

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item H-3
April 28, 2015
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Jim Cason
Commissioner Pat Keon
Commissioner Vince Lago
Vice Mayor Frank Quesada
Commissioner Jeannett Slesnick

City Staff

City Manager, Cathy Swanson-Rivenbark
City Attorney, Craig E. Leen
City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman
Deputy City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Public Works Director, Glenn Kephart
Assistant Public Works Director, Jessica Keller

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item H-3 [1:41:53 p.m.]

Update on the Comprehensive Multimodal Transportation Plan scope

Mayor Cason: Last item for City Manager is H-3.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: And we are almost done, but it's an important one. We'll ask Glenn Kephart from the Public Works Department to give you an update with Jessica Keller on what we are doing with the Multimodal Transportation Plan. This was an initiative that you all asked us to begin developing a citywide traffic plan and they are going to give us an update on where we are with it.

Mr. Kephart: Thank you Mayor, Commissioners. As the City Manager said in January you asked us to take a look at – well in recognition that our transportation and traffic concerns in the City are an issue that one of our bigger challenges, and we need to address that in a comprehensive

manner and you asked us to do that by proceeding with a multimodal comprehensive transportation plan. So what we've done is we've developed a draft RFQ (Request For Qualifications) that we will put out on the street to try to find the best transportation firm that can come in and advise us. Our challenges are significant. I mean as the Miami Metro grows, we are in the middle of it and we can't control the number of cars that come in and go out of our City every day, but what we can control is our reaction to that and how we best manage that. The traffic is going to continue to grow and as we continue to grow with smart growth we do need a comprehensive approach. So what I'd like to do is Jessica will go over a little bit the highlights of what the RFQ will do before we go out and it's a draft at this state because we want to have a discussion with you and make sure that we are incorporating everything into this scope of work that will allow us get the best firm that we can to accomplish what we need to accomplish for our City. And then we'd also like to after the scope discussion, have a little bit of discussion about what this means to how we manage our traffic challenges as we are going forward, as we are developing this scope. Some of our traffic challenges are huge and they have a broad effect. If you do something on Granada you can draw a one mile radius around Granada and it's going to impact traffic to that huge of an area. Some of our traffic challenges are very small and they only affect a very minute neighborhood and some of our traffic challenges are somewhere in between there; and this comprehensive transportation plan overlays that, but we should start with an explanation of what we want to, what we hope to accomplish with the transportation plan, such as if you want to go over what's included in it and you can discuss with us if we are missing things, if you think we have it right or don't have it right.

Ms. Keller: Hi. We put together this scope working with Development Services Department and one of the most important things that we are looking to accomplish is to provide a safe and effective multimodal transportation network and provide accessibility to our job centers, but we don't want to sacrifice the high quality of life that exists in our neighborhoods. We need to identify and recommend transportation improvements and make sure we maintain connectivity within our City and within the region. We also want to identify traffic calming opportunities throughout the City. This has been done in the past, we need to update that. The plan will also provide a strategy and project prioritization method. We don't have a whole lot of room to expand capacity so we have to look for opportunities and develop projects and prioritize them. One of the things that I mentioned, we have some existing concerns in the City that we have to address in the meantime as we develop this plan. We routinely meet with the community one, two, three times per week in different neighborhoods to address their concerns, and their continuing theme and that theme is they have concerns about speed and volume. We are going to continue to work with the Police Department; we will provide targeted enforcement in areas to help us with the speeding issues. Sometimes it's the perception of speed, other times there really is a speeding concern within the neighborhoods. We are also going to advance a study to lower the speed limit to 25 miles per hour should the Commission want to pursue that.

Vice Mayor Quesada: Yes, we've discussed it in the past. I actually heard that the biggest issue in the past, and this was discussed 10 or 15 years ago, was that the County required the City to incur the cost of all the signage for everyone coming into the City and everyone leaving the City. Keep that in mind if you haven't heard that already.

Ms. Keller: Yes, we are aware of that, and as a City if that's where we want to go that cost, if that's something that we take on to achieve a goal of increased safety then that's for the Commission.

Vice Mayor Quesada: Do we have an idea what that cost will be?- about \$600,000...

Mr. Kephart: We have a preliminary estimate – we had a preliminary study done of what it would take to lower the speed limit to 25. What would be the process and what would be the cost by David Plummer and Associates last June. I think it was just under \$200,000 for the additional signs.

Commissioner Lago: I think that the issue had to do with the fact of liability, correct?- was the County was pushing liability?

Vice Mayor Quesada: They were discussing liability in the sense of that cost, who was going to be liable for that cost...?

Commissioner Lago: No, but also the issue was in regards to maintenance of the new signs that we were going to put up, who was going to be responsible for that?- that was the liability we discussed.

Mr. Kephart: Yes. We would enter into an agreement. I mean the process as it stands now is the City would enter into an inter-governmental agreement with the County, and we would be responsible for not only the cost of installing the signs, but also for maintaining those signs.

Commissioner Lago: From what I also remember, they had also provided us with a cost for yearly maintenance, an example \$5,000, \$10,000 to maintain the signs, to replace signs that have gone missing, or that have been damaged. So there was also an ongoing cost that was associated with, not just the \$200,000.

Mr. Kephart: That's correct. The signs should have about a ten year life, so you take the \$200,000 over ten years is and you annualize that is about the annual cost. So it's not cost prohibitive from a standpoint of the annual cost, but there is an annual cost.

Mayor Cason: Would that give us the ability to, if we take that on to put signs where we want, sometimes it's the County that tells us where we can put certain types of signs, right?

Mr. Kephart: Yes. The County actually installs most of our signs for us. The actual location of a speed limit sign from a regulatory standpoint, and if we are going to be able to uphold the speeding tickets, they do have to be placed in certain locations according to the traffic standards, so there is some flexibility, but not total.

Commissioner Slesnick: I don't think it's the speed limit so much that causes the issue, the issue is that the laws are not enforced, can we have more enforcement of the speed limit?- the neighbors are always complaining that cars are going down 50 miles an hour down the street, there is not a big difference between 25 and 30 miles per hour. I just think we need more enforcement. Now do you have to have police officers all the time or can you have other people ticket?- I'm not sure.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: That's a discussion that we are working with the Police Department on. Can other non-sworn officials actually issue tickets?- but we recognize that we almost call it the Pinecrest way, if we are going to do this change to 25 miles per hour, in the beginning it will be a very heavily enforced process and then start learning and some of that enforcement then can be more targeted.

Commissioner Slesnick: I just think before we go to the expense of changing all the signs and we have way too many signs in Coral Gables to begin with, in my opinion, is that we should start enforcing the speed limit in various neighborhoods where the residents have been complaining.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: And a part of our neighborhood meeting discussions are followed up with targeted enforcements, so you'll see that our Police Department has actually been very responsive on hearing when it is a speed issue. Sometimes we are hearing that the volume is so intense that people can't speed and then once the volume is reduced then comes the speeding. So it's a very multi-disciplinary approach, but Public Works and Police are working very well together on it.

Mayor Cason: One of the things that I would like to see in the study as well – the public education is just show the public just how much of the traffic is not from Coral Gables. I asked the Chief to look at three elements of the auto accidents. He told me 90 percent involve cars not from Coral Gables. The red light cameras, 73 percent of the tickets are not Coral Gables residents; and of theft from vehicles, 44 percent are not from Coral Gables residents. So it gives you an idea that the vast majority of the traffic we see is coming through the Gables, north,

south, east, west. It would be useful if we can get some more granularity of that, because there is a perception that it's caused by things in Coral Gables, and that's not necessarily the case.

Mr. Kephart: Now that's absolutely a necessary component of the plan is extensive data collection so we can comprehensively looking at our major arterials, what's coming into the City and what's going out of the City, and what are the times of day, and how can that be best managed, and when you do a traffic control major on one location, what is the likely effect in another location, which is one of our challenges that we have.

Commissioner Lago: What is the expected delivery of the plan?

Mr. Kephart: Currently we are looking – because it's going to be a fairly expensive plan. We are going through the process now to get your input. We want to advertise the plan this summer so that we could proceed to interview firms and have the funding for the plan in next year's budget, but there is no reason that we couldn't – we would start that process this summer so that after October we would be ready to come back to the Commission with a recommendation, with a short list of recommendation of firms.

Commissioner Lago: Let me express why I'm asking that question. Obviously, everybody wants a timeframe. We hear from the residents constantly in regards to like what Commissioner Slesnick said about speeding and traffic and cut-through traffic like the Mayor just stated, but I know that everyone, the Commission has been notified by certain individuals who say, I want action in my neighborhood, I want action on my street; and currently what we've been stating to these residents are that we can't provide anything right now because we are moving in a direction of having a comprehensive transportation plan, but we are implementing to the adjacent neighbors devices or traffic devices that will hopefully slow down traffic, or will curb cut-through traffic so all that cut-through traffic and all that speeding will then now move onto their neighborhood. So they are desperate and the answer that I have given to them is, listen you have to wait, we are coming with the transportation plan. To them it's obviously unacceptable, because they are seeing other neighbors are either getting circles, or are either some sort of street humps, or they are having their streets, instead of being widened – different measures that are taken which we can't take in their neighborhood because we are waiting for the transportation plan to come through. I agree with it. I think it's a great idea, I think we need to do this, because if you do something to a certain street, the neighbor is going to be affected. So, I just think that we need to come up with an answer in reference to how we are going to deal with these issues. I know we haven't even had them addressed yet, because that's what the purpose of the plan is, but I think we should be ready because the neighbors are going to start coming to us and saying, if we are doing "X," why can't you help me out?- and they are not going to accept that we don't do anything for a year while we wait for a year to come to fruition.

Mr. Kephart: We would like to have further discussion and we were actually talking about coming back at the next meeting to talk about some interim processes of how we deal with this. There are several categories of our transportation issues, and I use Granada as an example. If you were to do traffic control devices as we saw when we built the Granada pedestrian bridge, and we had to close it for a while. It impacts hugely throughout our City, so it impacts south of U.S.-1 on Miller, as a result of that project. So we know those things need to be handled comprehensively. At the other end of the spectrum, we have an intersection at Pizarro and Majorca. We've met with those neighbors, and we've met with the adjacent neighborhood. The impacts of doing some majors to slow traffic in that area don't go out very far and it has local support. That's the type of a project that we can say, we could continue with those projects, if we have county support for them, in that particular case we do. Then we have sort of the in-between projects, and I'll talk about one of them is Biltmore Drive and that neighborhood.

Commissioner Lago: I was about to mention that.

Mr. Kephart: And they have documented speeding issue and we've met with that neighborhood and the adjacent neighborhood, because what we try to do is not just meet with the street, we meet with the streets surrounding that would be impacted, and that neighborhood as-a-whole hasn't come to a consensus yet as to what they should do. Just look at the one street, they know what they want, if you look at the adjacent streets, they say no, that's going to impact us; and we've been talking about a process that's been used in some other cities where currently the Miami-Dade County requires two-thirds support, say if you are going to put in a traffic control like maybe a speed hump. We need our Fire Department support, that will help slow traffic, two-thirds support on that street, but what we can do to try to get the neighborhood as-a-whole is, as a suggestion, we need to meet with the City Attorney and we want to come back to you on May 12th for further discussion of this is, a process that in this particular case, throw out the example, perhaps two-thirds vote, if you live on the street 100 percent by county regulations, if speed hump devices is going to be in front of your house, but the other streets that may be effected by it, because traffic may divert, need a 50 percent support. So you do an overall community vote and everybody gets involved, gets to be involved and weigh in, the people on the street get a little heavier weighted vote than the people who are on the adjacent streets, but you are able to get neighborhood consensus. So we'd like to have more discussion with you about that because that may be a way to – looking at like that neighborhood doesn't expand citywide like something with Granada would or something of restricting traffic movements off one of the major arterials, say Douglas Road or Red Road or Bird Road. So that's kind of where we are at with those, because we recognize that it may not be acceptable, just to tell people just wait until this plan is done.

Ms. Keller: One other thing I wanted to add was, remember this is a multimodal plan, and we have a number of transportation plans now. We have the bicycle master plan, we have the trolley plan, we are going to fold all of those together to have this comprehensive plan, but that isn't going to stop the implementation of the bike master plan. We are moving forward with pieces of that. Last week we met with the community, along Sevilla from Red Road to Anastasia, and then along Anastasia all the way to Segovia. We got support that we will be installing bicycle lanes on Sevilla to Anastasia, and on Anastasia there will be sharrows. So we will be moving with that tomorrow, if we can, but we are ready to go with that. We will not be implementing anything in the bicycle master plan that would impact the capacity of the network at this point in time, but we can still advance it.

Vice Mayor Quesada: Two things real quick. Speed humps, speed tables, speed bumps, traffic circles, that's what we use in the City of Coral Gables to curb traffic from what I've seen. Neighborhoods complain about speed and slowing things down, we can never get a consensus in the neighborhood for speed bumps, no one ever wants one in front of their house. Same thing with the tables or maybe their street isn't long enough. What I'm asking you guys is to incorporate here, but also for you guys to look into it, see what other municipalities do is, can we do rumble strips?- is there anything else that we can do? I know some municipalities throughout the world they use; they change the color of the pavement. I know we do it on Segovia Circle now and it creates, for lack of a better phrase, it messes with driver's vision and forces them to slow down. Is there anything else that we can do? Can we incorporate that into the list of traffic calming measures?

Ms. Keller: We had a traffic calming 101, that we provide to the communities when we go there, and we show an array of options...

Vice Mayor Quesada: My request to you is, can we provide more options?- that's the question, because I know the speed bumps never works – everyone wants it, and then when you get down to the neighborhood meeting it doesn't pass because the people directly affected don't want it, because they don't want to hear the “du-dunk, du-dunk” of every car driving by and that's what you see with our experience, so are there more options that we can offer, because again, we are not seeing any other types of traffic calming devices being installed by the City.

Ms. Keller: Typically, you aren't seeing them as the offer, the substantial number of options. Residents typically gravitate toward the speed humps and then when it's actually time to implement...

Vice Mayor Quesada: They don't go through with it.

Ms. Keller: Yes. We narrow it down and we get to a point and then we back off, and that's what it's been now. That's not to say it won't change.

Vice Mayor Quesada: Maybe we can do mid-block – Glenn, I discussed it with you, when I say rumble strips, you know it's cobble stone or uneven pavers in a certain spot in the middle of the street to slow people down, because that works as well. When you are driving on the expressway and you get too far off into one lane – I don't know how else to explain it, those were terrible sound effects, but I think that could work in our residential neighborhoods. The point is to slow people down.

Mr. Kephart: I think also part of this comprehensive transportation plan is – we do a traffic calming 101, but it's to look at our tool box that we have and see if there are other innovative things that perhaps we try to stay upon it. We think that we are pretty aware of innovative techniques that are being used out there and are acceptable, but we need to continue to look at that as part of the comprehensive.

Vice Mayor Quesada: I know we might be discussing – I mean it's to slow traffic down.

Commissioner Keon: I think the answer is, the best answer is enforcement and its whether or not how police...

Vice Mayor Quesada: I think that's a piece of the pie, though. As it is we have 13 vehicles on the street, I mean I think the second half of that equation is what infrastructure can we improve to slow vehicles down. We see it with traffic signals, they are very successful.

Commissioner Keon: Yes, they are effective.

Mayor Cason: We'll look forward to what you come up with in your study.

Commissioner Keon: There are like three streets in the North Gables though that I think are three streets all the way from Red to or from Alhambra, I mean from Pardo all the way to LeJeune and those three streets really seem to get an inordinate burden of traffic on them. It may not be speed, because they are so heavily travelled, and the people driving through the City are not terribly courteous when there are trash trucks or garbage trucks or whatever, they drive up on people's lawns to go around them, so that's a real problem too in a lot of neighborhoods. It's just a discourtesy of the people that are cutting through, they don't live here, it's not their City and they are not terribly concerned.

Mr. Kephart: And I think part of it too needs to be a public outreach campaign and I'd like to – I'd liken it for those of us who have lived long enough to remember when there would be ashtrays across the dais, and we'll all be smoking, it was the norm, and right now I think people need to be made aware that it shouldn't be the norm to speed through somebody's neighborhood. It shouldn't be the norm to cut-through somebody's neighborhood to save a minute off your commute. So it's not just the physical side, I think there needs to be a public outreach campaign and also just sort of throw out there is, most communities we interact with agree with us on they face similar challenges. Everybody in the Miami Metro has similar challenges too and most of them probably would support a lower residential speed limit, so maybe we don't have to do this alone, would be something to consider also.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: There is technology today that combines a license plate reader with a speed identifier and able to write tickets, but the State of Florida does not approve that technology. That could be something that through League of Cities, if that's technology you want to encourage, we install it and you want to slow people down, you want to worry about enforcement and how to properly do that, those cameras have the ability to do it. It's something that we can get more information on, and then as a policy you want to encourage that in our forward legislative agenda, we should look at it, but currently the state is not approving it.

Mayor Cason: Maybe additional warnings, maybe issue additional warnings.

Commissioner Keon: I think we talked to Fausto about that, didn't we?- when we talked about legislative...?- what about the ability to track speed and issue traffic citations electronically...

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: A strong hesitancy on behalf of the legislature to embrace that technology is what I heard when I was speaking to Fausto on that.

Commissioner Keon: Yes. I don't know why. Maybe you can ask him.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: You all have a lot of contacts. You have made it very clear each one of you that quality of life is compromised by the volume and speed in our neighborhoods, and you want us to do something about it, and so that's why when Glenn says that the traffic study will cost significant dollars, it's a couple hundred thousand dollars, but we believe that that is an investment worthwhile and that's why we scheduled it so that the funds become available October 1, it's not something that we had budgeted for, but it's something that we are making happen and the way that they are approaching it is a comprehensive citywide approach.

City Attorney Leen: Mr. Mayor, if the Commission will let me, one thing I wanted to do in relation to the speed cameras is, you know under state law as the City Manager aptly said, correctly said, right now you can't ticket people based on these cameras, but I always felt that you could use it as evidence of another offense. We are allowed to collect speed information, so if you could show something more like reckless driving, or careless driving, or imperiling a child, or an assault or a battering with a vehicle, I think you could probably use this evidence. I mean you still have to charge them separately, and I was thinking of putting together an opinion to that effect and maybe talking with some people outside of the City, some attorneys that have worked in this area to see what people think about that, but you know before I do something like that I would want to check with you. The matter just came up so I thought I would raise it.

Commissioner Slesnick: Can we use this technology for warnings like the Mayor said?

City Attorney Leen: What the law indicates and I'll take another look, I can report back with the Manager at the next meeting, but is that you can't use it like a red camera program. You can't have – you can't basically issue tickets.

Commissioner Slesnick: For ticketing, but I mean for a warning...

City Attorney Leen: This is publicly available information, so you can always send a warning to someone about this. Now it may – it doesn't mean that the response might not be, Oh well this is something that is not allowed under state law, why are you doing this on a voluntary basis?

Vice Mayor Quesada: How about we do this though – how about we use the system to see the trends that are happening, so that we could properly direct enforcement to get to those areas that we are seeing a lot of traffic. So that way we are capturing the data, I mean we are a day behind as far as enforcement, but we are correcting the issues with the worse speeding throughout the City.

City Attorney Leen: It's not my place to comment on that, but one thing I think is – it sounds like a good idea though, but one thing for me is that, if I had evidence that someone like on eight occasions drove 60 or 70 miles per hour in a residential zone, I wouldn't need to ticket them, I'd send them a cease and desist letter and I would go seek an injunction against them. So I do think there are other ways to act in these sorts of instances.

Vice Mayor Quesada: Can you provide us a memo as far as what we can do with the technology, what we can't do, so we can make a better informed decision?

City Attorney Leen: Of course.

Vice Mayor Quesada: Thank you.

Mayor Cason: Any other discussion on this?

Commissioner Keon: Yes. One of the other interesting issues with regard to enforcement is, I think the police will tell you that you have to do that enforcement for, there is like a period of time that they have down on it. I don't know whether its 30 days or 20 days, whatever it is that you have to enforce that speed limit in a particular area where there is a problem consistently over a period of time in order to change behavior. So I think so often – I don't know that we really do that, because I don't think we don't have the motor police, the motor police to really do that and I don't know how that is and how they are being deployed or whatever, because it's like one spot to the next spot, to the next spot where you really have to make those changes.

Vice Mayor Quesada: How about if we ask through the Manager that we have the Interim Chief who used to be in charge of specialized enforcement come in to have that conversation with us, so we can make a better informed decision.

Commissioner Keon: Yes. And can work with them on it.

Vice Mayor Quesada: At a future meeting.

Commissioner Keon: Yes.

Mayor Cason: Thank you.

Mr. Kephart: Thank you.

[End: 2:10:36 p.m.]