SOUTH FLORIDA
FREIGHT & PASSENGER
RAIL ENHANCEMENT PROJECT

Phase 1A · Rehabilitate Existing Northwood Connection

November 2013

Natural Resources
Technical Memorandum

U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Railroad Administration

TECHNICAL MEMORANDUM

South Florida Freight and Passenger Rail Enhancement Study

Phase 1A - Rehabilitate Existing Northwood Connection; FPID: 434948-1

Palm Beach County, Florida

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The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), in coordination with the Federal Railroad Administration, is conducting the South Florida Freight and Passenger Rail Enhancement Study to evaluate improved freight connectivity between the existing South Florida Rail Corridor (SFRC) and the Florida East Coast (FEC) Railway. The project will enhance freight connectivity between the existing SFRC and the FEC Railway to accommodate existing freight traffic and the projected growth in freight rail operations following the expansion of the Panama Canal and freight intermodal improvements at the Port of Palm Beach, Port Everglades, and PortMiami. The study is being conducted in compliance with federal and state regulations that require engineering and environmental analysis in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (known as NEPA).

The South Florida Freight and Passenger Rail Enhancement Study project involves three interrelated and independent projects being studied concurrently including:

- Phase 1A: Rehabilitate Existing Northwood Connection, Financial Project Number: 434948-1; ETDM Number: N/A; Palm Beach County, Florida
- Phase 1B: IRIS Northeast Connection, Financial Project Number: 433514-1; Miami-Dade County, Florida
- Phase 2: New Northwood Connection, Financial Project Number: 434948-2; ETDM: 14093; Palm Beach County, Florida

The Phase 1A proposed action involves the rehabilitation of the existing single track Northwood Connection between the SFRC and FEC Railway on the existing alignment. The rehabilitated Northwood Connection will not require right-of-way acquisition. The Phase 1A proposed improvements include: the rehabilitation and replacement of approximately 3,725 linear feet of existing track and new connections at the SFRC and FEC Railway; and the implementation of new signal equipment at the grade crossings.

While the South Florida Freight and Passenger Rail Enhancement project would facilitate future passenger rail serve by providing connections between the SFRC and the FEC Railway, the

project does not involve the development of a station or passenger rail service. The Tri-Rail Coastal Link Study (http://www.Tri-RailCoastalLinkStudy.com) proposes reintroducing passenger service along an 85-mile stretch of the FEC Railway corridor between Jupiter and Miami.

Introduction

The purposed of this technical memorandum is to document the existing natural environment conditions (including wetlands and wildlife or wildlife habitat) and document any potential effects to natural environment resources.

The project study area was based on a 1000-foot buffer from the proposed improvements to evaluate the surrounding environmental conditions. The actual construction limits will occur within the existing 30 ft. right-of-way along the existing track alignment. Potential impacts to natural resources were evaluated by a Professional Wetland Scientist and Certified Wildlife Biologist. Figure 1 shows the location of the project and the 1000-foot buffer (study area) that extends from it.

Wetlands

The project corridor was evaluated for wetlands following the methods established in the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Technical Advisory T6640.8A, to fulfill the requirements of USDOT Order 5660.1A. The purpose of this section is to document wetlands in the project study area, the measures implemented to avoid and minimize impacts, the unavoidable impacts, and mitigation for the unavoidable wetland impacts.

This project was developed in accordance with the Presidential Executive Order 11990 dated May 23, 1977. In September, 2013, a field reconnaissance to locate and delineate wetlands within the 1000-foot study area was conducted according to the "Federal Manual for Identifying and Delineating Jurisdictional Wetlands" (United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), 1987), "The Florida Wetlands Delineation Manual" (Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), 1995), the Florida Land Use Cover Classification System (FLUCCS),and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) classification system as described in "Classification of Wetlands and Deepwater Habitats of the United States". The field reconnaissance was conducted with the aid of United States Geological Survey topographic maps, National Wetlands Inventory maps, Natural Resource Conservation Service soil surveys, and aerial photos.

The 1000-foot study area is heavily urbanized with few open areas, and no wetlands were identified within it. The cut banks of the canal in the western portion of the 1000-foot study area are too steep to support jurisdictional wetlands.

The Advance Notification stated; “According to the National Wetlands Inventory (NWI), there are approximately 1.2 acres of wetlands within the 500 foot buffer area. However, there are no wetlands located within the existing alignment or the limits of the proposed improvements.”

Figure 1 shows the location of these NWI wetlands. However, based on recent coordination with them on similar canals, it is not anticipated that the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) or South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) would claim

jurisdiction over any portion of this canal with the 1000-foot study area, and no portion of this canal will be impacted by the project. Establishing the limits of jurisdictional wetlands per the rules of SFWMD and the USACE requires the presence of three parameters: wetland vegetation, hydric soils, and evidence of surface hydrology. No evidence of wetland vegetation was noted in the study area.

Wildlife and Habitat

The purpose of this section is to present the findings of the evaluation of potential effects to protected wildlife and/or wildlife habitat for the proposed project and to meet the requirements of Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended. This assessment was completed in accordance with Part 2, Chapter 27 of FDOT's PD&E Manual (last updated 10/01/91). As such, a Biological Assessment (in accordance with 50 CFR 402.12) was conducted for all species with the potential for involvement. The Biological Assessment included an analysis of the effects of the proposed action on the species and habitat and is documented within this memo.

The Endangered Species Act requires federal agencies, in consultation and with the assistance of the Secretaries of the Departments of Interior and Commerce, to insure that their actions are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of endangered or threatened species or result in the destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat of such species. Under the law, the Secretary of the United States Department of Interior, acting through the USFWS and the Secretary of the United States Department of Commerce, acting through the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), have broad powers to protect and conserve all forms of wildlife, plants, and marine life they find in serious jeopardy.

The Advance Notification stated; "Due to the industrialized and developed nature of the area, limited threatened and/or endangered species and associated habitat exist within the 500 foot buffer distance. Additionally, according to the GIS data in the FDOT Environmental Screening Tool, the project falls within Wood Stork Core Foraging Areas, Scrub Jay Consultation Areas, within West Indian Manatee Consultation Areas and the South Florida Ecosystem Management Area."

The potential involvement with listed species and critical habitat was determined through a Geographic Information System (GIS) analysis, review of existing data and literature, and In, a field reconnaissance conducted in September, 2013. Literature reviewed included FFWCC's "*Florida's Endangered and Threatened Species*" (2013), Florida Natural Areas Inventory's (FNAI's) "*Field Guide to Rare Plants and Animals of Florida*" (2000), and USFWS' "*South Florida Multi-species Recovery Plan*" (1999). All GIS species occurrence data available from the USFWS, FFWCC, and FNAI was also evaluated; including the FFWCC wading bird colony records.

Appendix A contains a list of the species recorded by FNAI in Palm Beach County. No protected species were identified by the GIS as potentially occurring in the vicinity of the 1000-foot study area.

During the field reconnaissance, four Federally-endangered wood storks (*Mycteria americana*) were observed in the southwest portion of the 1000-foot study area, as shown in the photograph below and on Figure 1. However, no impacts to this canal will result from this project and there

is no wood stork foraging habitat within the 1000-foot study area, so no impacts to wood storks are anticipated.

Although the Federally-endangered West Indian manatee (*Trichechus manatus*) may also occur in this canal; no impacts to this canal will result from this project, and no impacts to manatees are anticipated.

FDOT has determined that there will be *no effect* on any protected species. Because the project corridor is abutted by commercial development on both sides, and the primary protected species of concern are avian, it is not anticipated that the mobility or habitat connectivity of avian species will be affected by the proposed project.

Other Protected Natural Resources

None of the following natural resources occur within the 1000-foot study area, and therefore, will not be impacted by the project:

- Aquatic Preserves
- Coastal Barrier Resources
- Coastal Zone Management Area
- Essential Fish Habitat
- Floodplains
- Outstanding Florida Waters
- Wild and Scenic Rivers

References

Florida Department of Environmental Protection. 1995. "The Florida Wetlands Delineation Manual." Tallahassee.

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Florida Department of Transportation. 1999. "Florida Land Use, Cover and Forms Classification System". Tallahassee.

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. 2011. "Florida's Endangered and Threatened Species." Tallahassee.

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FIGURE 1
PHASE 1A NORTHWOOD CONNECTION REHABILITATION
NATURAL RESOURCES TECHNICAL MEMORANDUM

Appendix A

Palm Beach Species - 59 Matches Found

Lichen
Lichen - Cladonia perforata - perforate reindeer lichen

Plant
Dicot - Asimina tetramera - four-petal pawpaw
Dicot - Cucurbita okeechobeensis - Okeechobee gourd
Dicot - Jacquemontia reclinata - beach jacquemontia
Dicot - Lechea divaricata - pine pinweed
Dicot - Polygala smallii - tiny polygala
Dicot - Tephrosia angustissima var curtissii - Curtiss' hoary pea
Dicot - Zanthoxylum coriaceum - Biscayne prickly ash
Fern (Pteridophytes) - Asplenium dentatum - slender spleenwort
Fern (Pteridophytes) - Pecluma ptilodon - swamp plume polypoda fern
Fern (Pteridophytes) - Thelypteris serrata -
Monocot - Calopogon multiflorus -
Monocot - Halophila johnsonii - Johnson's seagrass
Monocot - Nemastylis floridana - celestial lily
Monocot - Sacoila lanceolata var paludicola - Fahkahatchee ladies' -tresses
Monocot - Spiranthes torta - southern ladies'-tresses

Vertebrate
Amphibian - Rana capito - gopher frog
Bird - Ajaia ajaja - roseate spoonbill
Bird - Aphelocoma coerulescens - Florida scrub-jay
Bird - Aramus guarauna - limpkin
Bird - Athene cunicularia floridana - Florida burrowing owl
Bird - Buteo brachyurus - short-tailed hawk
Bird - Caracara cheriway - crested caracara
Bird - Egretta caerulea - little blue heron
Bird - Egretta rufescens - reddish egret
Bird - Egretta thula - snowy egret
Bird - Egretta tricolor - tricolored heron
Bird - Eudocimus albus - white ibis
Bird - Falco sparverius paulus - southeastern American kestrel
Bird - Grus canadensis pratensis - Florida sandhill crane
Bird - Haematopus palliatus - American oystercatcher
Bird - Haliaeetus leucocephalus - bald eagle
Bird - Mycteria americana - wood stork
Bird - Pandion haliaetus - osprey
Bird - Pelecanus occidentalis - brown pelican
Bird - Picoides borealis - red-cockaded woodpecker
Bird - Rostrhamus sociabilis plumbeus - snail kite
Bird - Rynchops niger - black skimmer
Bird - Sterna maxima - royal tern
Bird - Sternula antillarum - least tern
Mammal - Corynorhinus rafinesquii - southeastern big-eared bat
Mammal - Neofiber alleni - round-tailed muskrat
Mammal - Podomys floridanus - Florida mouse
Mammal - Puma concolor coryi - Florida panther
Mammal - Sciurus niger shermani - Sherman's fox squirrel
Mammal - Trichechus manatus - manatee

Reptile - Caretta caretta - loggerhead
Reptile - Chelonia mydas - green turtle
Reptile - Crotalus adamanteus - eastern diamondback rattlesnake
Reptile - Dermochelys coriacea - leatherback
Reptile - Drymarchon couperi - eastern indigo snake
Reptile - Eretmochelys imbricata - hawksbill turtle
Reptile - Gopherus polyphemus - gopher tortoise
Reptile - Lepidochelys kempii - Kemp's ridley
Reptile - Malaclemys terrapin - diamondback terrapin
Reptile - Pituophis melanoleucus mugitus - Florida pine snake
Reptile - Sceloporus woodi - Florida scrub lizard