

SARASOTA COUNTY GOVERNMENT

Public Works

TO: Sarasota County Commission
THROUGH: Thomas A. Harmer, County Administrator
FROM: Isaac R. Brownman, P.E., Director
Carolyn M. Eastwood, P.E., MBA, Interim County Engineer
Paula R. Wiggins, P.E., MBA, Transportation Planning Manager
DATE: April 17, 2015
SUBJECT: **Item 2A: River Road Regional Interstate Connector Update**

BACKGROUND:

The River Road Regional Interstate Connector (Englewood Interstate Connector or EIC) is an approximately 11-mile road reconstruction project along River Road from I-75 to Winchester Boulevard, and an approximately 4-mile segment of Winchester Boulevard from River Road to SR 776 in Charlotte County. The project will correct existing road deficiencies, provide additional capacity, and serve as a hurricane evacuation route. The project, which is within the Five-Year Capital Improvement Program (CIP #95760), is currently divided into four segments (Table 1).

Construction of the U.S. 41/River Road intersection improvements began in Fiscal Year 2012 and was completed in January 2014. This intersection is part of Segment 1 and there was an opportunity to construct the intersection improvements through a public/private partnership.

The design for Segments 1 and 2 are 100 percent complete. These segments have been issued permits from Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) and the Army Corps of Engineers. Construction costs are estimated to be \$35 million and \$15 million, respectively.

Both Segments 1 and 2 require additional right-of-way (ROW). Staff estimates ROW costs to be \$2.85 million (30 parcels) for Segment 1 and \$2.45 million (19 parcels) for Segment 2. The ROW needs are depicted on Attachments 1 and 2. Additional ROW is needed for Segment 3, and the construction cost estimate for this segment is estimated at \$25 million.

In a joint effort between Sarasota and Charlotte Counties, two-lanes of the future four-lane Winchester Boulevard from River Road to SR 776 in Charlotte County were completed in 2000. The remaining improvements to complete a four-lane divided roadway with sidewalks, bicycle lanes, and street lighting have not yet been designed.

Table 1: River Road Regional Interstate Connector Segments

River Road	Limits	Improvements
Segment 1	U.S. 41 to Center Road	Six-lane divided roadway including drainage, sidewalks, bicycle lanes, street lighting, and traffic signal upgrades
Segment 2	Center Road to I-75	Four-lane divided roadway including drainage, sidewalks, bicycle lanes, street lighting, and traffic signal upgrades
Segment 3	Winchester Boulevard to U.S. 41	Four-lane divided roadway including drainage, sidewalks, bicycle lanes, and street lighting
Segment 4 (Winchester Boulevard)	SR 776 to S. River Road	Four-lane divided roadway including drainage, sidewalks, bicycle lanes, and street lighting

RELEVANT PRIOR BOARD ACTION:

1. March 20, 2015 Budget Workshop – Sarasota County Commission approved concurred with applying for TIGER Grant funds towards the River Road Regional Interstate Connector sub-phase 1A (5-0 vote).

ANALYSIS/NEXT STEPS:

Analysis:

The River Road Regional Interstate Connector is included in the Sarasota-Manatee Metropolitan Planning Organization’s (MPO) 2035 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). The project is the fifth (5th) ranked project in the Major Improvement Program priorities. Based on the current LRTP, 80 percent of the funding for River Road is programmed to come from local funds and/or developer contributions and 20 percent through the MPO. An amendment to the 2035 LRTP would be required if there is interest to alter the funding allocation prior to the update to the LRTP.

A designated hurricane evacuation route and regional road, the River Road connector project remains a priority for the Sarasota-Manatee MPO and the Charlotte County-Punta Gorda MPO, as expressed at their joint meeting January 26, 2015. Also discussed at the joint meeting and at the Board’s January 27, 2015, commission meeting, was how the project could move forward faster in terms of funding the construction of Segments 1 and 2. Questions were raised during both meetings as to whether or not breaking the project up into smaller segments, or constructing only four of the six lanes on Segment 1 would better Sarasota County’s chances of receiving federal funds through the Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) Grant program.

To date, the County has submitted the entire River Road project once and Segment 1 four times unsuccessfully for funding under the TIGER Grant program. Staff understands that the project was given a rating of “Recommended.” While this rating is good, projects that have typically been awarded funding were rated “Highly Recommended.” Following last year’s application, suggestions for improvements were provided by the United States Department of Transportation. Some of these suggestions include looking at the following areas:

- Sarasota’s request for federal funding was for \$38 million, which is higher than other grant awards;
- The application should possibly include a phased or segmented project approach;
- The federal funding requested was to partially cover right-of-way acquisition, which is not considered the most competitive use of funds;
- The project budget was broad and needed to be more specificity;
- The safety data needed to be updated with current information; and
- The economic growth data needed more specifics, to include timeframes and existing/projected growth along the project corridor.

Based on this information, it is staff’s opinion that Segment 1 should be split into two segments: Segment 1A (north of the U.S. 41 intersection to West Villages Parkway) and Segment 1B (West Villages Parkway to Center Road). The construction cost estimates for each of these segments are approximately \$20 million and \$15 million, respectively. Splitting Segment 1 will reduce the dollar amount the county is seeking and bring it in line with the typical dollar amounts awarded for TIGER grant projects.

During the Board’s Budget Workshop on February 20, 2015, there was discussion on the possibility of submitting a TIGER planning application for Segment 3. According to the county’s fiscal staff and consultant, submitting two applications for different segments of a larger project is allowable, but each segment must stand on its own in terms of satisfying the selection criteria of the grant, in addition to the benefits it provides. Grant funds would not be provided if the benefits of the individual segments of a larger project did not align well with the selection criteria because the overall project would still be incomplete. Therefore, staff does not recommend pursuing the TIGER planning grant for Segment 3 at this time.

Next Steps:

1. Staff will continue with the 2015 TIGER grant application process for River Road Regional Interstate Connector Segment 1A.
2. Staff will also seek funds through the MPO for the design of the River Road south of U.S. 41 to Winchester Boulevard; and
3. Staff recommends that the programmed funding for the River Road project’s MPO funding be amended to allow a majority or all of the funding to come from State and Federal funds.

FUNDING:

Funding for this project could include Federal Grants, South County Road Impact Fee District funds, City of North Port Road Impact Fee District funds, Transportation Ad Valorem Taxes, ELMS Gas Taxes, Infrastructure Continuation funds (00-09), Contributions from West Villages, Commercial Paper Fund Balances and short term borrows to be repaid by South County Road Impact Fee District funds and Telecommunication Taxes.

Staff is pursuing funding for the construction of River Road through the Sarasota-Manatee MPO and the TIGER Grant program.