

**CHAMBER OF COMMERCE - TRAFFIC COMMITTEE MEETING
SPECIAL MEETING TO DISCUSS ALTERNATING LIGHTS
ON FORT MYERS BEACH, FLORIDA
NOVEMBER 8, 2002**

Town Council Members Present: Mayor Daniel Hughes, Council member Bill Van Duzer and Council member Howard Rynearson

Town Staff Present: Deputy Town Manager John Gucciardo

This meeting began with a statement expressing a suitable solution is anticipated for the needs and concerns of the residents of Fort Myers Beach and the residents along San Carlos Blvd.. This will also include those residents and businesses on Old San Carlos Island.

John Davis began by extending the apologies of Deborah Snyder, District Traffic of Operations for Florida DOT. She has had a family illness, which is keeping her home. Unfortunately he was unable to meet with her to discuss ideas prior to this meeting. He is hoping to schedule a meeting next week. He did indicate Florida DOT is around the table today.

John went on to discuss that there have been two trials of the alternating traffic signal concept. The result found some successes and some operational issues, which need to be addressed. He pointed out that this solution is a piece of the bigger puzzle. No singular action will solve the problem. No easy solution exists to this problem. The concept of the alternating traffic signal may be one of the elements. The lights did prove to show success obtaining a more orderly transition or merge from two lanes to one lane. Greater usage of the right lane was seen by using this concept, which created a further delay for Estero Island. Another idea is to try and move people away from the use of their vehicle as a way to come to Fort Myers Beach. The reconfiguring of San Carlos Blvd. is being considered to provide a change in the lanes. He explained that going southbound the right lane (curve lane) will become a right turn only lane or a transit use lane. The lane which is presently a thru lane will remain a thru lane. The two lane left turn lane will become a thru lane. One of the northbound lanes would become the two-way left turn lane. The last lane would still be a thru lane northbound. Operational issues would still need to be addressed. This would give the people intending to go to San Carlos Island the right lane back. Another advantage is that a lane would be created for transit and trolley's. Emergency vehicles will be able to access with greater ease. Two thoughts were explored to make this situation full time. Another solution is to try and base the change on traffic flow or time of day. There is a significant cost estimated around \$750,000.00. These options are being discussed with FDOT. One concern is northbound one lane will be reduced. These issues are being addressed at the present time.

Chris Swenson was present and indicated he has a tremendous amount of respect from John Davis. He indicated John Davis is the best Traffic Operations Engineer he knows. He agrees with most everything stated by John. Some very real opportunities exist to take one of the northbound lanes and convert it into the two-way left turn lane. This will still leave plenty of capacity in the northbound direction. Some details still need to be determined, but he feels there are some very good opportunities to move forward with the ideas as presented by John Davis.

Al (member of the Traffic Committee) spoke out and expressed he is on various committees. He has been in favor of pursuing the installation of the alternating lights. He is also in favor of the options as presented by John Davis. The factor of how many will be impacted should be considered. The years leading up to the change also need to be considered. He expressed that they would like to see the alternating lights completed on a seasonal basis until the project is complete. He hopes the introductory given today will satisfy the residents on San Carlos Island. The negative feelings will exist in the interim. There are approximately 100 properties in the San Carlos area that would be immediately affected by not having the right turn only. He worked with the condominium association to poll the residents to get figures to bring to today's meeting. E-mail contact took place with 38 condominium associations. 35 were in favor of the alternating lights with particular interest in seeing this done on a seasonal basis. 70% responded within 48 hours and 75% within 5 days. Those who responded represent 2,662 units. He expressed there are 5,326 interested individuals in favor on the island. This is a compelling number and should not be taken lightly. He hopes this information will give some strength toward the continuation of the project on a seasonal basis, but with a long range plan to alleviate the concerns of the neighbors on San Carlos.

Steve Myers, Director of Lee Tran, expressed he has mentioned in the past if an exclusive transit lane was developed this would get people around the traffic and down the beach. He has always felt many people could be carried on trolley's. The locals would see this would be a quicker approach. He is supportive of John Davis' suggestion. He also supports the alternating light, but it does create a much larger traffic flow in both lanes.

Captain Riener feels the largest advantage of the alternating light is the road rage factor. People do become so aggravated by waiting patiently and seeing others continue down the turn lane and cut back in. He cannot have a deputy sit in this lane all day every day to enforce these types of violations. He has concerns with one lane coming northbound. He explained during events on the beach, such as Forth of July, where lane configuration has changed, great success has taken place with two lanes coming off of the beach. Evacuation situations are not an issue. He does feel it is important to get people off of the beach as well as getting on. The public transportation issue does need to be addressed. He does favor the idea of the alternating lane. The cost factor is larger, but the discussion is about people coming to enjoy the beach and businesses. Law enforcement will live with whatever decision is made. He does feel the alternating light should be continued in the interim, while the long term plan is considered.

Dick Collins, Representative from the Fort Myers Beach Fire Department, came forward. He explained the Fire Department has no concerns with the alternating light. The middle lane will be used, if necessary. The Fire Department will go against the traffic. The alternating lanes will be a different situation and he is unsure if this will work. The issue will need to be further looked into.

Mayor Daniel Hughes stated as an elected official the most frustrating issue is once a consensus is reached the time it takes for implementation. He hopes this group can come with a strong consensus. He feels the suggestion made by John Davis is favorable, but needs further investigation. He would like to see a consensus at the earliest possible time and this matter be expedited as soon as possible. The sooner the situation is tried the better everyone will be.

Council member Bill Van Duzer represents the Town of Fort Myers Beach on the MPO. This issue was before the MPO. Traffic problems exist all over the county due to growth. These issues are always being addressed in the best manner. He feels they must be able to accommodate those coming to the beach. 9 out of 10 times people come to Fort Myers Beach. This is not just a Fort Myers Beach problem. He is in business and takes the route, which contained the alternating light. Last year, he experienced some of the road rage situations. The alternating light solved the road rage. It also solved a major portion of the traffic problem, because traffic will back up anyway. The alternating light allowed traffic to move in both lanes at a regular pace. He would like serious consideration given to allow the alternating light on a temporary basis during season. Also, to move forward with the permanent facility as rapidly as possible. He would like careful thought and consideration given to Chris Swenson for the handling of the traffic situation in the future on Fort Myers Beach as a Lee County problem. The Town of Fort Myers Beach will cooperate with the County and San Carlos Island. Everyone is in this together, because they live in Paradise.

Council member Howard Ryneanson is in agreement with Council member Van Duzer and Mayor Hughs. He feels it is time to move on. This issue is not what has been done, but what needs to be done. John Davis has a tremendous idea. He feels with Chris Swenson's help this project could be a success. He would like to see the people of San Carlos Island get what they need. He feels this permanent change will offer what they need. Fort Myers Beach is looking forward to working with everyone.

Flip Harby agrees with everything stated today. The changing of the traffic lanes is a "will see" type approach. He does not feel they will be able to satisfy everyone on the issue of alternating lights. He is 100% in favor the traffic lights. The alternating lights do not need to operate 365 days a year. This will not be necessary. He feels this is a 100-day project.

Jim Bagley, member of the Citizens Advisory Committee to the MPO, made some additional comments. He expressed that funding is being received through Federal Congestion Fixed Funds. He was amazed by the support from people all over the County on the Advisory Committees. The earliest course change is typically one or two years. He is confident whatever funding is necessary will be received. He prepared a quick poll. He reported that everyone from a state standpoint is happy to continue the test of alternating lights on a temporary basis. He encouraged everyone to continue with the planning process. Whenever volunteers are managing the crosswalk and traffic flow the situation works a lot better.

Tom Myers reported the Traffic Committee has met on a monthly basis for the past nine years. He explained that they have dealt with issues going all the way to the airport. He welcomes everyone to come to the committee meetings. A lot of issues have been solved in the past.

Commissioner Ray Judah is encouraged by what has been heard today. The resource and creative mind of John Davis and Chris Swenson will allow them to proceed with addressing the overwhelming concerns of the residents and businesses of Fort Myers Beach along with those along the San Carlos corridor. He would like to move forward with a temporary alternating signal light during the season until it is installed permanently. He hopes this Traffic Committee could make a recommendation that the Town Council and the County Commission support a joint resolution to the Florida Department of Transportation to incorporate the first suggestion of utilizing the dual left turn lane as a southbound lane. There would be an understanding that the monitoring of the free flow lane will exist for traffic movement to the north with one of the lanes being utilized for left-hand turn movement. This could be handled on a trial basis to collect information for the benefit of all residents on the island and off the island.

Tom Myers thanked everyone for attending and asked for greater attendance in the future.

A motion was made and passed unanimously to support the comments made by Commissioner Ray Judah.

The meeting was adjourned by Tom Myers.

Sincerely,

Shannon Miller
Transcribing Secretary