



By Jerry Marks, TRIAD Inc.

WHAT IF WE COULD TRAVEL LIKE GEORGE JETSON?

FBT Retreat tries answering questions about tomorrow's travel

Meet George Jetson. His Boy Elroy. Daughter Judy. Jane his wife.

(The Jetsons Lyrics, Hanna-Barbera, 1962)

Forget being Baby Boomers, we are the Jetson Generation. How else can you describe the recent gathering in Sarasota when talk at the two-day Floridians For Better Transportation (FBT) Retreat centered on the future of transportation?

Forty-five years after William Hanna and Joseph Barbera, of famed Hanna-Barbera Productions, first produced the futuristic family “The Jetsons” viewers of the Sunday night, half-hour sitcom are still thinking what if? What if we could travel like George, uninhibited . . . un-congested . . . un-frustrated?

Is it unrealistic?

More than 250 transportation-minded people convened at the Ritz-Carlton Sarasota trying to answer the questions of how Florida is going to accommodate the needs for 1,000 residents moving to the state every day – including one every six minutes in Central Florida, and an estimated 79 percent growth in freight revenue carried by trucks by 2017.

FBT Retreat attendees traveled to Sarasota seeking information to questions such as:

What about the future?

What about freight?

What about funding?

What about capacity?

What about non-highway solutions?

What about people?

In welcoming the audience, FBT President Doug Callaway talked about his group’s slogan first used two years ago – Keeping Florida Moving. Learning that sometimes you have to be more specific, Callaway said, “We have to Keep Florida Moving *Forward*. With 1,000 people a day moving to Florida, and just an astronomical transportation funding deficit we have no other choice.”

WHAT ABOUT THE FUTURE?

The first of the six sessions began with Florida Turnpike Enterprise’s Matthew Click, who via video took the audience forward - in terms of transportation - by looking back.

Through the retrospective video, Click looked at how the media and Hollywood – 50 years ago – envisioned travel in the next 50 years (meaning what they thought it would look like in the early 2000s). “There’s a common theme . . . whether you go back 50 years ago, or today,” said Click. “And that is: Surface transportation operating in a congestion-free environment . . . you never see brake lights, backups, or congestion. But we know, as professionals in this room, that we have never had a congestion-free environment in the last 50 years, there isn’t today, and there won’t be one in the next 50 years if we continue to do things the way we’ve always done them.”

Through artist renderings from half-century-old *Popular Mechanics*, Click showed how people in the early 1950s envisioned passenger vehicles would “take flight to get away from congestion.”

Looking at some of the technology that “smart cars” are, and will be, implementing,

Click provided a vision of what future travel will look like – such as being semi-autonomous (operating independently) and not running solely on gas. “I can see the wheels already turning, as the audience knows that there is a big policy issue for all of us in that how are we going to fund and finance our roadway structures without a fuel tax, or a much depreciated one?”

Also speaking were St. Petersburg Mayor Rick Baker, who chairs the Century Commission for a Sustainable Florida, and Florida Turnpike Executive Director Jim Ely, who is also president of the International Bridge, Tunnel & Turnpike Association.

As chairman of the Century Commission for a Sustainable Florida, which is helping the state prepare for a continued increase in population and to craft plans that meet those challenges, Baker said transportation and other crucial public infrastructure is a key component.

He said transportation shouldn’t be measured by the number of lane miles; rather it should be graded by performance measures. “A typical type of measure should be: What is the average daily commute? For me, that is a relevant performance measure. How long did it take someone in the Miami-area to get to work? Now you’re just not talking about roads, you’re not even just talking about mass transit. You’re also talking about working from home; you’re talking about alternatives to transportation.”

Ely said his crystal ball to the future is no clearer than anyone else’s, but he believes he’s starting to see trends that will be around far into the future. “I firmly believe that the dis-

tant future of transportation will be a lot brighter than the immediate future. When cars and highways are a lot smarter than they are today; when everyone pays their fair share electronically on our highways; we'll begin seeing major changes in transportation and benefits to our public."

Not surprising, Ely forecasts the transition will be towards more tolling. "It's either going to be a toll road, or no road ... Conventional funding is not sufficient" he said.

Calling it a 'perfect storm,' Ely said variables such as a decline in the real value of fuel taxes; resistance by elected officials to increase fuel taxes; better fuel economy in automobiles; growth in vehicle miles traveled; the depletion of Highway Trust Funds; and growing costs of construction and right of way, are all making it quite evident that change is on the horizon.

WHAT ABOUT FREIGHT?

In introducing the session Callaway talked about the love-hate relationship most people have with trucks, saying we might not like driving next to an 18-wheeler but we love what that 18-wheeler is carrying.

The session's three speakers were Port of Tampa Director Richard Wainio, American Trucking Association Vice Chairman Charles



In welcoming the audience to the 2007 Retreat, Floridians For Better Transportation President Doug Callaway discusses the two-day seminar's agenda.

L. Whittington, and Port Manatee Director David McDonald.

Wainio gave a world perspective on freight and insight on the growth China is, and will be, experiencing in the global market, and spoke of hurdles the United States must overcome to remain competitive. "Most of the containers coming into the U.S. market, including U.S. East Coast markets, presently enter the United States through West Coast ports and move across the country on rail and truck. U.S. West Coast ports, however, are near capacity and face serious limitations to further expansion due to land, highway and rail constraints exasperated by local community concerns over environmental issues."

In the past, shipments traveled to the East Coast through the Panama Canal; in the 1980s that shifted to overland transportation. But with West Coast ports becoming more and more congested, Wainio said the pendulum is shifting back to an all-water route. An expansion of the Panama Canal lock system is being planned to open in 2011 to handle bigger cargo ships – which means Florida could benefit from the increased port use. Wainio estimates waterborne trade going in and out of Florida was worth \$75 billion in 2006 and will roughly double within the next 15-20 years.

By quickly recapping the previous speakers' talks, Whittington provided a picture of Florida's future trucking crisis. "I'm glad to hear that we can now take a futuristic car, go to the office, hit your computer and order your products from China, and put them on a huge, huge ship and get them to the Port of Tampa. Then what?"

According to Whittington, currently 94 percent of the freight value and 79 percent of the freight's total tonnage being transported in Florida is by truck. And it is estimated that the state's total freight revenue being shipped by truck will increase nearly 80 percent by 2017.

In reiterating earlier speakers, McDonald provided statistics that should open eyes on why future intermodal needs need to be addressed today. "We're growing while other states are shrinking by population. One figure that I heard is that by 2030 we should up around

28-million residents (in Florida). That's astounding. Those people need to be served."

In talking about Florida's 14 ports and the 350,000 seaport jobs the state provides, McDonald urged the audience to think intermodally when it comes to the future.

FBT Retreat attendees used the evening's dinner reception as an opportunity to continue talking about transportation. While the "beach party" was moved indoors – as was the steel drum – because of the threat of inclement weather, it didn't dampen the lively discussions.

WHAT ABOUT FUNDING?

The second day's schedule began with the question: What About Funding?

With inflation eating away at its buying power, higher construction costs and cars going farther on less fuel, the panel was in agreement that the motor fuel tax as we know it is DOA as a source for future transportation funding. Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) Assistant Secretary of Finance Lowell Clary, Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) Oregon Innovative Partnerships Program Manager James Whitty and HNTB Sr. Vice President, National Director of Toll Services Jack Finn helped answer how and where future funding is going to come from.

"At the national level – I hope this is no mystery to anyone that – Congress pretty much spent every dime, every dime, coming into the Highway Trust Fund to fund SAFETEA-LU. It is spent down by 2009," said Clary.

While many states are nervously awaiting Congress to react, Clary said Florida is ahead of a lot of states, saying, "In Florida, we have a public that has shown an acceptance for tolling in our urban areas, and we've developed models that are very efficient for getting toll facilities built." He added that since 1990, tolling has funded more than 90 percent of the state's new expressways.

Besides tolling, Clary said Public-Private Partnership (P3s) and longer-term options



Speakers (from left) Lowell Clary, FDOT assistant secretary of Finance; James Whitty, ODOT Oregon Innovative Partnership Program manager; and Jack Finn, HNTB senior vice president, national director of Toll Services, answer questions regarding What About Funding?

might be the keys to funding future transportation. "In the long run, we may be looking at a totally priced system . . . California did a survey of this about a year ago, and for the first time in its history tolling approached 50 percent acceptability." He added that raising the tax had only 30 percent acceptability. And in segueing to Whitty, Clary asked, "Where did vehicle miles traveled (VMT) rate in the survey? Five percent."

Whitty explained the ODOT pilot project, where automobiles are taxed by the number of miles traveled instead of by the amount of motor fuel consumed. Looking at 28 alternatives to the gas tax, Whitty said the legislature-mandated task force was given the mission to "create a new road revenue system that mir-

rored the gas tax as closely as possible with fewer disadvantages. The solution we came up with was the per-mile charge VMT fee. It would replace the fuel tax for participating motorists and it has the advantage of connecting to the road system and removes the fuel-efficiency erosion factor."

Vehicles participating in the pilot project, which ended in March, were taxed per mile driven – and taxed at a slightly higher rate if driven during rush hour in certain geographic zones. Calling the results of the pilot program "a good substitute to the gas tax," Whitty said 91 percent of motorists participating in the pilot program said they would continue with the VMT tax if technology made it available throughout the state. "That is success."

Finn talked about transportation funding on the national level. He mentioned the U.S. celebrated the 50th anniversary of its Interstate Highway System in 2006, which on the pessimistic side means those roads are 50 years old. Other transportation "bad news" Finn shared was congestion is costing the average American 46 hours a year; and according to a national infrastructure survey, seven of 10 categories have worsened from 2001-2005.

Besides tolling, Finn said P3s are being used more and more as a way to leverage up-front financing to fund transportation projects. He said Texas is a leader in P3s, but foreign concessionaires are looking at other states to formulate P3s. "They look at Florida as the next Texas . . . So there's a great opportunity, I think, for Florida."

WHAT ABOUT CAPACITY?

"There needs to be a new vision for the national program, similar to what we had with the Interstate," said Rich Juliano, vice president for Chapter Relations and Grassroots Programs for the American Road & Transportation Builders Association (ARTBA), in opening the "What About Capacity?" seminar.

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ARTBA's 2009 proposal for SAFETEA-LU reauthorization is a two-part solution. The "two-prong attack" would be an increase in the federal motor fuel tax and a national priority program that would "involve developing a system to secure efficient movement of freight," Juliano said.

The Critical Commerce Corridors (3C) program would include a separate user-fee financing mechanism along with the existing core program. Critical Commerce Corridors users would help finance the system through lading and mileage taxes, and customs, freight transaction and segregated diesel fuel fees.

"Our vision," Juliano said, "would be two, equal priority federal programs; two independent financing structures and a cohesive national surface transportation strategy."

FDOT Secretary Stephanie Kopelousos followed, speaking about the state's expected congestion and unfunded needs. After sharing the state's "bleeding charts" when it comes to current and future congestion predictions in 2015 and 2025, Kopelousos announced that Florida is facing \$53.2 billion of unfunded needs for the state's intermodal system by 2030.



Central Florida Regional Transportation's LYNX CEO Linda Watson and DayJet Corp. Government & Community Affairs Manager Malcolm Murphy participate in the What About Non-Highway Solutions? seminar.

"We're not going to stop growing, people aren't going to stop visiting Florida ... we have to look at reality," she said. "We're going to have to simply get more out of what we have; we're going to have to add capacity where we can and should; we're going to have to look at congestion pricing, we're going to have to look at choices – there is a tradeoff between time and money and we're going to have to give Floridians that option."

Javier Rodriguez, the executive director of the Miami-Dade Expressway (MDX) Authority, said the "lets just add capacity" mindset is unrealistic; especially when, realistically, it takes 16 years – citing Florida's S.R. 836 extension – to complete some expansion projects.

"I've been hearing the constant theme 'let's maximize our assets, let's work within our right-of-ways.' That's what we need to do," Rodriguez said. He went on to describe some of the programs MDX has been implementing with open-road tolling; and buses on shoulder programs, where buses operate on road shoulders if traffic flow falls below 25 mph.

"It's not just expanding capacity, it's bettering what you have now," he said.

WHAT ABOUT NON-HIGHWAY SOLUTIONS?

With Florida (Orlando-Miami-Tampa) being one of the nation's 10 "mega regions," where 70 percent of all future growth will be centralized, speakers Linda Watson, CEO of the Central Florida Regional Transportation Authority's LYNX, and Malcolm Murphy, manager of Government & Community Affairs for DayJet Corporation, urged attendees to think outside the highway spectrum.

In mentioning that Florida is on the verge of surpassing New York as the third most-populated state in the nation, Watson asked: "How does Florida's transit infrastructure compare to New York? Without investing in transit now, we won't be able to handle the state economy and all the jobs, and all the growth that are moving into our communities.

"... By the time we build (the future roads), we solved yesterday's problems. So how do we move our population and economy tomorrow when our highways are failing us today?" Through transit.

Murphy's idea is for Floridians to – like George Jetson – take flight and get out of congestion. With eight out of 10 business trips conducted by cars – and roads being over capacity – Murphy believes a solution could be utilizing an infrastructure already in place: airports that are "underserved and unconnected." By using less-than 6,000-pound jets, Murphy's company DayJet hopes to fill a void for business travelers through per-seat-on-demand jet service.

The idea for on-demand jet service began in 2002 under the code name JETSONS – which

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seemed appropriate for futuristic travel – and is scheduled to begin in Florida in September.

“We are aiming for people that need to get from Point A to Point B quickly,” Murphy said. “. . . our sweet spot are journeys between 300 to 600 miles – an hour, an hour-and-a-half in the air. We go directly from Point A to Point B quickly.”



AAA Auto Club South Sr. V.P. Kevin Bakewell (left) and FDOT Communications Director Dick Kane remind the audience that nothing can be accomplished without public support in the *What About People?* session.

WHAT ABOUT PEOPLE?

In introducing the final session, Callaway said, “It’s great to hear about freight, highway solutions, capacity and funding, but all of that is irrelevant unless we take people into account.”

In talking about motorist’s rights, plain language and more, Kevin Bakewell, the senior vice president of AAA Auto Club South, Inc., and Dick Kane, FDOT communications director, provided tips on how to get the public to start thinking about future transportation.

Bakewell discussed a “pocket of pain” survey conducted earlier this year by AAA with motorists of the nation’s most-congested areas. He said surprising findings were people didn’t mention transportation among the top five when it comes to public policy issues. “A lot of that I think has to do with lack of education, a lack of awareness,” he said. Other survey findings were that the public would rather pay tolls than higher gas taxes, and adding tolls to new roads was more appealing than adding tolling to existing roads.

Kane spoke about Gov. Charlie Crist’s Plain Language Initiative, an executive order that written communications to the public must be clear and concise and free of needless words. “What he’s really looking for,” said Kane is, “a two-way conversation between the government and the people of Florida.”

The 2007 FBT Retreat was Jetson-like – really out of this world, when you consider the vision speakers had for transportation compared to what the public is currently experiencing. But if there was one thing repeated time and time again it was making sure the public is onboard. Communications is the key to getting the public to understand the problem and wanting change.



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