

# Sun Coast Connector Meeting #6 – a subtle reaction–

July 22, 2020



Sierra Club's Cris Costello and OSFR board member Kristin Rubin wait their turn to speak against the toll roads boondoggle at a 2019 meeting. Photo by Jim Tatum.

Sun Coast meeting number six had the virtual version but with the option of an in-person meeting in Trenton or Monticello. The virtual meeting appeared to be the most popular, with the normal 160 plus attendees, which dwindled to about 125 by the time it got around to public comment.

Speaking of which, this was the first meeting where an overview was given of public comment up to now. Presented by staff member Will Watts, the presentation was a disappointment to your

historian as well as to at least one Task Force member, who complained that there was no break-down as to support or dissent.

As anyone who has attended any meeting, virtual or otherwise, well knows, public comment has been overwhelmingly against the roads. At today's meeting the numbers were reported as: original emails: 1,546; form letters: 9,673; Task Force Meeting forms: 167; Open House comment forms: 185. Total is 11,571.

The DOT staff most certainly did not want it to show, so they did not break it down but you can rest assured that the big majority of these were against. Very much against.

Shame on the DOT for taking the easy way out and not offering this information.

We noticed a new tone in the Task Force today which was refreshing. And at the same time a new note of reaction from the staff. Three members, Charles Lee, Janet Bowman and especially Kent Wimmer all pushed for stronger, more specific language in the Guiding Principals dealing with aspects of the environment.

Mr. Wimmer even used the phrase "Outstanding Florida Waterway."

Wow.

Earlier we had included in some of our comments a complaint about the vague, non-committal language saying something like the wetlands will be avoided, "... as far as feasible, whenever possible..." etc. etc." which really promises nothing.

Happily, this issue was discussed at length to the point that Mr. Ronald Kitchens of the Task Force voiced some irritability and used the word "filibustering" to describe his perception of

unfair time allotments by the staff.

Dissent among Task Force members, another new, subtle note.

The staff also strayed a bit from its “all sweetness and light” mode and Mr. Will Watts and Ms. Wuiwei Shen, Chief Planner of the Department of Transportation, both denied Mr Charles Lee and friends their request to distribute suggestions/information to the Task Force before the next meeting.

Another problems with virtual meetings. There are restrictions.

There are three more meetings to go. Keep the pressure up.

*Comments by OSFR historian Jim Tatum.*

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*– A river is like a life: once taken,  
it cannot be brought back © Jim Tatum*