

TRANSPORTATION ROUNDTABLE SUMMARY

PLANZephyrhills 2035 | City of Zephyrhills | February 15, 2024, 1:30-3:00 PM

Introduction

On February 15, 2024, the City of Zephyrhills convened a Transportation Roundtable, bringing together community stakeholders to discuss the current state and future prospects of the transportation system in southeast Pasco County. This summary encapsulates the insights and perspectives shared during the roundtable discussions. The City will use this input and other information to develop a citywide mobility plan. The GoingPLACES Mobility Plan is scheduled for completion in late spring 2024.

Roundtable Attendance

Per the event sign-in sheet, 18 people with one or more of the following affiliations were in attendance at the roundtable:

- City residents
- Other residents (county commuters)
- Business/employer
- Regional transportation planning
- City elected officials
- City administration and departmental staff

Additionally, the members of the planning team listed below were present to facilitate the discussion and provide critical background information:

Todd VandeBerg, City of Zephyrhills (City project manager)

Rob Cursey, Benesch (Consultant project manager)

Tammy Vrana, Vrana Consulting, Inc. (Consultant)

Roundtable Topics

1. Welcome and Introductions

Todd VandeBerg welcomed everyone and started the roundtable with introductions around the room. He shared a series of events leading up to the roundtable, including the planned update of the City's 2025 Comprehensive Plan, rapid residential growth, exacerbated traffic congestion, and the Planning Technical Assistance Grant award from the Florida Department of Commerce in 2023.

2. Overview

Rob Cursey provided an overview of the mobility planning project, starting with a definition of mobility from the dictionary and identifying the project study area, major tasks, and objectives. Refer to the roundtable presentation available on the project [webpage](#) for more details.

3. Existing and Planned Conditions

Rob Cursey highlighted a series of transportation and land use resource maps showing existing and planned conditions influencing transportation environment in the City and beyond the city boundary in the City-County Joint Planning Area. These maps are available in the presentation on the project [webpage](#).

4. Previous Plans and Studies

Tammy Vrana described a series of plans and studies prepared by the City, including plans developed in collaboration with Pasco County, the Pasco County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), the City of

Dade City, and the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT). Prior planning offers a foundational understanding of community issues, values, and aspirations and the outcomes of public involvement processes. This approach ensures that the mobility plan is informed by and responsive to a continuum of community insights and lessons learned.

5. Next Steps

The final item on the agenda was moved up to allow the remainder of the roundtable time to be devoted to discussion. Rob Cursey identified the remaining project tasks (phases) and additional opportunities for the public to participate in the planning process for the mobility plan. He pointed out the project webpage address and encouraged everyone to visit regularly over the coming months to view draft materials and updates on community engagement events.

6. Roundtable Questions/Discussion

During the discussion segment of the roundtable, Tammy Vrana presented the roundtable participants with a series of thought-provoking prompts, designed to elicit a spectrum of perspectives and insights about the city's transportation landscape today and in the future. This input will help the City identify and prioritize transportation solutions to meet local needs.

Discussion Prompts

- What do you envision as the most pressing transportation need for the next 5-10 years?
- How accessible do you find the city's options for individuals with limited mobility?
- Are there demographics/neighborhoods that you find are underserved?
- Are there areas where you feel the transportation network is lacking (e.g., parking, bike/scooter parking, sidewalks and paths, bike network, etc.)?
- How safe do you feel using different modes of transportation in the city?

Themes emerging from the discussion included:

Key Themes from the Discussion

- Transportation safety, accessibility, and mobility for all users, with attention to people who do not drive or have reliable access to a car (i.e., transportation disadvantaged)
- Impacts of regional growth on ill-equipped transportation infrastructure and services (e.g., roads, bike/pedestrian facilities, and public transit)
- Mobility enhancements under the direct control of the City such as sidewalks, multi-use trails, local street connectivity, and turn lanes
- Intergovernmental coordination to advocate for City projects into the regional transportation planning and funding processes
- Land conservation and its direct influence on growth and indirect influence on transportation demand
- Walk, bike, and transit accessibility and delivery options for daily needs shopping/services to better accommodate transportation disadvantaged populations (e.g., people with disabilities and low-income households) and to reduce reliance on driving
- Safety, including the need for better street lighting and personal safety equipment (e.g., bike lights) for bicyclists
- Strategies for gaining public support for additional funding for transportation improvements (safety projects)

The discussion is summarized in the remainder of this report. Abbreviated responses by the project team are shown in *italics*.

- We need to coordinate the impacts of US 301 S, SR 54, and Morris Bridge Rd with Pasco County or the City will be shoveling against the tide.

The mobility plan is meant to be an action strategy and policy guide for what the City can do and what the City controls. The state highway projects, like US 301, are not the purview of the of the city. Those big dollar projects are meant to respond to forecasted regional growth that are bringing additional trips to Zephyrhills. Those trips will need to be taken into consideration, but the mobility plan will have a focus on alternative modes, including multi-use trails, bike facilities, and sidewalks, more so than dealing with traffic congestion, which is the function of larger MPO planning projects. Turn lanes projects are an example of an action that is within the City's purview. So are incremental improvements that address vehicular hotspots. These types of projects could be identified in the mobility plan to put on the city's radar for annual budgeting. The mobility plan can be a guiding force for those types of projects.

- Part of the job of the County MPO is to take recommended projects coming out of this planning process and to work them into the into the overall funding allocation process, whether through the county or state, to leverage bigger pots of money.
- I am blessed to have health. I can walk and bicycle. Bus service here is lacking. Is part of the plan to get more buses for people that do not have the money for a vehicle or are not blessed with health needed for walking and biking?

For many people who do not have access to a car, either by financial situation or health issues, having alternative modes and alternative transportation options is essential.

- I am a bicyclist. Are there any plans for a trail connecting Zephyrhills to Dade City and the Withlacoochee Trail? How can the city assist in making trail connections outside of the city where Pasco County has recreational trails? Not knowing all that goes into planning and constructing transportation projects, it can be easy to be critical of our transportation system.

Creating a better trail network provides not only recreational opportunities but also transportation opportunities for people who like to bike to work or other destinations.

Connectivity is important to mobility, connecting the sidewalks, connecting the trails, connecting the street network. Todd Vande Berg mentioned expanding the city's historic street grid and having more connectivity for making trips on the other side of town or north and south without having to jump on US 301. Working on connectivity is important to enhancing the transportation network and is something that the city can work on inside its boundary.

- Polk County has a Rural Land Stewardship program to help conserve its natural resources. I came here because I like the beauty of the countryside. Is controlling growth part of the discussion?

The mobility plan recommendations will inform the update of the City's comprehensive plan and potentially influencing land use policy and decisions indirectly. By prioritizing conservation, the City could reduce the demand for transportation infrastructure.

- We would love to see more preservation, but we also need money coming in.
- Polk County has an active program for purchasing development rights from priority agricultural or environmental lands. The taxpayers in Polk felt it was important enough to not have all their

property developed. These programs are typically adopted by at the county level or by larger cities.

- In 1994, the taxpayers voted to raise the tax rate. Since 1995, Polk County has collected \$70 million for purchasing natural resource lands and reducing the impact of growth and housing development.
- We have had a number of fatalities of bicyclists and night. I would like to see the plan incorporate safety features, such as street lighting, depending on where these crashes are happening. We have built trails but without lighting.
- Some people do not have the luxury of riding a bike on a trail. They use our streets to commute to work and back. If they are on SR 54, which is very narrow, or on wider roads, they need street lights, too. Often, there is not adequate right-of-way or paved shoulders for riding outside the travel lanes.
- Dean Dairy is dangerous for bicyclists, too.
- I see a lot of bicyclists without lights. As we get older, our eyesight starts to go.

Free bike lights and helmets are often available through the FDOT Safety Office.

- The apex of US 301 and SR 39 always has cyclists that seem vulnerable in that space.
- We do not have the political wherewithal or the teeth to force those types of improvements. People speak up about how much taxes they are willing to pay and government has to balance that. One of the strategies I would like to see in the plan is ways to approach the public to gain support for additional funding, such as a special assessment or taxing district, for bike/ped improvements. Also, working with the MPO is essential.
- Relative to bicyclists not using bike lights, provide headlights and taillights to police officers to give away during traffic stops, instead of ticketing. This would be a simple, one step thing that helps address a safety issue and provides a community policing atmosphere.

FDOT has been aggressive with their safety campaigns. The Safety Office attends community events to give out and fit free bike helmets. They also hand out reflectors, lights, and safety vests. Getting more of those types of events in your community can help raise awareness about what the users can do to be properly equipped and safer.

- Are you trying to find ways for people to go back and forth to the grocery store or the doctor?
Yes, we are looking at transportation for all of the reasons that people need mobility. It could be for going to work and back or shopping for daily needs. The Zephyrhills sustainability action plan talks about a city of short distances, where homes are located close enough to a grocery store or a park so driving to every destination is not a necessity. This is particularly important for good quality of life for people who do not drive.
- That ability is very limited here. We are seeing changing demographics, but we also have a significant elderly population and pockets of low-income people. GoPasco has two transit routes in Zephyrhills, mainly on the main roads. They do not circle the city. There are areas along the fringes where if we had a few extra bus stops it might be one way of approaching that. In terms of limited mobility, including handicapped status, it is very difficult to get around this town if you do not have a car.
- Go Pasco is kicking off a comprehensive operational analysis of their entire transit system. The entire effort will be a 12-month process, at minimum.

- Who here has used the bus system in this county? I rode the bus in Pasco County for 2.5 years as a single mom with three kids. My car broke down and I could not afford to fix it. For \$30.00 a month, it was cheaper for me to ride the bus and save money for a new car.
- While I was on a nonprofit board, a board-member requirement was to ride the bus from Zephyrhills to Dade City to experience what it was like. We rode the bus and got on and off in various places. I remember a woman with three children and four grocery bags trying to get on and off the bus and walk through the Walmart parking lot. It gives you a whole different view of how you see the county and how you see transportation when you are in that situation.
- Bus service in West Pasco is more frequent because the population is higher. The bus comes every half hour on US 19. Everywhere else, the service is hourly, if the bus is on time. I had to leave my house at 5:30 in the morning to get to my job at 8:00 in the morning, and my home was 3.5 miles away from my work. I worked with people who rode the bus from West Pasco to Zephyrhills and up to Dade City. It took them an entire day to go and forth across the county.
- GoPasco is trying to do more loops, and they offer taxi-like services to some of the population. Communication to residents about these services is very much lacking. This is not a City problem, but it is a resident problem.
- New Port Richey is implementing a trolley system, basically a large golf cart, in the downtown area. Nobody takes it. It is unclear as to why. Maybe they do not know about it.
- In a smaller community like Zephyrhills, it could be possible to offer that type of service on those peripheral streets or maybe to doctors' offices off of US 301 where the buses do go. This could possibly be done in partnership with GoPasco.
- Part of the problem with busses coming in and out of Zephyrhills is that we did not do an adequate job setting up safe places for people to get on and off the bus. Busses do not pull off the road and riders have to walk across ditches to reach the bus. It is unsafe for busses to be stopping suddenly with drivers behind them. It holds up traffic. There are areas in Zephyrhills where we could have had nice pull-offs with seating for people waiting to ride the bus. I am not sure who is in charge of doing that.
- This (forum) is fantastic. The major issue right now is that in the mornings you cannot go south on US 301. You cannot go on Morris Bridge Rd. You cannot go anywhere out of here on SR 54. This has been long discussed. We have the political will now, probably the most we are ever going to have. We just have not done anything with that to help the City of Zephyrhills. We did get SR 56 to come here but, basically, that caused the state's US 301 project (four lanes to Tampa) to get pushed back time and time again. The last story was that the money went to a project some place else. Most of the money and political clout that we had that could have been used to upgrade facilities in the city went to SR 52, which is actually how I get to Wesley Chapel. When I go between Zephyrhills and Dade City, I go around because there is absolutely no way to go down Eiland Blvd, which should have been four lanes when it was built. I do not think that is currently on the docket.
- We are talking about 26,000 homes coming in to the south of Zephyrhills and another 2,200 in the city. We cannot get to and from that area now. We need to do something while we still have political clout, while we still have money. The \$75,000 (grant) for this study is fine, but we need to get \$75,000 to look at that for the City of Zephyrhills. We have been pushed to the side ever since we have been here.

- The City went to Tallahassee two weeks ago and learned that there will be an announcement regarding US 301 next month regarding 301. Hopefully, it is about addressing exactly what you are talking about because that is the issue the City brought up. The section of US 301 through town, the one-way pair, was pushed back. The section from the apex to SR 56 pushed up. We are still five years out. We are hopeful the announcement is about everything to Hillsborough River State Park.
- The most dangerous intersection in this area is at US 301 and Chancey Rd. The recent expenditure there was for not even for a turn lane. It was for people to walk across. We have trucks on the road every day. I have a hard time sleeping knowing my guys are using that intersection to get to our facility. It is horrible. We have to do something so we are stronger.
- We could try to do what Dade City did with SR 52. Obviously, we do not have the financial means for the people that own these properties. Maybe there is some pull out there if we say enough is enough, this needs to be done. We could see it even during COVID when nobody from Canada was here. Now we are in a deep hole.
- That gets back to modeling and forecasting. Part of the problem on US 301 is that when we did the long-range transportation plan 10 years ago, years ago, that kind of growth was not in the forecast. That is why we are in the position we are now.
- When the subdivision comes in, don't they study how much traffic they are going to generate?
- On Eiland Blvd, there are probably 400 homes in our subdivision alone and there are another six to seven subdivisions and an apartment complex with probably 200 to 300 units. As it is, Eiland is a two-lane road. We have witnessed crashes where drivers are making a left turn on to Eiland Blvd. They have done a good job putting in turn lanes but getting out of these subdivisions in the backups from just the two lanes is ridiculous.
- At 6:00 p.m., you either go the backway from Dean Dairy Rd to SR 54 or the other way on US 301. Putting in a couple of traffic lights would create backups.
- Developers have an infrastructure plan and pay impact fees. Why isn't that money going to widen the road? Why wasn't that done before all these subdivisions came in like SR 56? You go to Wesley Chapel and it is smooth sailing; four lanes all the way. We are still building homes here and that should have been done years ago. Do they do traffic counts? We are seeing accident after accident. It is screaming to be widened.
- No consolation, but the transportation planning process has not kept up with the pace of growth. The issues are known and prioritized but there are also funding considerations.
- Eiland Blvd is not programmed for widening until 2029.
- The big problem is regional. The discussion today is about the mobility plan and what the City can do. We need to set something up with the county.
- The City did exactly that for SR 56, which originally was slated to be two lanes. We should form a committee to do that. We need to do something other than what we are doing.

The City has heard from residents, and staff is pushing on the Eiland Blvd project with the MPO. The MPO Executive Director lives in Zephyrhills so she is aware of these issues. Staff walked Geiger Rd from US 301 with Pasco County and FDOT yesterday to look at where new developments are going in and where the issues are. Geiger Rd needs to be resurfaced and it has no sidewalk or trail. There are drop offs at the edges and site visibility issues. A report will be prepared. The City will continue to press them but it is a slow process, and there is not enough money to address all of the needs.

- Twenty years ago, after a development agreement fell through, the County transferred Simons Rd to City, who then did the paving. Sometimes the City has to do things like that. The only way we are going to get anywhere is to work with Pasco County and FDOT. The US 301 projects, from the apex south to SR 56 and north to Geiger Rd, were at the top of the list. Unfortunately, very large projects takes a lot of time and a lot of dollars. There is an allocation of dollars each year based on population and given to Pasco County. The money is allocated to projects to the extent available.
- Another lane is programmed on US 301 from Eiland Blvd north to Kossik Rd.
- Funding is allocated every five years from the state but that could cover the cost of just a few transportation projects. Part of the issue is that there are so many needs and not enough funding to address everything.
- Bringing it back to what the City has control over and comments regarding complete streets and having proper places for pedestrians and bicyclists, in Ohio the DOT follows local government codes for roadway design, including streetscaping (e.g., sidewalk and lighting design). If the City adopts a complete streets program, is it possible to require new developments and our transportation to implement those designs, where appropriate?

The FDOT Context Classification System responds to locally adopted plans and code provisions.

Note: The US 301/Gall Blvd Form-Based Code includes standards for the public realm.

Sidewalks is another big missing link, particularly in the City's street grid. City Council approved the allocation of \$1 million to address sidewalk gaps around Zephyrhills to connect residents to parks and schools. These are local projects and one part of the City's multimodal transportation system.

- There are bus stops on side streets with no benches or shelter. People have to wait a long time without a place to sit. FDOT wants these requirements. Could we build ramps for wheelchair access, like we have along US 301 S? Maybe the City could do a simple shelter to help people stay out of sun and rain.
- HARTline in Hillsborough County coordinates with the cities to do that (e.g., locational and equipment standards).
- In Pasco County, whether there is a bench or a shelter is based on the number of trips. Looking at how many trips are coming from each stop to see what stops they can improve would be part of the COA.
- Eiland Blvd is only two lanes so it would be tough for a bus to pick up people along the road.
- Everything behind the bus is held up and there is no safe place for riders to load/unload.
- Eiland Blvd would benefit from public transportation for trips to Wesley Chapel or US 301 N. A lot of people go to Dade City but also to Wesley Chapel.
- We cannot underestimate growth. We are looking at tens of thousands of new homes and the corresponding population growth. We have to take into account that a lot of our infrastructure was not built with that kind of growth in mind.
- We have to have other ways of getting around. If we had more bus service, it would take car trips off the roads.
- My dad is 78 years old. He is not going to walk three miles back and forth to the grocery store. The solutions we put together have to be appropriate for our demographics. A large majority of the population has mobility issues that prevent them from walking far, and certainly not in the

heat. Maybe grocery home delivery services like Peapod could be a solution if bussing is an issue for those populations.

- It is not just older people here anymore. Demographics are shifting and we are getting a lot of younger people.
- To bring industry into the airport industrial corridor, you workers for those jobs as well.
- The MPO Long Range Transportation Plan population forecasting shows over one million people in Pasco County by 2050.
- The City has had success recruiting large employers recently. Close to 800 jobs are coming to the industrial corridor in the next three to four years, 300 jobs in the next 18 months. Local jobs will have an impact on transportation demand if those workers are able to find housing locally.
- The construction industry is also adding trips to the road network.
- US 301 south of the city is really bad. On US 39, the traffic coming into Zephyrhills backs up past the bridge, all the way to Circle K. Really, traffic is coming from all directions.

There is only one major north-south arterial through Zephyrhills, US 301. That is a problem, has been a problem, and will continue to be a problem, even more so, in the future. That is why building a bypass around Zephyrhills and even up Old Lakeland Hwy is so important. We need to look at alternatives including SR 54, Chancey Rd, and Morris Bridge Rd.

At 3:00 p.m., everyone was thanked for their time and contributions, and encouraged to stay engaged through the mobility plan's completion this June.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:02 p.m.