

Chapter 5

COMMENTS AND COORDINATION

5.1 SCOPING MEETING

The Fort Hamer Bridge Scoping Meeting for this *National Environmental Policy Act of 1969* (NEPA) study was held on Tuesday, August 17, 2010 at the Carlos E. Haile Middle School, 9501 E. State Road (SR) 64, in Bradenton, Florida. An informal open house was held from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m., and the presentation and public comment period was held from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. The purpose of the scoping meeting was to provide an opportunity for the public to participate in the alternatives scoping process for the Fort Hamer Bridge project. The United States Coast Guard (USCG) project manager presided at the meeting. Representatives of Manatee County, the USCG, and its consultant were present at the meeting to discuss the project with the public. See Appendix A-3 for sign-in sheets and speaker cards from this meeting.

A letter announcing the scoping meeting was mailed on July 19, 2010 to public officials, agencies, and property owners within 0.5 mile of the project. A quarter-page display advertisement announcing the meeting was published in the Bradenton Herald on Friday, August 6, 2010. In addition, a Notice of Intent (NOI) for the meeting was published in the Federal Register on Friday, July 9, 2010.

In correspondence dated July 20, 2010, the USCG, as lead federal agency for this study, invited the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), National Marine Fishery Service (NMFS), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to be cooperating agencies in this study. Only the USACE accepted this invitation.

A total of 264 people signed the attendance sheets at the meeting. Aerial photos showing the alternatives under evaluation were on display along with other project information. The presentation portion of the meeting began with introductory remarks by the USCG project manager, followed by a PowerPoint presentation. The presentation included a summary of the need for the project, a brief background of the project, and the alternatives under evaluation.

Following the presentation, the next portion of the meeting was devoted to receiving public comments. Specific comments and questions raised by concerned individuals were answered by email or letter following the meeting. Twenty-four (24) people spoke for the public record at the meeting.

A total of 222 comments have been received. Seventy (70) written comments were received at the scoping meeting, 24 people gave oral comments during the public comment portion of the meeting, and two people gave their comments directly to the court reporter. Forty (40) comments were submitted via the website in the days prior to the meeting. Fifty (50) comments

were submitted via the project website and email prior to the end of the comment period on August 27, 2010. Another 36 comments have been submitted after the comment period ended. **Table 5-1** summarizes comments received to date.

5.2 OTHER PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT EFFORTS

On May 27, 2010 a Manatee County Public Works Department Public Information Meeting was held in Parrish, Florida that discussed several Manatee County projects including the proposed Fort Hamer Bridge. Approximately 100 people were in attendance. Many questions and comments related to the Fort Hamer project focused on:

- Project schedule
- Potential noise impacts
- Potential safety issues (e.g., sidewalks)
- Increased traffic volumes

On July 20, 2010 representatives of the consulting team met with the Waterlefe Homeowners Association Bridge Committee at the Waterlefe Clubhouse. Approximately 40 people were in attendance. A brief PowerPoint presentation was given providing an overview of the project and the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process. Afterwards there was a question and answer session that addressed the following issues:

- Project schedule
- Potential noise impacts
- Potential safety issues (e.g., sidewalks)
- Increased traffic volumes
- Impact to property values
- Bridge aesthetics/lighting
- Potential personal liability issues related to errant golf balls striking cars on the bridge
- Future impacts to access via Waterlefe's northern, secondary entrance

Multiple update presentations have been made to the Manatee County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) since the beginning of the EIS for this project. Each Manatee County BOCC meeting is broadcast on local public access cable television and agendas are published via the County's webpage and provided to residents on the BOCC mailing list.

**TABLE 5-1
COMMENTS RECEIVED**

Comment	Received Prior to Scoping Meeting (Prior to 8-17-10)	Received at Scoping Meeting (8-17-10)	Received During Comment Period (8-18-10 to 8-27-10)	Received After Comment Period (After 8-27-10)	Total
Use and/or improve existing routes and/or bridges.	10	24	12	5	51
Existing routes are already too congested.	10	21	4	3	38
The Fort Hamer Bridge would cause increased traffic.	7	11	5	2	25
The Fort Hamer Bridge would save time/gas/costs.	6	16	5	6	33
The Fort Hamer Bridge would not save time/gas/costs.	1	6	3	2	12
The Fort Hamer Bridge would cause negative noise and/or light impacts.	3	16	9	4	32
The Fort Hamer Bridge would cause negative environmental impacts.	15	29	16	6	66
The Fort Hamer Bridge would cause negative impacts to wildlife.	1	16	6	1	24
The Fort Hamer Bridge would be wasteful spending of County money in this economic downturn.	15	27	17	9	68
The Fort Hamer Bridge would create negative overall safety and/or bus stop safety impacts for pedestrians, bicyclists, and children.	17	19	2	5	43
Questioning the design of the Fort Hamer Bridge, access to and from the Fort Hamer Bridge, and/or other road widenings instead of building the Fort Hamer Bridge.	6	19	6	1	32
The negative impacts caused by the accidents on I-75 and US 301 would be repeated without the Fort Hamer Bridge.	9	12	13	1	35
The Fort Hamer Bridge is needed to create a new north/south route and to serve as an emergency evacuation route.	12	39	17	5	73
The Fort Hamer Bridge would cause negative impacts to boaters.	2	8	2	1	13
The Fort Hamer Bridge is being built for political reasons and/or governmental rules have changed since the first analysis.	7	6	2	2	17
The Fort Hamer Bridge is a "Bridge to Nowhere."	3	6	0	1	10
The Fort Hamer Bridge would cause an increase in property values.	2	4	0	3	9
The Fort Hamer Bridge would cause a decrease in property values.	3	9	2	1	15
Commenter is a Waterlefe resident: The Fort Hamer Bridge would negatively impact Waterlefe.	11	16	5	1	33

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**TABLE 5-1 (CONTINUED)
COMMENTS RECEIVED**

Comment	Received Prior to Scoping Meeting (Prior to 8-17-10)	Received at Scoping Meeting (8-17-10)	Received During Comment Period (8-18-10 to 8-27-10)	Received After Comment Period (After 8-27-10)	Total
Waterlefe residents were aware of the Fort Hamer Bridge being built when they purchased their homes.	7	3	9	0	19
The Fort Hamer Bridge would cause negative impacts to historic Fort Hamer and/or the Indian Trail.	1	3	1	0	5
The Fort Hamer Bridge is not necessary because the population has decreased and/or development has stopped.	4	7	5	3	19
The Fort Hamer Bridge would create growth and/or jobs.	1	17	7	4	29
The original analysis of the Fort Hamer Bridge is no longer valid.	4	6	2	0	12
Request to be added to the project mailing list.	1	1	0	6	8
Total Commenters FOR the Fort Hamer Bridge Project	17	46	21	16	100
Total Commenters AGAINST the Fort Hamer Bridge Project	23	50	29	14	116
Total Commenters	40	96	50	36	222

A project website, www.forthamerbridge.com, has been active since May 2010. The Fort Hamer website provides an overview of the Proposed Action, alternatives under consideration, a project schedule, notification of upcoming meetings, and a portal for comment submittal is linked to the USCG (www.Regulations.gov).

5.3 AGENCY COORDINATION

Prior to the development of this Final EIS (FEIS) as a USCG document, the Fort Hamer Bridge project was led by the FHWA and the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) during the period 1999-2006. During that period, multiple meetings were held in association with the development of the FHWA/FDOT Draft EIS (DEIS). The Comments and Coordination chapter of the last version of that DEIS can be found in Appendix K.

In May of 2010, Manatee County restarted efforts to complete the Fort Hamer EIS with USCG as the Federal Lead Agency. The following section summarizes agency coordination and consultation efforts that have occurred from 2010 to date. Copies of all correspondence can be found in Appendix A-4.

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC)

In response to URS requests, FWC provided mapping identifying:

- Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas (SHCAs)
- Prioritized SHCAs
- Species Richness
- Priority Wetlands
- Florida Land Cover – 2003
- Manatee mortality and calving information

FWC also noted that similar mapping should be requested from the Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI).

Department of Homeland Security/United States Coast Guard (DHS/USCG)

On Friday, July 9, 2010, a Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS was published in the Federal Register (75 FR 39555), which included notice of the Public and Agency Scoping Meeting (detailed in Section 5.1).

On July 20, 2010, DHS/USCG, submitted a Letter of Invitation to the following federal agencies to participate in the development of the Fort Hamer EIS as a Cooperating Agency:

- NMFS
- USACE
- U.S. Department of Transportation/FHWA
- FWS
- EPA

National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS)

In a letter dated July 27, 2010, the NMFS declined the invitation to participate as a Cooperating Agency. On July 5, 2013 a copy of the DEIS, including the Biological Assessment (BA) and Wetlands Evaluation Report (WER) was provided to the NMFS for their review. On July 24, 2013 the USCG initiated *Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act*, as amended, (MSFCMA) consultation with the NMFS.

On August 8, 2013 the NMFS responded with comments on the DEIS, BA, and WER and requested additional information for NMFS' review, including a recommendation that an *Endangered Species Act of 1973*, as amended (ESA) consultation on smalltooth sawfish be conducted. In emails dated August 27 and 29, 2013 the NMFS requested additional information regarding project-related impacts to estuarine resources. In a letter dated September 18, 2013, the USCG provided responses to the NMFS' comments and requested initiation of ESA Section 7 consultation for the smalltooth sawfish. On October 2, 2013 the NMFS requested additional information regarding project impacts and construction methodology. A response to this request was provided to NMFS on October 9, 2013. On December 11, 2013, the NMFS issued an ESA concurrence letter to the USCG. On December 16, 2013, the NMFS issued a MSFCMA concurrence letter to the USCG.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)

In a letter dated July 29, 2010, the USACE accepted the invitation to participate as a Cooperating Agency. The DEIS was released for public review on July 5, 2013 with a copy provided to the USACE. On August 23, 2013 the USACE responded with comments on the DEIS. Each USACE comment is provided below followed by a response to each comment.

USACE Comments on the DEIS

Comments on the DEIS received from the USACE, dated 23 August 2013. Responses to comments are shown in bold.

Chapter 1: No comments on purpose and need. The stated project purpose, "...to provide an alternative north/south transportation route between high-growth areas of Manatee County located east of Interstate 75 (I-75), separated by the Manatee River and to improve regional

mobility” is acceptable to the Corps. The documentation of the need for the project is also acceptable.

Response: Comment noted.

Chapter 2: The Corps offers the following comment on Chapter 2:

1. Please provide additional details on the alternative alignments considered by Manatee County for the Fort Hamer Bridge, including a comparison of impacts to waters of the United States associated with each alignment. If there is an alternative alignment that has less impact than the proposed alignment, please explain why that alignment is not reasonable or practicable.

Response: The alternatives considered are detailed in Section 2.0. The impacts resulting from implementation of the alternatives are presented in Section 4.0 The two (2) build alternatives carried forward in the DEIS for evaluation were the Fort Hamer and Rye Road Alternatives.

The wetland impact acreage reported in the DEIS for the Fort Hamer Alternative was incorrectly reported due to a database error; the FEIS presents the corrected wetland impact acreage. The following summarizes the wetland impacts associated with the two build alternatives:

Impact	Fort Hamer Alternative (acres)	Rye Road Alternative (acres)
Permanent Dredge/Fill	2.05	2.51
Permanent Shading	1.01	0.01
Secondary ¹	1.28	0.00

¹ Based on SWFWMD criteria

Additional impacts associated with the alternatives include:

- Relocations – 4, Fort Hamer Alternative 0
- Protected Species – 10, Fort Hamer Alternative 9
- Noise – 183 noise-sensitive receptors, Fort Hamer Alternative 39
- Contamination – 14 potential sites, Fort Hamer Alternative 1

Furthermore, emergency response times are not improved by the Rye Road Alternative, hurricane evacuation capacity is not improved by the Rye Road Alternative, and construction costs are significantly higher for the longer Rye Road Alternative (\$23.9 million for the Fort Hamer Alternative and \$54.4 million for the Rye Road Alternative).

2. Chapter 2 should offer an explanation as to why the Fort Hamer Alternative does not require any road expansions to accommodate the proposed two-lane bridge, yet the Rye Road

Alternative requires the expansion of approximately 10 miles of roads from two lanes to four lanes, including a section of Fort Hamer Road that is within both alternatives' study areas. If the Fort Hamer Alternative does require road expansions, the impacts associated with the expansions, especially to wetlands and other surface waters, need to be identified and considered in the EIS.

Response: There is a need for 2-lanes of additional capacity across the Manatee River in eastern Manatee County. With the Fort Hamer Alternative this is achieved with a 2-lane bridge connecting 2 existing 2-lane roadways (Fort Hamer Road and Upper Manatee River Road). With the Rye Road Alternative, the existing 2-lane bridge is expanded to 4-lanes. This requires Rye Road to be widened to 4-lanes south to a logical termini (SR 64) and widened to 4-lanes north to Golf Course Road, Golf Course Road widened to 4-lanes to Fort Hamer Road and Fort Hamer Road widened to 4-lanes to a logical termini (US 301).

Chapter 3: No comments on Chapter 3.

Chapter 4: The Corps offers the following comments on Chapter 4:

1. Section 4.3.2.1: Please note that the Corps also considers the consideration of offsite alternatives to be part of avoidance. Also, consideration of alternate on-site alignments as described in the comment on Chapter 2 above, should also be part of the consideration of minimization.

Response: Section 2.2 Alternatives Considered, including Transportation Systems Management (TSM) and Multimodal Improvements, (noted above as offsite alternatives). Section 2.3.1 discusses the Step 1 screening process. During this process these two alternatives were eliminated from further consideration because they did not meet the purpose and need stated in Section 2.0.

2. In Section 4.3.2.4, the DEIS states "In Florida, the USACE has also adopted UMAM for assessment of wetland impacts and mitigation." Although the Jacksonville District accepts UMAM, and recommends that it be used to allow consistency with state and local functional assessments of wetland impacts and mitigation, we cannot and do not require or prohibit any assessment methodology. The Corps recommends revising this sentence to say "In Florida, the USACE also accepts UMAM for assessment of wetland impacts and mitigation, with some changes from the state implementation."

Response: This change has been made to Section 4.3.2.4 of the FEIS and in Section 3.3 of the Wetlands Evaluation Report (Appendix D of the FEIS).

3. The Corps accepts the wetland impact acreages, functional assessments, and conceptual mitigation for the purpose of comparing alternatives. We reserve the right to review and approve future avoidance and minimization measures, the applicant's wetland delineations and determinations, the final impact acreages including secondary impacts, functional assessments, and mitigation plans pursuant to the Corps permitting process. The Corps has provided information about the Corps' mitigation plan requirements to Manatee County.

Response: Comment noted.

4. The Corps acknowledges the ‘may affect, not likely to adversely affect’ determination for the wood stork. The statement that Manatee County will mitigate all impacts to wood stork suitable foraging habitat should be revised to state that the County will provide suitable foraging habitat compensation within the Core Foraging Area of the affected colony site(s) equivalent to the impacted SFH in accordance with the Wood Stork Foraging Assessment Procedure, and that is not contrary to the USFWS’s Habitat Management Guidelines for the Wood Stork in the Southeast Region. Otherwise, based on the September 2008 effect determination for the wood stork in central and north peninsular Florida, as developed by the Corps and the USFWS, either of the action alternatives would appear to result in a ‘may affect’ determination for the wood stork.

Response: This change has been made to Section 4.3.5.1 of the FEIS.

5. Section 4.3.5.1 should provide additional explanation on how the ‘may affect, not likely to adversely affect’ determination was made for the eastern indigo snake for both action alternatives, and for the Florida scrub jay and crested caracara for the Rye Road alternative.

Response: Section 4.3.5.1 provides only a summary listing of the effect determinations for listed species. The reader is referred to the Biological Assessment in Appendix E of the EIS for details on how the effect determinations were made.

6. The Corps’ 404(b)1 Guidelines state that the Corps can only approve the Least Environmentally Damaging Practicable Alternative (LEDPA). In addition, both the 404(b)1 Guidelines and the 404(b)1 Mitigation Memorandum of Agreement between the Corps and EPA state that compensatory mitigation cannot be used in the alternatives analysis and the determination of the LEDPA.

Response: Comment noted. Additionally, the wetland impact acreage reported in the DEIS for the Fort Hamer Alternative was incorrectly reported due to a database error; the FEIS presents the corrected wetland impact acreage. The following summarizes the wetland impacts associated with the two build alternatives:

Impact	Fort Hamer Alternative (acres)	Rye Road Alternative (acres)
Permanent Dredge/Fill	2.05	2.51
Permanent Shading	1.01	0.01
Secondary ¹	1.28	0.00

¹ Based on SWFWMD criteria

7. Section 4.7 states “The Fort Hamer Alternative would have larger impacts on natural resources compared to the Rye Road Alternative. A greater amount of wetlands and floodplains would be affected by the construction of the new bridge for the Fort Hamer Alternative than would be impacted by the Rye Road Alternative. Chapter 4 describes the following impact figures for the two alternatives (based on a 25-foot buffer as described in Section 4.3.2.2):

- Fort Hamer Alternative: 2.71 acres fill, 2.61 acres shading, 1.12 acres secondary

- Rye Road Alternative: 2.51 acres fill, 0.01 acre shading, 0.00 acre secondary

Response: As described above, the wetland impact acreage associated with the Fort Hamer Alternative has been corrected in the FEIS and the wording in Section 4.7 revised to reflect the corrected impact acreage.

However, Table 2-4 describes the following potential impacts (presumably direct and secondary) to wetlands based on a 200-foot buffer:

- Alternative 2 (Fort Hamer Alternative): 73.8 acres
- Alternative 3 (Rye Road Alternative): 86.5 acres

And Table 2-8 describes potential impacts to wetlands based on a 110-foot buffer:

- Alternative 2 (Fort Hamer Alternative): 7.5 acres
- Alternative 3 (Rye Road Alternative): 12.28 acres

8. The Corps requests that the USCG include discussion of the area of potential wetland impact within these greater buffer distances in its Chapter 4 discussion of comparative impacts between alternatives.

Response: The acreages presented in Chapter 2 and the tables therein quantify the existing resources (including wetlands) within the prescribed buffers for each of the preliminary alternatives. The term “impacts” as used in this chapter represents a hypothetical loss of the resource if the alternative were built out to the buffer limits. The true impacts associated with the build alternatives are first presented in Chapter 3; these are the impacts that would actually result from construction of the alternative.

9. The comment for Chapter 2 about impacts associated with road expansions for the Fort Hamer Alternative applies to Chapter 4 as well.

Response: See previous response.

10. It should be noted that some of the wetlands potentially impacted by the proposed project may be areas used as mitigation for wetland impacts in previous Corps permits. For example, wetlands 1 and 2 within the Fort Hamer Alternative appear to have been mitigation areas for the adjacent Waterlefe project. If it is determined that mitigation areas will be impacted, then either the Corps will require in its permit review, or ask the USCG to require its permit review, that mitigation for these impacts include additional compensation to replace the lost mitigation value.

Response: Proposed impacts to wetland mitigation areas that have been deemed successful and released by the agencies from further monitoring are treated the same as any other wetland impact; i.e., the amount of mitigation required to off-set the proposed impact is evaluated with a UMAM analysis on the actual impact area and not on previously impacted wetlands associated with other projects.

Chapter 5: As described elsewhere in the Draft EIS, the Corps accepted the invitation to become a cooperating agency. On page 5-6, there is a statement that we declined.

Response: Page 5-6 has been corrected to state that the Corps accepted the invitation to participate as a Cooperating Agency.

Chapter 6: No comments on Chapter 6

Chapter 7: No comments on Chapter 7

Chapter 8: No comments on Chapter 8

Chapter 9: No comments on Chapter 9

Appendix A: No comments on Appendix A

Appendix B: No comments on Appendix B

Appendix C: No comments on Appendix C

Appendix D: The Corps offers the following comments on Appendix D:

1. The comment for Chapter 2 about impacts associated with road expansions for the Fort Hamer Alternative applies to Appendix D as well.

Response: See response to Chapter 2 comments above.

2. The Corps' comments for Chapter 4 about wetlands apply to Appendix D as well.

Response: See response to Chapter 4 comments above

Appendix E: The Corps offers the following comments on Appendix E:

1. The Corps recommends including the comparative information on potential impacts to listed species habitat, such as the 17 acres of upland habitat within the Fort Hamer Alternative and the 38 acres of upland habitat within the Rye Road Alternative, in the Chapter 4 discussion of the alternatives.

Response: The 17 acres and 38 acres of uplands referred to in Appendix E (Biological Assessment) as being impacted are artifacts from previous working drafts of the DEIS and are not correct. Implementation of the Fort Hamer Alternative would result in the conversion of approximately 19.4 acres of upland open land and 6.8 acres of upland forest to roadway and associated facilities. Implementation of the Rye Road Alternative would result in the conversion of approximately 19.0 acres of agriculture (mostly pasture), 3.0 acres of upland open land, and 7.5 acres of upland forest to roadway and associated facilities. This information is presented in Chapter 4 and has been corrected in Appendix E.

2. The Corps recommends including additional information on what types of “suitable habitat” are present within the two alternatives in the discussion of potential impacts to the eastern indigo snake. For example, the discussion of impacts to the gopher tortoise describes 37 acres of upland habitat within the Rye Road alignment. How much of this is pasture, how much is undisturbed, how much is xeric, etc.

Response: See response to Appendix E, No. 1 above.

Appendix F: No comments on Appendix F

Appendix G: No comments on Appendix G

Appendix H: No comments on Appendix H

Appendix I: No comments on Appendix I

Appendix J: No comments on Appendix J

Appendix K: No comments on Appendix K

U.S. Department of Transportation/Federal Highway Administration (DOT/FHWA)

In a letter dated July 29, 2010, the FHWA declined the invitation to participate as a Cooperating Agency.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS)

In a letter dated August 24, 2010, the FWS declined the invitation to participate as a Cooperating Agency. A copy of the EIS, including the BA, was provided to the FWS on July 5, 2013. On July 24, 2013 the USCG initiated consultation with the FWS pursuant to Section 7 of the ESA. The FWS provided comments on the DEIS, BA, and ESA Section 7 consultation request on August 23, 2013. The USCG responded to the FWS with additional information on September 13, 2013. On November 29, 2013, the FWS issued an ESA concurrence letter to the USCG.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

In a letter dated August 19, 2013, the EPA responded with comments on the DEIS. Each EPA comment is provided below followed by a response to each comment in bold.

EPA Comments on the DEIS

Based on our review of the DEIS, US EPA's environmental concerns are related to the footprint of the Rye Road alternative evaluated, and the construction methods and BMPs implemented during the construction of the bridge.

Rye Road Alternative

This Alternative proposes a widening of a 10+ mile segment of a road and the addition of a two-lane bridge across the Manatee River. The conceptual design and typical section shows a total width of 110' of ROW. Since this alternative widens a road segment that is more than 10 mile, minimizing the foot print can significantly reduce the impact. It is recommended to examine other alternate sections that can accommodate a 4-lane road. Alternate sections may include ones with narrower median. It is recommended to investigate the possibility of reducing the footprint of this proposed roadway while keeping the capacity near the target VMTs.

Response: The proposed typical section for the Rye Road Alternative conforms to Manatee County Transportation Department standard and AASHTO Greenbook criteria for suburban areas. Based on safety considerations and design speeds the proposed median of 22 feet is at minimum standards as well as clear zones. Sidewalks are required by County and the bicycle lane is collocated in the minimum paved shoulder width of 4 feet for a suburban typical section.

Construction Method and BMPs for the Fort Hamer Alternative

EPA recommends including more details and specifics regarding construction methods and protection measures, especially for the Fort Hamer Road new bridge Alternative. Since the new bridge will be significantly longer (2,570 feet), it is necessary to elaborate on the construction methods and techniques, on how materials will be transported to the site, and what additional specific measures and BMPs will be in place to minimize impact on the wetlands and aquatic resources in the area. Quantifying impacts on these resources can differ significantly with different construction techniques.

Response: It is not possible to elaborate on specific construction methods and techniques and what specific measures and BMPs will be in place until a construction contractor is selected for the project and he determines which methods/techniques he will employ. Without knowing specifics, we can state in general terms that the construction contractor may elect to use a temporary trestle from which to construct much of the proposed bridge. The temporary trestle would extend across the wetland areas on both sides of the main channel and would result in fewer wetland impacts than placing a temporary causeway or mats across the wetlands. The temporary trestle would not span the channel of the river; work at this segment of the bridge would likely be conducted from barges. The wetland impacts presented in the DEIS and Wetland Evaluation Report reflect the permanent wetland impacts resulting from the proposed bridge and the temporary impacts associated with a temporary construction trestle.

The concrete piles for the proposed bridge will likely be driven with a hydraulic hammer, however, there is a potential for the contractor to use water-jetting to start the piles.

It is envisioned that materials will be delivered to the construction site via truck and by barge.

State of Florida Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO)

In a letter dated January 3, 2013 DHS/USCG submitted the Cultural Resource Assessment Survey (CRAS) for the Fort Hamer EIS for review and concurrence.

In a letter dated February 6, 2013 the State of Florida SHPO concurs with the findings found within the submitted CRAS and finds the CRAS in compliance with Chapter 1A-46 FAC.

Seminole Tribe of Florida

In a letter dated August 4, 2010, the Seminole Tribe of Florida notes that “[the tribe] appreciates the invitation to this meeting [scoping] but is unable to attend.”

A meeting was held on January 7, 2011 with the Seminole Tribe of Florida to update the Tribe on the status of the project as a USCG led EIS. During that meeting the reduction of the scale of the project was discussed and the commitment from Manatee County to place a historic marker/plaque at the bridge to commemorate the events related to Fort Hamer and the Second Seminole War.

In a letter dated November 20, 2012, the Tribe acknowledges the initiation of government-to-government consultation as part of the Section 106 process.

In a letter dated January 2, 2013, DHS/USCG submitted the CRAS for the Fort Hamer EIS for review and concurrence.

In an e-mail dated March 11, 2013, the Seminole Tribe of Florida communicated with DHS/USCG that Tribe still “has a desire” to erect a commemorative marker/plaque in association with the proposed bridge.

Seminole Nation of Oklahoma

In a letter dated January 2, 2013, DHS/USCG submitted the CRAS for the Fort Hamer EIS for review and concurrence.

5.4 PUBLIC HEARING

The USCG, in cooperation with Manatee County, conducted a public meeting for the proposed construction of a highway bridge across the Manatee River in Manatee County on Wednesday, August 7, 2013 at the Bradenton Area Civic Center (aka Manatee County Civic Center), 1 Habon Blvd., Palmetto, Florida 34221.

The purpose of the meeting was to receive comments on the DEIS and the proposed project's impact on river navigation. The DEIS was on display for public review at the Coast Guard District, Manatee County Chamber of Commerce, Manatee County Central Library, and Manatee County Rocky Bluff Library, and on the USCG website prior to the meeting and for at least 10 days following the meeting.

An invitational letter for the public meeting was mailed to property owners and interested parties on July 3, 2013 and an email was sent to public officials and agencies on July 3, 2013. A document availability notification and meeting announcement was published in the *Bradenton Herald* on July 17 and July 29, 2013.

The formal presentation began at approximately 4:00 p.m. on August 7, 2013 with Randall Overton, USCG Project Manager, presiding. Marty Peate, URS Project Manager, provided a PowerPoint presentation, which included project history, a description of alternatives, and the purpose and need for the project. Following the formal presentation by the USCG and its consultant, oral statements were taken from those who had completed speaker request cards. The formal presentation and oral statements were recorded by a court reporter and has been included in an official transcript. All interested parties were afforded the opportunity to present data, views and comments, orally or in writing, on navigation, environmental impacts and historic preservation concerns.

A total of 402 people signed the attendance sheets at the meeting. Meeting handouts were provided to meeting attendees. Comment forms were available at the registration tables and at comment tables in the lobby area. Participants were encouraged to fill out a speaker request card if they desired to speak at the meeting. Twenty-nine (29) people filled out speaker cards, and 28 people spoke for the public record during the formal meeting.

Table 5-2 provides a tally of the number of written comments received as a result of this public meeting with a general summary of the issues and concerns:

A CD containing the comments received as a result of this public meeting, sign-in sheets, speaker cards, and a copy of the official public meeting transcript is attached to this summary.

**TABLE 5-2
SUMMARY OF COMMENTS RECEIVED AT THE 08/07/13 PUBLIC MEETING**

Description	Total	In Favor	Oppose	Issues/Concerns
Written Comments completed and submitted at the public meeting	82	64	18	8 – Traffic related concerns 3 – Bridge is for developers 2 – Boat/navigation safety 1 – Cultural resources specific to the location of Fort Hamer 1 – Noise 3 – General
Petitions submitted by a speaker at the public meeting	447	447	0	
CD submitted by a speaker from the For Our Bridge website	766	766	0	
Oral comments made at the public meeting	28	22	6	1 – Purpose and Need 1 – Aesthetics
Comments from Federal Register Docket website	113	96	24	4 – Traffic related concerns 4 – Environmental concerns (wildlife, wetlands) 3 – Visual and aesthetic 11 – Purpose and need 1 – Noise 2 – Water quality 2 – Navigation 1 – Logical Termini 1 – Fort Hamer Park and Boat Ramp 1 – Emergency Response
Total	1,436	1,395	48	

5.4.1 RESPONSES TO PUBLIC COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC HEARING

As noted in Table 5-2, over 1,400 comments were received during the Public Hearing comment period. Of those comments, 48 were in opposition to the proposed project. The following section summarizes these comments into 12 categories (Purpose and Need, Traffic, Boat Safety, Private Interests are Driving the Bridge, Noise, Aesthetics, Environmental Concerns, Water Quality, Cultural Resources, Logical Termini, Fort Hamer Park and Boat Ramp, and Emergency Response) and provides responses. The following section addresses those comments received from the public.

Purpose and Need

Several comments mention that the Purpose and Need is flawed with no specific indication of which element or elements are flawed. The stated Purpose and Need as found in Chapter 1, is to:

- Accommodate existing and project growth in eastern Manatee County:

- Section 1.2.2, Population and Employment Growth – based on 2010 U.S. Census data, Manatee County has a population of 322,833, which is a 22.3 percent increase from 264,002 in 2010. Within the census tracts inside the project area (Figure 1-1), that population has grown from 21,002 in 2000 to 47,643 in 2010, a 128.6 percent increase. The Countywide population is projected to grow to 447,910 by 2035. *The Fort Hamer Alternative is centered on the area of current and projected growth.*
- Improve the level of service (LOS) of the local roadway network:
 - Section 1.2.3, Improvements to LOS on the Local Roadway Network – Table 1-2 summarizes the No-Build Alternative annual average daily traffic (AADT) volumes in 2015 (opening year) and 2035 (design year) on major roadways in the project area. These volumes were compared to the Fort Hamer Road and Rye Road Alternatives to identify which alternative yielded the greatest network-wide improvements to volumes and, therefore, LOS. *The Fort Hamer Alternative provides the best LOS results along the corridor and throughout the network.*
- Improve emergency response times:
 - Section 1.2.4, Emergency Response and Evacuation Enhancement – according to Manatee County Emergency Medical Services (EMS) records, the current (2013) average response time for the 17 ambulances Countywide is 7.5 minutes. The National Fire Protection Association’s (NFPA’s) Standard 1710 states that for Fire Suppression Services Deployment (NFPA 1710 §5.2.4) and Emergency Medical Services Deployment (NFPA 1710 §5.3.3.3) of Initial Arriving Company shall be within 4.0 minutes of the incident 90 percent if the time. *The Fort Hamer Alternative provides the greatest improvements to emergency response times.*
- Improve hurricane evacuation capacity across the Manatee River:
 - Section 1.2.5, Hurricane Evacuation – in 2010, the State of Florida State Emergency Response Team (SERT) developed a Statewide Regional Evacuation Study Program which examined evacuation clearance times for 11 emergency management regions within the state. Manatee County is within the Tampa Bay region along with Pinellas, Hillsborough, and Pasco counties. Tables 1-3 and 1-4 summarize operation clearance times and maximum evacuating times for each of the counties and the region as a whole. Manatee County requires between 10.0 and 69.5 hours to evacuate up to 284,000 persons. During a regional evacuation the clearance time increases to 11.0 to 75.0 for 660,000 persons. *The Fort Hamer Alternative provides a local, parallel alternative to I-75 for north/south evacuation.*

Traffic

Concerns related to the general increase in traffic volumes from the Fort Hamer Alternative with the introduction of a new crossing connecting two existing roadways including safety (bicycles

and pedestrians), proximity to Annie Lucy Williams Elementary School, and access and egress to the Waterlefe Community on the southern shore of the Manatee River.

Table 4-6 summarizes the projected traffic conditions for the No-Build Alternative, Fort Hamer Alternative, and Rye Road Alternative. The following is information found in that table:

Roadway Segment	2011	2015			2035		
	No-Build AADT	No-Build AADT	Fort Hamer Alternative AADT	Rye Road Alternative AADT	No-Build AADT	Fort Hamer Alternative AADT	Rye Road Alternative AADT
Upper Manatee River Road	5,500 – 8,300	5,900 – 9,100	17,400 – 19,500	5,300	9,800 – 14,500	23,600 – 27,200	10,900 – 14,500
Fort Hamer Road	300 – 2,700	1,400 – 5,200	14,500 – 17,400	800 – 17,400	2,100 – 10,500	15,400 – 23,600	2,100 – 21,200
Rye Road	2,800 – 5,700	2,900 – 7,000	2,900 – 7,000	14,000 – 14,500	15,600 – 19,800	6,500 – 9,400	23,200 – 24,000
Golf Course Road	1,800	1,100	3,700	9,800	11,500	3,000	22,900
I-75	90,500	130,900	122,900	126,600	164,700	163,300	165,200

Traffic volumes for both Build Alternatives increase the number of vehicles on either Fort Hamer Road or Rye Road. The Fort Hamer Alternative in 2015 reduces volumes on I-75 by 8,000 vehicles per day (vpd) and in 2035 reduces volumes in Golf Course Road by 8,500 vpd and on I-75 by 1,400 vpd. Conversely, the Rye Road Alternative reduces volumes on I-75 by 3,700 vpd and in 2035 increases volumes in Golf Course Road by 11,400 vpd and on I-75 by 500 vpd. The recommended Fort Hamer Alternative has a greater regional benefit to the transportation network by removing vehicles from other segments of the network.

The recommended Fort Hamer Alternative typical sections for the roadway and bridge call for a 5-foot sidewalk and a 4-foot bike lane on the east side for both the roadway and bridge. In conjunction with the proposed typical section, Manatee County is currently constructing sidewalks on the east and west side of Fort Hamer Road from the river north to Annie Lucy Williams Elementary.

In the area of Annie Lucy Williams Elementary, Manatee County is also currently under design and permitting for roadway improvements to include widening, shoulder improvements, sidewalks, and intersection improvements for right- and left-turn lanes (see Table 2-10, Current CIP Projects).

Waterlefe residents will have right-in/right-out access at Winding Stream Way and Upper Manatee River Road. To travel north across the river (currently a movement that does not exist) vehicles travel south to a new signalized intersection approximately 750 feet south and perform a U-turn.

The proposed improvements are based on population and traffic generation projections developed using approved and adopted Future Land Use mapping from Manatee County. Table

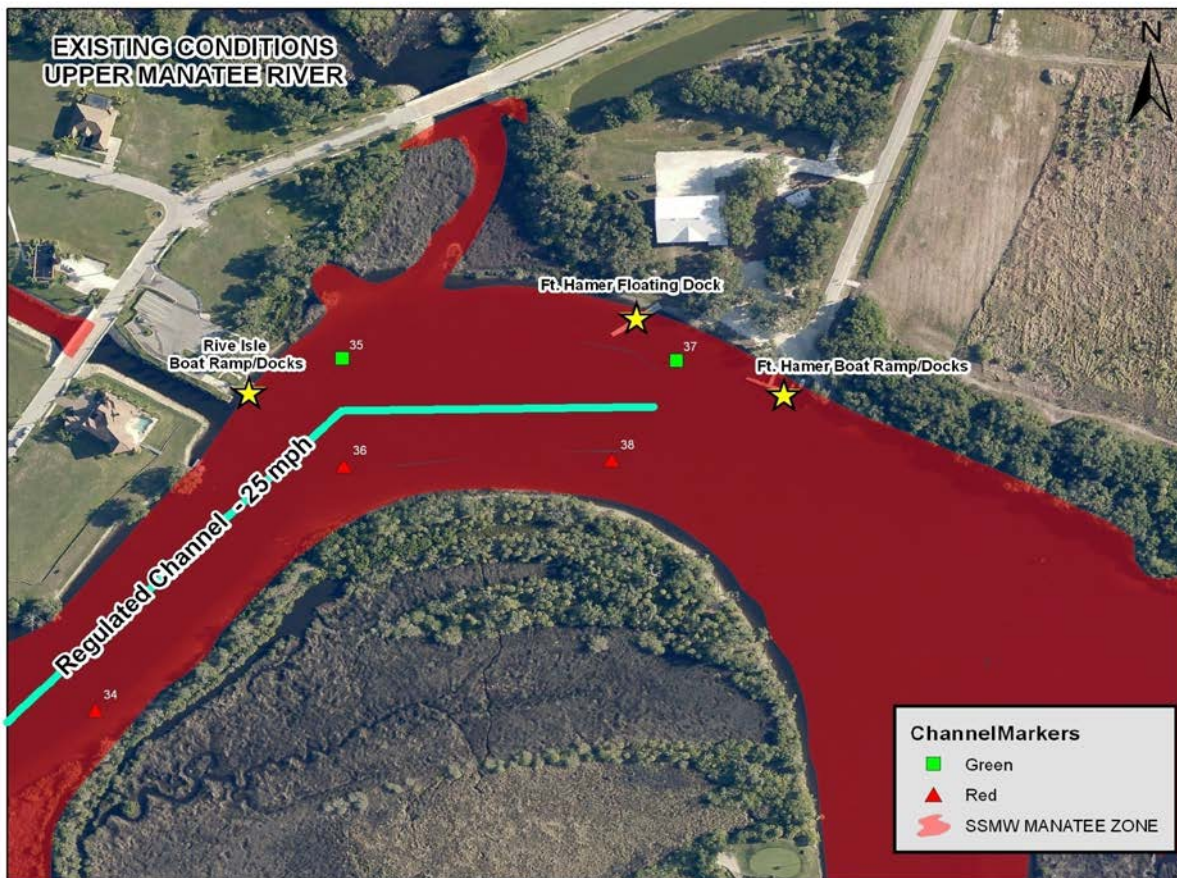
2-10 describes those projects currently on the Manatee County Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) that in conjunction with a new crossing works toward alleviating current and future mobility issues in the project area.

Boat Safety and Navigation

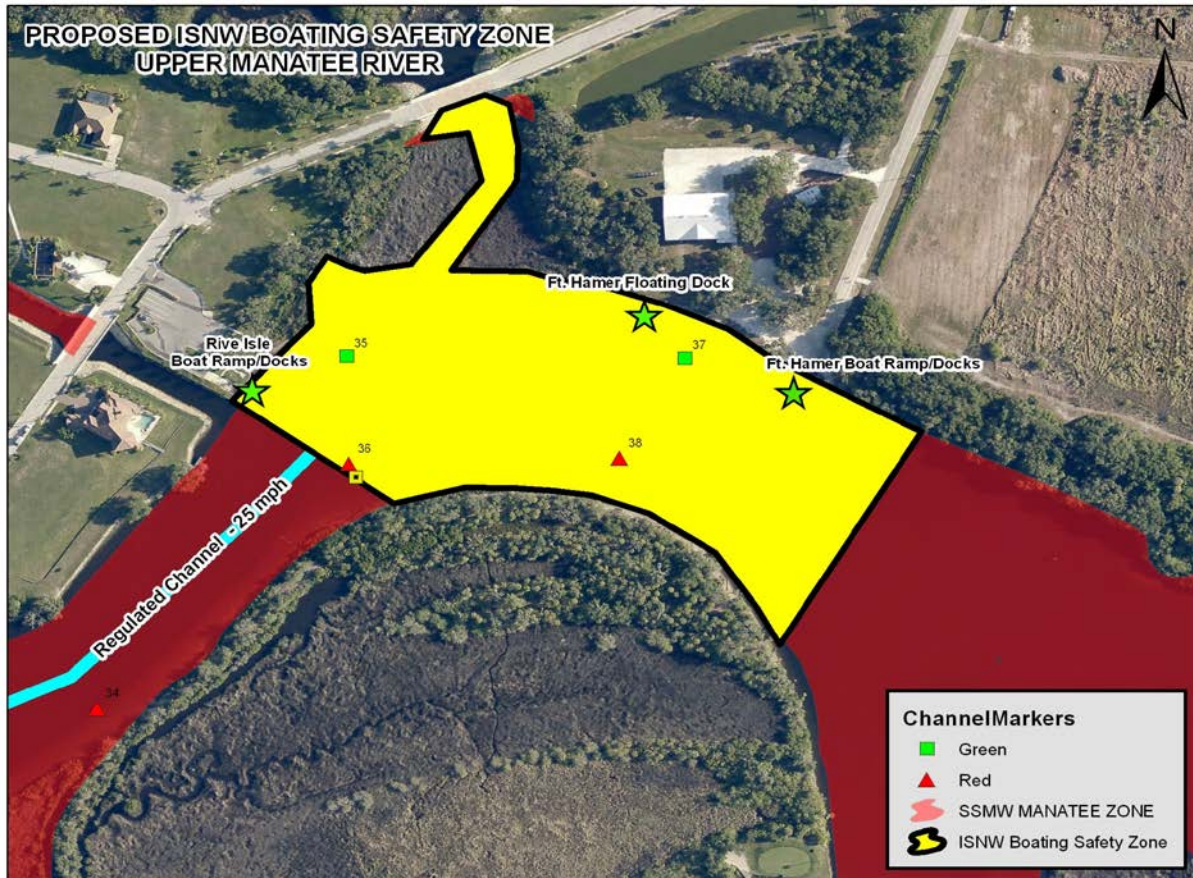
Two comments were received that had concern related to the location of the proposed bridge and boat usage. The commenters were concerned about the amount of time a boater would have traveling upstream while possibly pulling water skiers or tubers.

Based on the current FWC Manatee Protection Zones (68C-22.014 FAC), the entire area of the Manatee River east of the I-75 is marked as “Slow Speed” and 25 miles per hour (mph) in the marked channel to a point approximately 2,500 feet upstream (east) of the proposed crossing (Markers 37/38). In October 2013, Manatee County proposed and passed County Ordinance 13-37 establishing an Idle Speed No-Wake Boating Safety Zone beginning at Marker 36 (see figures below).

Existing Condition



Proposed Condition



Manatee County is authorized by 327.46(b)(1)(a) F.S. to:

“[e]stablish the following boating-restricted areas by ordinance: 1. An ordinance establishing an idle speed, no wake boating-restricted area, if the area is: a. Within 500 feet of any boat ramp, hoist, marine railway, or other launching or landing facility available for use by the general boating public on waterways more than 300 feet in width or within 300 feet of any boat ramp, hoist, marine railway, or other launching or landing facility available for use by the general boating public on waterways not exceeding 300 feet in width.”

Idle Speed – No Wake is defined as the lowest speed at which a vessel or personal watercraft may operate while maintaining steering control and forward progress.

Slow Speed – Minimum Wake is defined as the speed at which a vessel or personal watercraft proceeds when it is fully off plane, completely settled in the water and not producing a wake that endangers other vessels.

Based on the passage of County Ordinance 13-37 and the speed restrictions established there within, any vessel or boater adhering to the marked restrictions will have ample time to gain visual orientation with the proposed new bridge crossing.

Private Interests are Driving the Bridge

Several commenters expressed concern that local developers were the only parties to gain from the construction of a new bridge at the Fort Hamer Alternative location.

Figure 1-7 depicts the historic and approved development pattern for the study area. Based on the 2030 Future Land Use map, the entire study area is slated for some level of development. Section 3.1.2.2, Future Land Use, Table 3-8 indicates that the Fort Hamer and Rye Road Alternatives both have 222 acres of designated residential land use.

Noise

Two homeowners (one on Fort Hamer Road and one within the Waterlefe community) submitted comments voicing concerns related to noise impacts, potential noise barriers, and trucks.

Section 4.4.1 details the methodology and results of the noise study and barrier analysis. The noise study was performed in accordance with FHWA's Measurement of Highway-Related Noise guidance. Noise measurements were then modeled using the Traffic Noise Model (TNM) version 2.5.

Model results found that for the Fort Hamer Alternative of the 39 noise-sensitive sites evaluated, none approached, meet or exceeded noise abatement criteria (NAC) as established by FHWA guidance. One receptor was found to have a substantial increase. However, for a noise barrier to be considered feasible, two or more impacted receptors must achieve a reduction. No other receptors are benefited; therefore, a noise barrier is not considered a feasible noise abatement measure for this single receptor.

The Rye Road Alternative, however, found that of the 182 noise-sensitive sites evaluated, 11 meet and/or exceed NAC and required a noise barrier analysis. One barrier was evaluated but found not reasonable (see Table 4-19).

Upper Manatee River Road and Fort Hamer Road are local roads owned and maintained by Manatee County and; therefore, Manatee County has the authority to restrict certain types of vehicles on roadways. Manatee County has committed to posting this corridor as a "No Trucks" corridor.

Aesthetics

Several comments were received with issues related to the aesthetics of the proposed Fort Hamer Bridge and its potential impact to surrounding area.

Manatee County has committed to forming a Design Advisory Committee composed of residents proximate to the proposed Fort Hamer Bridge to gather input on such features as lighting, color schemes, railing details, façade treatments, and landscaping.

Environmental Concerns

Comments received related to environmental concerns focused on impacts to wetlands and increased potential for road kill of wild and domestic animals.

Sections 4.3.2.6, Table 4-12 summarizes the impacts to wetlands (direct and indirect) for the Fort Hamer and Rye Road Alternatives. The following is information found in that table:

Impact Type	Impact Acres	
	Fort Hamer Alternative	Rye Road Alternative
Direct		
<i>Permanent Dredge/Fill</i>	2.05	2.51
<i>Permanent Shading</i>	1.01	0.01
Secondary		
<i>25-ft Buffer</i>	1.28	4.48
<i>50-ft Buffer</i>	8.73	7.34
<i>100-ft Buffer</i>	10.75	14.40
Totals		
<i>Direct + 25-ft Buffer Secondary</i>	4.34	7.00
<i>Direct + 50-ft Buffer Secondary</i>	11.79	9.86
<i>Direct + 100-ft Buffer Secondary</i>	13.81	16.92

A Mitigation plan for these impacts is detailed in Figure 9 of the Wetland Evaluation Report (Appendix D of the FEIS).

Water Quality

Two comments were received related to concerns about water quality.

The Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) establishes water quality criteria for stormwater run-off from roadway and bridge projects through Rule 40D-4, Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C.). These criteria must be met and demonstrated in order to receive an Environmental Resource Permit (ERP) from SWFWMD, which constitutes water quality certification of the project in accordance with State of Florida and EPA requirements.

Cultural Resources

One comment was received related to the potential of Second Seminole War Fort Hamer.

Sections 3.2 and 4.2 detail Cultural Resources within the study area and potential impacts to those resources. A Cultural Resources Assessment Survey (CRAS) was conducted and submitted to the State of Florida Division of Historic Resources, SHPO. The CRAS was approved on April 17, 2013. The CRAS found that neither Build Alternative had an adverse impact on historic or archaeological resources. A copy of the CRAS is provided in Appendix C. The SHPO further stated that,

“[i]t is the opinion of this office that the principal structures of Fort Hamer were not located within the area of potential effect for this project.”

Logical Termini

The logical termini of the Fort Hamer and Rye Road Alternatives were based on the actions necessary to satisfy the purpose of this project, to increase capacity across the Manatee River. In this case, capacity needs to be increased by two lanes. In the Fort Hamer Alternative, there is no crossing and a two lane bridge would satisfy the demand. A new crossing at Fort Hamer ties the existing two lane Upper Manatee River Road to the south with the two lane Fort Hamer Road to the north. The limits of the purposed action end once the new bridge is geometrically connected to the current roadway typical sections.

In the Rye Road Alternative, there is an existing two lane bridge. In order to increase capacity on Rye Road by two lanes it would require expanding the existing Rye Road bridge from two to four lanes. This would also require expansion of the current two-lane Rye Road north and south of the crossing from two to four lanes. In order for the improvements to operate with the added capacity, the Rye Road expansion would need to be carried to the next intersection north and south. In this case, it is SR 64 to the south and US 301 to the north. Expansion of the roadway network is needed to accompany the added two lanes of capacity across the river in order to maintain the operational effectiveness of the added capacity at the crossing.

Fort Hamer Park and Boat Ramp

During the early development of this project as an FHWA lead project the Fort Hamer Park and Boat Ramp were avoided due to the park’s protection under Section 4(f) of the USDOT Transportation Act. As part of that avoidance exercise, County staff worked in conjunction with FHWA to jointly plan for a future bridge crossing at the Fort Hamer location which included the development of a transportation easement in the regional park and rowing center that was being planned on the east side of Fort Hamer Road. The Fort Hamer Alternative has no direct impacts to the park and provides for improved and safer access to the resource.

Emergency Response

The analysis of emergency response times is a representative analysis of regional response times. In Section 1.2.4 – Emergency Response and Evacuation Enhancement, it is noted in a letter from Fire Chief Bryon Teates, that “a new crossing in the area of Fort Hamer would substantially reduce fire service mutual-aid response times. . . .”, and from EMS Chief Ronald Koper, Jr., “an additional crossing connecting the existing Upper Manatee River Road and Fort Hamer Road would improve public safety through decreased emergency response times and more efficient geographic coverage of areas proximate to the river.