

STATE ROAD 429 - WEKIVA PARKWAY & SR 46 BYPASS

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENT (PD&E) STUDY

How we got here: Project Chronology

For years, there had been numerous discussions and various actions taken regarding the need to protect the Wekiva River and springshed, as well as to complete the beltway on the west side of the Metropolitan Orlando area. Area agencies, municipalities and environmentalists agreed on the needs, but could not reach a consensus on issues including funding, alignment and potential environmental impacts. The following key steps have resulted in the Wekiva Parkway reaching, and proceeding through, the PD&E stage:

1986: The Expressway Authority and FDOT conducted a study for the Western Beltway Part A and B. (Part A from the Turnpike to US Highway 441 has since been built.) Part B was proposed from US 441 to Interstate 4, incorporating portions of northwest Orange County and east Lake and Seminole counties.

Late 1980's: The agencies prepared an environmental document and approved a preferred alignment for the previously proposed Western Beltway. Since that time, however, several properties were purchased by the state for conservation. There was no funding to move the Western Beltway forward, so it fell off the long-range transportation plans.

September 26, 2002: Gov. Jeb Bush issued Executive Order No. 2002-259 creating the Wekiva Basin Area Task Force to evaluate area transportation needs, as well as the need to protect and preserve the Wekiva River's unique natural environment.

January 15, 2003: Wekiva Basin Area Task Force issues final report. Among the 16 recommendations were five addressing the need for the Wekiva Parkway, specific elements to be included in the Parkway design and four parcels identified to be acquired as conservation land.

July 1, 2003: Gov. Bush signed Executive Order No. 2003-112 creating the Wekiva River Basin Coordinating Committee to address specific issues related to the definition of the study area. The Coordinating Committee also was charged with identifying land use planning strategies and development standards; reviewing permitting requirements, water supply, surface water protection and land acquisition; and evaluating a funding plan for the implementation of the Wekiva Parkway.

The Coordinating Committee's S.R. 429 Working Group received input from the Mt. Plymouth/Sorrento community that they wanted to maintain existing S.R. 46 as a two-lane facility (minimizing land use impacts) and provide a southern bypass for through traffic. In response to the communities' desires, the Working Group revised the Wekiva Parkway corridor.

March 16, 2004: Using the corridor location input from the Wekiva Basin Area Task Force and the S.R. 429 Working Group, the Wekiva River Basin Coordinating Committee issued its final report, which further refined the Wekiva Parkway corridor.

June 29, 2004: Governor Jeb Bush signed the Wekiva Parkway and Protection Act.

September 23, 2004: As recommended by the Coordinating Committee and in the Protection Act, Gov. Bush appointed 18 members to the Wekiva River Basin Commission. This commission was assigned to monitor and ensure the Implementation of state, regional and local efforts with regard to the Wekiva Parkway and other area issues consistent with the Coordinating Committee's recommendations.

November 10, 2004: First meeting held of the Wekiva River Basin Commission. FDOT, OOCEA and SCEA successfully drafted a preliminary project funding plan prior to this meeting, as required by statute.

December 2004: Expressway Authority began the required acquisition process for buffer areas along the Parkway corridor.

January 19, 2005: Wekiva Parkway Project Development and Environment (PD&E) Study officially kicked off.

June 3, 2005: First meetings of the Project Advisory Group (PAG) and Environmental Advisory Group (EAG) were held to discuss PD&E Study progress with state and local agencies, municipalities, environmental groups and other stakeholders. Field data gathering was ongoing, with development expected to begin in earnest in July of initial alternative alignments, for review at public involvement meetings in November 2005.

November 9, 10 & 14, 2005: More than 1,100 people attended three public workshops in Lake, Orange and Seminole counties to review and submit comment on the initial alignment alternatives. The public was able to review alignment alternatives exhibits, projected traffic data, and conceptual typical sections and interchange designs. Expressway Authority and FDOT representatives and project team members addressed hundreds of questions and concerns from property owners and others. More than 300 people submitted comments on the various alignment alternatives, listing their concerns or support for the project, or requests for further information. Responses were sent to all those submitting comment forms.

Mid-November 2005-Spring 2006: Feedback on the initial alignment alternatives was solicited from various local government and state agency representatives. The alignment alternatives also were presented to various homeowners associations and community organizations. Evaluation of the alternatives based on public and government feedback, as well as engineering analysis and other criteria also took place.

July 7, 2006: The Expressway Authority hosted meetings of the Project Advisory Group (PAG) and Environmental Advisory Group (EAG) to discuss PD&E Study progress with state and local agencies, municipalities, environmental groups and other stakeholders. The groups provided continuing input used to further refine the viable alignment alternatives.

July 25-Aug. 1, 2006: More than 1,200 people took part in public involvement workshops to review and comment on the viable alignment alternatives. The meetings held in Lake, Orange and Seminole Counties also generated more than 540 comment forms from members of the public giving their views on the overall project, specific alternatives or requesting additional information.

Late Summer 2006-Spring 2007: The Expressway Authority and the Florida Department of Transportation continued evaluating government feedback and public comments, as well as continued engineering analysis with regard to the viable alignment alternatives. Existing alternatives were refined and additional possible alignments developed. The study team also was preparing detailed right-of-way and impact analyses for the various alternatives. Expressway Authority and FDOT representatives also met extensively with local government and state agency representatives, as well as with homeowners associations, school officials and other community stakeholders to discuss the latest alternatives and continue gathering input.

February 2, 2007: Comparative impact assessments, construction and right-of-way cost estimates, and engineering analysis were discussed during meetings of the Environmental Advisory Committee and Project Advisory Group. Several members of the public attended the advisory committee meetings. The study team also continues to coordinate with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the Federal Highway Administration and other agencies.

February 7, 2007: The Apopka City Council approved a proposed route for the Wekiva Parkway within their city limits, thereby allowing the Expressway Authority to begin advance right-of-way acquisition along that segment. The vote was requested since the alignment in this area would have to connect to the northwest end of the planned extension of State Road 429/414 (John Land Apopka Expressway), and there would be little room for shifting the proposed parkway.

March 6, 2007: The Orange County Board of County Commissioners approved their staff's recommendation for the Wekiva Parkway interchange in Orange County to be located at Kelly Park Road. This alternative would have lower construction costs than the Ponkan Road option, slightly higher projected traffic use, and would provide better access to north Orange County and east Lake County motorists.

May 8, 2007: The Seminole County Expressway Authority received an update on the Seminole County portion of the project including the alignment alternatives for connecting to Interstate 4 at SR 417.

May 15, 2007: The Mount Dora City Council received an update presentation on the proposed widening of SR 46 east of US 441 and alternatives for modifying the US 441/SR 46 interchange. The City Council subsequently issued a statement on June 11 that they preferred interchange Alternative 1 featuring a grade separation between the two highways and a southbound US 441 flyover to go east on SR 46.

June 1, 2007: The Wekiva River Basin Commission received an update presentation on the project, with particular focus on the east Lake County and Seminole County project areas.

June 5, 2007: The Lake County Board of County Commissioners received an update presentation on the Lake County portions of the project including the alignment and access alternatives in the eastern part of the county.