

Lee County Recovery Task Force Critical Infrastructure Workshop

Session 2 – Meeting Minutes

11:00 AM – 12:30 PM | JUNE 5, 2023 | COLLABORATORY | 2031 JACKSON STREET, SUITE 100, FORT MYERS, FL 33901 | TRANSPORTATION

Call to Order

On June 5, 2023, the Workshop facilitators, Mike Sprayberry and Tessa LeSage, convened the Critical Infrastructure Workshop: Transportation at 11:03 AM with the following panelists present:

- Don Scott
- Dominic Gemelli
- Benjamin Abes
- Laura Dodd
- Robert Price

The following Branch members were present:

- Kate Gooderham
- Daniel Andrews
- Bill Ribble
- Maya Robert
- Fred Forbes
- Joanne Ribble
- Frank Bonafilia
- Marco Villalobos
- Dan O'Berski
- Stephanie Wardein
- John Roth
- Ryan Carter

Workshop Topic Discussion

Members discussed the systems and technologies currently in place pertaining to transportation. Mr. Abes stated that he is not familiar with metrics related to vulnerability assessments, but the current system in place does not reset quickly enough in terms of emergency vehicles.

Mr. Scott stated that new technology could be adapted to the community. At first, it was cost-prohibited, but can now be revisited. Aside from the emergency vehicles, the current system takes an extended period of time to get back into ordination. New technology is more adaptive and can allow emergency vehicles to move through the County.

The facilitators asked if the County and municipalities work together to connect transit and future technologies to transportation. Ms. Dodd stated that the City of Cape Coral has coordinated with the County regarding the type of technology that can be provided, but it is a moving target. The municipalities are working together but have not solidified one area.

The facilitators asked what projects could be included to improve resilience in the region. The panelists suggested the following:

- Finding ways to strengthen resilience;
- Reviewing the Lee Plan that incorporates these ideas;
- Incorporating nature-based solutions, such as oyster restorations, when repairing/replacing infrastructure (during the environmental permitting process); and
- Looking at the recovery process in three phases: short-term, long-term, and longer-term.

The facilitators stated that more people are choosing to live in the Lee County region and some areas are densifying. They asked if there were any opportunities to improve resilience in key areas that would also better prepare the area for growth. The following were key points that the panelists brought up:

- Finding funding for projects that have been planned, such as the Three Oaks Parkway Extension and the Alico Road connection;
- Multimodal transportation is undergoing in Cape Coral, but it is important to provide options for other mobile choices;
- Creating infrastructure redundancies;
- Ways to take the stress off other roads and create community connections;
- Viable and modern technology to help with multi-modal transportation; and
- Work with municipalities for transportation options.

Mr. Oberski asked what it would take to financially access the region and how to make transit more accessible. The panelists responded as follows:

- No math has been done but can be incorporated as infrastructure is being done;
- South Fort Myers Transportation Center is almost done, and Lehigh Acres will be done and act as a connecting hub between Lehigh and Fort Myers;
- Ridership has not greatly increased since COVID-19 and Hurricane Ian;
- Vanpooling program, funded by the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), is showing growth and helps with transit funding;
- The transit system does incorporate emergency systems;
- Mixed-use areas will be familiar to bike and bus pairing; Midtown will be a hub for this;
- Mobility on demand is a pragmatic approach; and
- Looking into multi-modal approaches to increase micro-mobility in denser locations with mixed-use areas.

Ms. LeSage asked if there were solutions for safe infrastructure. The panelists stated the following:

- The County is trying to address adding vehicular and multi-modal improvements, but there are safety concerns;
- The railroad right-of-way is costly and has potential limitations;
- Increasing mixed-use areas that are residentially dense that attract less traffic;
- Services provided closer to homes; and
- Expansion of projects that can incorporate natural resources into the infrastructure.

Mr. Price stated that resilience is limited due to government oversight. Mr. Evans stated that there needs to be cost-benefit analyses on the projects.

Ms. Wardein asked if there was a cross-regional approach for the municipalities that have their plans and if there were plans, such as passenger rail. Mr. Scott stated that there is a regional approach, and passenger rail is something that can be done in the near future. He stated that each area includes multi-use infrastructure. FDOT has looked at multi-use separated facilities.

Ms. Robert asked if transportation was taking into consideration vulnerability assessments, the adaptation of floodways and wetlands when planning, and if affordable-multi-model transportation options were being considered, especially with grant funding.

Mr. Price stated the need to get permits to widen roads, which are underway. He stated that there is coordination with the Natural Resources Department when thinking about the

projects and mentioned a project pertaining to a wildlife underpass by Alico Road. Mr. Gemelli stated that there are no land-development codes that are across the region. He suggested that there should be a county-wide transit piece to it, but there currently is not one.

The facilitator asked what the region can do to ensure emergency repairs are completed as quickly as possible.

Mr. Price stated that there is a detailed analysis that must be done at each intersection that is required to be submitted to the government to get approval for repairs. A large portion of the damages includes span wires in intersections. A project has been submitted to Community Development Block Grant- Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) program to retrofit and build to the newest standards. He stated that some things cannot be addressed, such as storm surge impacts. There are no pre-positioned federalized contracts to get contractors to do damage assessments. Another issue was finding contractors that want to sign up for it ahead of a disaster, which can be costly.

Ms. Wardein asked for a high level of where there are gaps in the assessments and any way for a comprehensive approach.

Mr. Scott stated that the First Impression Damage Assessment (FIDA) gives an idea of where damages are and the need that should be addressed. He stated that the actual inspections necessary for Category B or permanent work under the FEMA Public Assistance (PA) program and the detailed needs to satisfy inspections are extensive. Ms. Scott stated that emergency repairs can be made, but there are projects pending approval by FEMA for facilities that have had roof damage following Hurricane Ian. Mr. Sprayberry stated that transportation projects typically take longer to get approval. Mr. Price stated that Red Tape is significant and that FDOT has helped coordinate with the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles in terms of expediting the process, but the paperwork and documentation are extensive.

The facilitators then asked how the region can accelerate the development of a transportation system that manages congestion, enhances connectivity between modes, and improves the resilience and reliability of the system. The suggestions were as followed:

- Micro-mobility from a connectivity standpoint can cause more issues;
- Jobs closer to housing can decrease transportation demand;
- Multi-modal options as an evolution of transportation options;
- Emphasize mixed-use options;

- Partnerships with other transportation options, such as Uber, for evacuations to public shelters; and
- Taking populations into account that must be evacuated during emergencies.

Next Steps and Questions

There were no next steps or further questions discussed.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Concluding Remarks and Adjournment

Ms. LeSage thanked the panelists and participants for their attendance and involvement. The meeting was adjourned at 12:22 PM on June 5, 2023.