progresses.
- The study will be completed in early 2019, and will recommend the next phase of development for the trail; either a Project Development & Environment study (FDOT's NEPA process) or straight to design. The recommendation will be based upon the results of the alternatives analysis.
 - FDOT is a lead agency for NEPA and utilizes Project Development & Environment (PD&E) studies to fulfill NEPA requirements. This planning study is meant to guide the trail development to the next appropriate step, which may be a PD&E study or straight to design. However, a NEPA document will be developed in a later phase in order to address agency requirements. The environmental components identified in this planning study will be carried forward to future phases where more detailed survey work will be performed.

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- The study team has not established an alignment for the Black Bear Trail at this time. Constraints due to right of way, National Forest property, State Forest property, among others, are located within the area.

IV. Existing Conditions

- The PVT reviewed the existing conditions of the corridor, noting that right of way varies along SR 40 and that drainage and utilities may present future challenges.
- The PVT discussed the maintenance of the trail.
 - Ocala National Forest is open to discussing a permit for a trail within their jurisdiction, and indicated that the trail design would need to be designed with several items in mind, including:
 - The need to maintain access and management between existing stands for timber trucks, with trucks crossing the trail.
 - Controlled burns within the forest
 - Safety for trail users and the surrounding environment, and the potential increase in dispersed camping
 - Wildlife
 - Historic & archaeological sites are located throughout the area.
 - Wetlands/floodplains/swales/drainage
 - Access points for the trail
 - Lake County is open to discussions to maintain the trail where it is located within unincorporated Lake County. Sections of the trail within City boundaries would be left to the City to maintain.
 - Marion County is open to discussions to maintain a paved trail, likely within the jurisdiction of the office of parks and recreation.
 - Volusia County is open to discussions to maintain the trail within their jurisdiction.
 - Volusia County recently signed a maintenance agreement for a trail along SR 40 east of US 17
- The PVT discussed the procedure for developing the trail alignment and asked about the eminent domain process.
 - Historically, FDOT has not utilized eminent domain to develop stand-alone trails.

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- Volusia County elaborated that, historically, FDOT funds have not been allocated to trail projects where a local public agency utilized eminent domain to acquire property.
- The Black Bear Trail is currently scheduled and funded for a PD&E Study in 2020
- A previous meeting with the St Johns River Utility discussed the potential joint-use of the utility corridor for the trail. After further conversations, also including the St. Johns River Utility Board, the utility corridor will not be considered for future alternatives. The Astor Board is in support of the trail, but would prefer to study other alignments that do not utilize the utility corridor.
- The study team is open to suggestions for alternative alignments.
- The Black Bear Trail would not only connect the Heart of Florida Loop, but would also connect the existing trail network within the area. Cyclists currently use the roadways to travel between destinations.
 - The forest roads within the Lake George State Forest are *not* considered trails. These roads are open to personal vehicles with a permit.
- Existing conditions for traffic, crash densities, future land use, social resources, wildlife and critical habitats, historic & archaeological sites, drainage basins, wetlands, and floodplains were reviewed by the PVT.
- The PVT discussed wildlife crossings within the study area
 - There are no existing wildlife crossings within the study area. The previous SR 40 PD&E identified wildlife crossing locations, but they are only planned where SR 40 will be widened. The Black Bear Trail study area is within the “No Build” recommendation from the PD&E.
 - Different species have different crossing preferences: some prefer open areas while others prefer more cover. E-Sciences was the consultant to perform the wildlife study during the SR 40 PD&E (Tom Roberts, Dan Smith, Heather Chasez).
- The PVT discussed the process to obtain an easement from the Ocala National Forest.
 - Ocala National Forest does not grant permanent easements. FDOT currently has a permit to place asphalt on federal land, and the land is continuously owned by the Forest.
 - Preference was also given towards developing one maintenance agreement per agency for future trail management, especially at times where maintenance needs to be performed.

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This would minimize the time needed to contact the appropriate agency and mobilize maintenance.

V. Project Branding

- Julia debuted several potential logos for the SR 40 Black Bear Trail Corridor Planning Study. The purpose of selecting a study logo is to begin to develop an identity for the project, but the preferred logo at this stage is not permanent and may be changed in the future.
- PVT members voted on the logos and provided their comments for the selection of a final study logo.

VI. Attachments

- Agenda
- Project Visioning Team Presentation
- Study Logo Concept Sheet
- Sign-In Sheet