

How UF Administration caused MTPO to change its 20-year transportation plan (while ignoring UF land-use procedures)

by T. J. Walker, Chair, Natural Area Advisory Committee, 8 Aug 2003

Summary: UF Administration, without consulting any of its land-use advisory committees, announced to Alachua County and Gainesville commissioners that UF intended to donate part of the Natural Area Teaching Laboratory for a segment of a four-lane east-west traffic corridor. Based on this, the MTPO changed its 20-year transportation plan, and Alachua County changed its construction plans for SW 24th Avenue. Even though UF Administration made its commitment to an east-west traffic corridor public on 31 Jan 2003, it has yet to ask its advisory committees to consider the costs and benefits of the proposed donation.

The following is an account of what UF did to influence local transportation planning on four key dates, with supporting evidence.

On or before 12 Dec 2002, UF told some MPTO members that UF would support an east-west traffic corridor that included a four-lane segment through the southern edge of campus.

From 25 Mar 2003 e-mail from MPTO Transportation Director Marley Sanderson:

At its 12 Dec 2002 meeting, "MTPO approved a motion to amend the December 12 MTPO agenda to include a discussion of Butler Plaza Transportation Issues (motion made by Cynthia Chestnut and seconded by Tony Domenech). When this issue was discussed, the MTPO approved a motion to schedule a public hearing to consider amending the long range transportation plan to include the four-laning of SW 24th Avenue and/or SW 62nd Boulevard (motion made by Cynthia Chestnut and seconded by Lee Pinkoson.)"

Transcription from the video tape of the 20 Feb. 2003 MTPO meeting:

Lee Pinkoson stated "A couple of months ago we changed the equation by the University coming forth and saying they would like to participate and help come up with an east-west corridor."

On 31 Jan 2003, V-P Poppell told a special meeting of the Alachua County Commission that UF supports an east/west connector that is a major road and includes the SW 24th Avenue extension from SW 34th Street to Archer Road.

From Poppell's notes for 31 Jan 2003 County Commission meeting (attached to the official minutes):

East/West Connector. Gainesville needs a major road that can encourage growth and movement in the east. SW 24th will enhance this growth and provide the much needed connector. We need access to the east side. This vision will take SW 24th across 34th Street to Archer and further to SW 16th Avenue."

From official minutes of 31 Jan 2003 County Commission meeting:

"Mr. Ed Poppell, University of Florida, discussed why the University of Florida is involved with S.W. 24 Avenue; the University's new vision and presented a proposal for accelerating the construction of S.W. 24 Avenue as a 4-lane road." and "Chair Long requested that the University of Florida make a commitment on the 4-lane east/west corridor, specifically that piece of UF property necessary to connect SW 34 Street with Archer Road."

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On 20 Feb 2003, on the basis of Poppell's assurances relative to UF donating the right-of-way, the MPTO amended its 20-year transportation plan to include a four-lane, divided extension of SW 24th Avenue from SW 34th Street to Archer Road.

From the official minutes of the 20 Feb 2003 MTPO meeting:

"Mr. Ed Poppell, University of Florida Vice President for Administrative Affairs, stated that the University of Florida is committed to recommending to the State of Florida Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund that right-of-way be provided for the extension of SW 24th Avenue east to Archer Road."

The 20-year plan was amended to include "Project #2- SW 24th Avenue extension to construct this facility as a four-lane divided roadway from SW 34th Street east to Archer Road." The motion to amend also included a "request that the Alachua County Commission direct its staff to...work with the University of Florida and the City of Gainesville to amend the Campus Development Agreement to assure the feasibility of an east-west transportation corridor."

Transcriptions from the video tape of the 20 Feb 2003 MTPO meeting:

Lee Pinkoson, in making the motion to amend the 20-year plan stated: "A couple of months ago we changed the equation by the University coming forth and saying they would like to participate and help come up with an east-west corridor. And I think that because of that that changes everything. ... I think we have the opportunity for an east-west corridor--something that will run from past Hawthorne Road to Newberry to past the Interstate, and I think this is too good an opportunity to just let go." In response to a question by Warren Nielsen as to whether the extension of SW 24th Avenue would be four-lane, Pinkoson replied "Correct."

On 25 Mar 2003, on the basis of previous events and a letter from President Young, the Alachua County Commission voted 3 to 2 to change its planning for SW 24th Street west of SW 34th Street from two lanes to four lanes.

President Young, in a letter to Commission Chair Long:

"The University of Florida believes its contribution of a right-of-way to extend SW 24th Avenue to Archer Road will support the sustainable growth of Gainesville and Alachua County. The University, therefore, will recommend through its Master Plan amendment process that sufficient right-of-way be given to the City of Gainesville/County of Alachua to provide the necessary land to connect SW 24th Avenue to Archer Road."

For images and more information and documentation relevant to the UF Administration's proposed donation of right-of-way from the Natural Area Teaching Laboratory, visit <http://natl.ifas.ufl.edu/24thAve.htm>.