

Florida Keys Transportation Coordination Committee

Meeting Minutes

Friday, June 4, 2021 (Hybrid)

I. Greeting & Introduction

The regular meeting of the Florida Keys Transportation Coordination Committee was called to order at 1:05 p.m. on Friday, June 4, 2021 (Hybrid) in Marathon by Vice-Chair Kimmeron Lisle.

II. Roll Call

Present Committee Members

Kimmeron Lisle, Vice-Chair, City of KCB

Mary Lou Hoover, Commissioner, City of Key West

David Webb, Councilperson, Village of Islamorada (Designated Alternate)

Brian Shea, Acting Planner Director, City of Marathon (Alternate)

Absent Committee Members

Monroe County Commissioner David Rice, Chair

Bruce Halle, Mayor, City of Layton, and Greg Lewis, Councilman (Alternate)

Pete Bacheler, Vice-Mayor Village of Islamorada, and Mark Gregg, Councilperson (Alternate)

Dan Zieg, Councilman, City of Marathon

Non-committee Members

Emily Schemper, Sr. Director, Planning & Environmental Resources, Monroe County

Cheryl Cioffari, Assistant Director of Planning, Monroe County

Janene Sclafani, Transportation Planner, Monroe County

Bob Shillinger, County Attorney, Monroe County

Kimberly Matthews, Sr. Director Strategic Planning & Libraries, Monroe County

Rod Delostrinos, Director, City of Key West Transit

Alison Higgins, Sustainability Coordinator, City of Key West

Tim Staub, Multimodal Transportation Coordinator, City of Key West, Transit Dept.

Henry Rosenthal, Councilperson, Village of Islamorada

Maria Bassett, Acting Village Manager, Village of Islamorada

Ty Harris, Planning Director, Village of Islamorada

Judy Hull, Executive Director, Islamorada Chamber of Commerce

Rita Irwin, Chair, Monroe County Tourist Development Council

Raymond Freeman, Public Transportation Manager, FDOT, District VI

Nilia Cartaya, FDOT, District VI

Norman Wartman, Transportation Specialist

Christina Miskis, Planner, South Florida Regional Planning Council

Tamara Lamarche, Executive Assistant, Commissioner David P. Rice, BOCC District 4

Jill Zima, Reporter, Key West Citizen

Numerous members of the public

III. Approve agenda:

Agenda was approved with an amendment to hear Item #XI after Item #IV, by request from Bob Shillinger, County Attorney, and approval of minutes.

Meeting Summary:

IV. Approval of meeting minutes from March 5, 2021

V. Discussion on Monroe-Dade Express Route 301 seat availability issue – Judy Hull

Judy Hull, Executive Director of the Islamorada Chamber of Commerce, presented the reports of lack of seat availability on the Route #301 bus from Village businesses to the Chamber. Issues reported: Early AM buses leaving Florida City were full, 2 and 3 successive scheduled busses, and employees were getting to work hours late impacting their employers. Additionally, the final end of the evening buses for employees getting off work from restaurants, bars, etc., and needing to catch the last bus north to Miami-Dade were being passed by, with FULL sign on the bus, stranding them in Monroe, with no way home. These employees generally quit their job soon after such an experience, further affecting businesses employee shortages. The other problem reported was students/athletes from Coral Shores High School, with late evening practice or games were also passed by buses with FULL sign on, and unable to get home. Judy is trying to get details that are more specific. We need to know what business/locations, what times this occurred, and frequency to provide to FDOT.

Communication with Miami-Dade Transit via FDOT representative Ray Freeman is necessary to determine if these buses are still running at 50% capacity for COVID social distancing, requiring additional buses be put on the schedule, or whether schedule changes can alleviate the issues. If the buses were to be restored to full capacity, this may solve the seat availability issues.

VI. Discussion to form sub-committee for waterborne transportation – Kimmeron Lisle

Kimmeron Lisle introduced her proposal to form a sub-committee to research the waterborne transportation issue and do the groundwork of establishing feasibility. We need more information to support this proposal. She called for volunteers, 2-3 people to assist with this endeavor. Interested persons can contact her, Janene, or Tamara at Comm. Rice's office by email.

VII. Discussion on funding options for more frequent public transit – Alison Higgins

Alison Higgins discussed funding options for more frequent public transit. She used a Key West example, some items directly applicable to Key West, but many could be applied at the County level. Such as the Federal Transportation Administration grant for funding pilot project for transit-oriented development. She noted that ferries were also part of the funding program.

The Florida Job Growth Grant provides funds for training programs. Could help address the lack of licensed CDL drivers in the Keys. The College of the Florida Keys is trying to pull together a CDL training program.

FDOT will provide 50% funding to support transportation services, as they do for Key West Transit, and for Miami-Dade Transportation bus services.

A new service grant, i.e. airport shuttle express with a few limited stops.

Public/private partnerships with resorts/hotels.

The 18-mi. toll

VIII. Discussion of US1 and County roads flow and safety projects – Norman Wartman

Norman Wartman discussed his proposed safety and traffic flow enhancing projects.

- a. Highpoint Rd. – Left turn onto US1 northbound. Needs a median merge lane.
- b. MM100-108, Key Largo – Overhead safety lighting, very dark in that area.
- c. Ocean Bay Dr., Key Largo – The bike path needs reflectors, and rip rap along Lake Largo to prevent erosion.
- d. MM96-100, Key Largo – Overlay zoning for right turns only for entry and departure hotels and restaurants where median is forested. High number of vehicles turning wrong way, not realizing it is a split north and southbound lanes section of the highway. Limit turning, directing vehicles leaving the establishment to turn only north or southbound right turns as applicable. This could be required by permitting regulation change whenever the business getting permitting for major renovations. Require the enhancement of entrance/exit cuts as part of the renovation.
- e. MM111-125 – Fires in the Everglades. Add agricultural “rainbirds” sprinkler system along the fence line to prevent and control the spread of fires, smoke, and road closures.

Tamara Lamarche added suggestion received from Upper Keys resident, Dr. Susana May, to make a right turn only at Snapper Avenue and US1, across from the Pink Plaza, with pavement markings. A lot of accidents have occurred at this location. It was noted that these road improvement suggestions would be provided to Engineering for their evaluation and comment to which items County can perform and which will have to be referred to FDOT for US1 future work plans.

IX. Report on plan to evaluate transportation schedule with intent to modify, as necessary, to meet peak ridership – Janene Sclafani (See Item X below)

X. Evaluate adequacy of current level of bus service – Janene Sclafani (IX & X read together)

Janene Sclafani gave a report regarding evaluation of bus schedules with intent to modify as needed for peak ridership, and evaluate adequacy of current level of bus service.

The County is working with City of Key West and Miami-Dade, as well as FDOT on schedules. We heard from Village, Judy Hull Islamorada Chamber of Commerce report on full bus issues being experienced currently. This information has been provided to FDOT, who is looking at the 301 scheduling to find solutions to the problem.

Janene plans to do a door-to-door survey of hotels and restaurants in the last 3 miles of Marathon (west end), to determine their employees transportation issues.

For the Lower Keys Shuttle (LKS), Rod Delostrinos said in general their schedule looks pretty good throughout the day regarding the connection to the #301 at Kmart in Marathon. Generally, a 30-40 minute wait for connection to northbound 301. Exceptions noted would be a one hour 40 minute wait for the northbound 301 on one run in the mid-morning, and one southbound run connection has a short 3 minute window to get off 301 and get on the LKS. He is committed to improving the schedule, looking at short-term and long-term solutions.

Currently has a shortage of CDL licensed drivers and cannot hire them. Has begun attempt to use smaller buses in the City that can be operated by non-CDL drivers but has gotten zero applications for those (4) driver positions. They have been short on LKS drivers (CDL licensed), for the past 4 years.

Long-term solutions would be CDL training programs to add more CDL drivers and go to self-driving buses for the City, freeing up his CDL drivers for the LKS. He is working with the College of the Florida Keys to establish a CDL licensing training program and has given them one of their decommissioned buses to use. He has a good network with other FL cities and counties and their efforts to innovate public transportation, such as Jacksonville Transportation Regional Authority, and will stay informed of their new enhancements as they arise.

Janene asked if they are doing 50% capacity social distancing on the LKS, and are they utilizing masks? Rod responded that they have placards up for reminders of social distancing but are not formally following 50% capacity. The drivers wear masks, and the riders generally wear masks. Riders who may consider a bus crowded can get off and wait for the next one. They have an established cleaning program for the buses.

Janene asked about transfers from #301 to LKS, do we know how many we have currently? Rod replied that LKS does not currently have that tracking ability. The data collection consists of a body on, a body off, but not whether a rider is a transfer or not.

XI. Investigate feasibility of establishing Monroe County as a transportation authority – Bob Shillinger

Bob Shillinger presented Comm. Rice’s June 16, 2021 BOCC agenda item to the group. It is a discussion and direction item for staff regarding long-term options to prioritize workforce

transportation. Comm. Rice forecasts that Monroe County will be relying more and more upon employees from the mainland to fill our hospitality, lodging, and other jobs in our tourism industry in outlying years. How the County is going to fund that workforce transportation service is the big framework question. The current bus system is not perfect and need improvement.

The County has a few possible options to explore. All these options will require further research and details to understand the pros and cons of each option before the BOCC will be able to decide on a direction. Joining an existing regional transportation or transit authority (RTA), or creating a new authority, opens up funding sources that can be used to fund transportation needs, through the levy of a discretionary sales surtax of up to one penny, upon voter referendum approval.

Our sales tax, currently 7.5% would become 8.5%, while not the highest, but would be among the highest County sales tax rates in Florida. Florida Statute caps sales tax at 10.5%, so we would still have discretionary 2 cents sales tax available for other uses. Monroe County sales tax historically has been paid about 55-60% by tourism. The earliest this sales tax issue could go to voter referendum is the General Election ballot of November 2022 or November 2024. The FL Legislature has not allowed the levying an additional gas tax for transportation uses and would require a Legislative amendment to pursue. Secondly, it likely would not generate enough funding.

1. Under current Florida Law, Chapter 343 of the Florida Statutes, the County has the option of joining the South Florida Regional Transportation Authority (SFRTA). The authority currently consists of Broward, Palm Beach, and Miami-Dade counties, but may also operate within Monroe with mutual consent of the BOCC and the authority. Under F.S 348.58(1), each SFRTA full member county must contribute \$267 million annually to that authority by statute. However, the contribution requirement does not seem to apply to an inter-local agreement (ILA). There may be benefits to full membership that we need to consider. Both full membership, (or an agreement), in the SFRTA would enable Monroe County to levy the one-penny sales surtax. As the potential participation of Monroe County was put into their enabling legislation, joining the SFRTA is a streamlined option.

Another option involving RTA's is to create a new regional transportation authority for the Florida Keys. Creating such an authority would require both statutory FL Legislative authorization and voter referendum approval in order to level the sales surtax. This would be a separate governmental entity from the County and its participating municipalities. It would have its own governing body and method of selection of its board members. A longer process to accomplish, but may offer the control and administrative oversight we need.

To summarize, there are three sub options for the regional transportation authority option:

- 1A) Join the SFRTA as a full member, paying the \$2.67 Million contribution fee;

- 1B) Explore an ILA with the SFRTA; or
- 1C) Create a Florida Keys Regional Transportation Authority.

- 2. A second option is to commence the process for becoming a Charter County, which in of itself would include the authority to levy the sales surtax without joining an existing RTA or creating a new one. Adopting a charter is the only option completely within the control of the BOCC and county voters. Previous efforts to adopt a county charter have not progressed very far.
- 3. A third option is consolidated government. This statute allows a county that has consolidated with a municipality to levy the transportation sales surtax. This would require a FL Legislative act authorizing the consolidation. Any such act would require a voter referendum. Essentially the participating city/cities would be merged into the County. Jacksonville/Duval County is the most notable example of a consolidated city/county government in Florida. This is not going to work with the municipalities.

XII. Report regarding DOT request for participation in funding – Janene Sclafani

Janene Sclafani reported on the FDOT funding participation request to Monroe County. FDOT began funding the Monroe-Dade Express route with Miami-Dade at a 50% equal funding level. Monroe County has never contributed to the transportation as it was begun as a Miami-Dade workforce initiative. In 2015 through 2021 there has been a gradual increase in the FDOT funding, and FDOT would like to get their funding percentage back down to 50%. Miami-Dade cannot pick up the difference, so they are reaching out to Monroe County for funding participation as Keys employers here are benefitting from the Miami-Dade employees utilizing the bus service.

Starting in FY 2022, FDOT proposes a Monroe contribution of \$125,000, increasing annually through FY 2026 to \$675,000 as their preferred option. There is an option 2, FY 2022 \$125,000 progressing through FY 2026 to \$700,000. The bus service total funding currently is approximately \$2,500,000 a year.

The County will need to study this proposal and make some arrangement for the next few years with Miami-Dade as we study the issues regarding establishing a Regional Transportation Authority (RTA). If pursuing an RTA is the decision of the BOCC, that process could take some years to put in place. (See Item #XI)

XIII. LKS service connection to the Key West Airport – Kimmeron Lisle

Kimmeron Lisle introduced the discussion regarding establishing a LKS addition of service to the Key West International Airport (KWIA). There are nine flights a day coming into KWIA now with Jet Blue service; we need to provide LKS bus service to the airport. Rod Delostrinos replied that the city bus routes come into the airport to the old DMV/Greyhound bus stop at the airport 10

times a day. Currently, a LKS rider can transfer to city bus to get the airport, but this adds another 45 minutes to their trip. To add this to the LKS service constitutes a major service change, and we have to go through the full process of City Council approval, public meeting, etc. He agreed that from Marathon to Key West, there should be a better linkage to get a rider to KWIA for flights; he will put the proposal out there.

He added that his department would do special trip planning for people needing transportation to the airport; they can hold a bus for a connection, etc. They just need to call his office when they have the need arise.

XIV. Discussion of Flixbus service to the Keys – Janene Sclafani

Janene Sclafani discussed the new Flixbus service that has started operation in the Keys. They have requested recommendation for additional stops locations throughout the Keys. Flixbus is a Europe-based company, now in US, operating in Orlando, Miami to Key West, and soon to be in Atlanta, GA. These are nice coach buses, and unlike the tour buses from Miami that run straight through to Key West, they are setting up a number of stops in the Keys to pick up passengers on their way through to Key West. Prices are reasonable, although higher than the public transit service. Pricing is in a range, i.e., Marathon to Key West \$7.99 to \$19.99, contrast with public transit at \$4.00 for a one-way trip. They will soon be adding Ft. Lauderdale Airport to their stops, and include stops in the Keys at the Islamorada Trading Post and the IHOP in Marathon.

XV. Report of Vertical Airports proposal to City of Miami – Janene Sclafani

Janene Sclafani presented a future look at public transportation, vertical airports, an article sent to her by Comm. Mary Lou Hoover. The company, Lilium, made a proposal recently to the City of Miami; and are working on plans with the City of Los Angeles. The planes are small, 4-6 passengers with a vertical take-off and landing capability like a helicopter. They have a 100 mile range and currently projected to cost approximately \$100 fare.

The City of Miami is looking into this; the Mayor is very interested in it. The Miami International Airport has said they do not have any room for the operation, but South Florida executive airports may offer some options. They can land in any space that a helicopter can, so space of a helipad is all that needed.

The FAA is working on interim regulations for these planes until permanent regulations can be put in place, so they are coming, and this a valid future transportation alternative. They will start out piloted, but automation will eventually come to these planes as well.

UberAir is getting into the game, proposing \$5.73 a mile fare, will go down to \$1.86 a mile fare and they are shooting for eventually getting to \$0.44 a mile per passenger.

XVI. Questions & Comments

Kimmeron Lisle announced the possibility of more frequent FKTCC meetings. They are currently scheduled as quarterly meetings but may become monthly as transportation issues are becoming more urgent.

Adjournment

Meeting was adjourned at 3:30 p.m. The next general meeting will be at 1:00 p.m. on September 3, 2021, in Marathon.

For past meeting minutes, audio meeting recordings, and additional information on FKTCC: <https://www.monroecounty-fl.gov/1163/Florida-Keys-Transportation-Coordination>

Minutes submitted by: Tamara Lamarche, Executive Assistant, Commissioner David P. Rice, BOCC District 4 in coordination with Janene Sclafani, Transportation Planner, Monroe County