Introduction

Transportation issues for local governments can often be controversial. The need to alleviate traffic congestion or the need to provide a quicker, more direct route can be easy to identify. However, steps taken to combat these problems can often result in an unhappy constituency and escalate into a complex public dispute. This is because of the implications that surround decisions to improve or construct new roads. These new and improved roads may increase traffic, increase property values and/or translate into increased development that may be seen as threats to citizens in affected communities. As a result, the decision to build or improve transportation can be contentious. The case of the “Western Corridor” involving many parties in Palm Beach and Martin Counties is no different and provides a great example of just how conflict-ridden a transportation issue can be. The following will discuss the history and an analysis of the Western Corridor Transportation Dispute.

Case History

The Western Corridor dispute takes place on the east coast of Florida in southern Martin County and northern Palm Beach County. The City of Tequesta is located in the northeast portion of Palm Beach County and the City of Jupiter is located to the south of Tequesta. Figure 1 shows a map of the setting for the Western Corridor Dispute.
Years prior to 1995, citizens in the Loxahatchee River Road Community in Palm Beach County complain of excessive traffic along Loxahatchee River Road. Loxahatchee River Road is a residential road that runs north/south and connects Martin County and Palm Beach County. Residents say that this road sees more than 6,000 cars a day (Hartnett, 1999). As a result, citizens of the community complain to county commissioners that this traffic is dangerous because it is a residential neighborhood and that it reduces the quality of life in the area. Commissioners recognize this need to alleviate traffic in this area and plan to take action. Figure 2 shows Loxahatchee River Road’s location along the Loxahatchee River at the Martin County/Palm Beach County line.
Once the traffic problem was brought to Palm Beach County commissioner’s attention by the Loxahatchee River Road citizens, the commissioners decided to take action. According to Engelhardt (1995), the policy in place that allows changes to area road plans meant that a decision must be supported and endorsed by four local government entities: Martin County, Palm Beach County, the City of Tequesta, and the City of Jupiter. Therefore, Palm Beach County, who represents the Loxahatchee River Road residents, entered into negotiations with the three other governments in 1993. Palm Beach and Martin County’s interests consisted of a new, connector road that would be located west of the Loxahatchee River Road neighborhood and east of Interstate I-95 connecting to Indiantown Road. However, Tequesta and Jupiter opposed this new road because they were concerned about the increase in traffic that would accompany a new road. However, they recognized the need to alleviate the traffic from Loxahatchee River Road
and were in favor of some form of a Western Corridor. Figure 3 shows this proposed area for the Western Corridor.

**Figure 3: Proposed Area for Western Corridor**

![Map of proposed area for Western Corridor](Mapquest.com)

According to Engelhardt (1995), after two years of unsuccessful negotiation between the four governments, the Treasure Coast Regional Planning Commission (TCRPC) intervened to attempt to solve the dispute by way of a ruling. In October 1995, they voted 13-3 to allow the new transportation route known as the “Western Corridor” that would not turn through the Limestone Creek neighborhood. Instead, the new connector road would connect Longshore Drive to Northfork Drive. This action infuriated residents in the Longshore Drive area and the City of Jupiter.

However, this action went directly against area policy that stated such a decision must be approved by each of the four local governments. As a result, the State of Florida objected to the TCRPC’s ruling and overturned it because the road was not endorsed by all four governments.
They forced the two cities and two counties to try and reach a consensus. At this same time the State of Florida delivered its ruling in December of 1995, both Jupiter and Tequesta proposed to remove road links from their communities to Martin County in their transportation plans. This action further complicated plans to alleviate traffic from the Loxahatchee River Road community who seemed to be bearing the entire burden.

The State of Florida’s overturning of the TCRPC’s decision to connect Longshore Drive to Northfork Drive put the four governments back at square one. As a result, Palm Beach County and the City of Jupiter choose to try and reach a consensus agreement by mediation. In February of 1996, a pre-mediation forum was held to formally define the issues and parties involved and to choose a mediator. This was to ensure that the correct issues and parties were clear and to be certain that all parties approved of the selection of the mediator. After this meeting, Harry Goodheart was chosen to mediate the Western Corridor Dispute.

During this mediation, the initial decision to connect Longshore/Northfork Drive into Martin County was discussed. This road stops 2,000 feet short of Martin County’s border. Palm Beach County favored this option because it would mitigate traffic from Loxahatchee River Road. Conversely, the City of Jupiter rejected this option because residents in the area argued that “the road is too crowded now to connect to Martin County” (Engelhardt, 1998).

However, during mediation, Palm Beach County, Tequesta, and Jupiter agreed that the construction of a new road was needed. This provided a creative option for alleviating the Loxahatchee River Road traffic. This new road would be about a half mile west of Northfork Drive that would run through an undeveloped area named “Section 28” (“Draw a Line in Martin,” 1999). This time, Martin County refused the option of a new road because they would not agree to connect its roads to the outlet. Martin County cited that they were awaiting the
outcome of a lawsuit over the development of Section 28 before obligating themselves to a road network and would not consider this option. Martin County Planning director Mark Mathes also claimed that expansion of southern roadways in Martin County was “not listed as a priority” and that there was “no need” (Hartnett, 1999). As a result, no agreement could be reached throughout the yearlong mediation.

Banstetter (1999) states that following the unsuccessful mediation effort that concluded in 1998, Palm Beach County considered the use of hard tactics in order to resolve the Western Corridor Dispute. In 1999, Palm Beach County considered disallowing any incoming or outgoing traffic by closing Loxahatchee River Road at the Martin County border. This was an attempt to get Martin County to see the Western Corridor as a priority. In response, the City of Tequesta claimed that if the road were to be closed, that they would respond by closing their route into Martin County, Country Club Drive. While no municipality ever followed through with these efforts, such efforts exhibit just how serious this issue was.

The article “Martin-Palm Beach: Cooperate on a New Link” (2000) maintains that after the Martin County refusal to discuss connector roads following the mediation process, another twist in this case developed. The Florida Department of Community Affairs ruled that the City of Jupiter could indeed remove the connection between Longshore/Northfork Drive and Island Way (Martin County) from its transportation plan. This meant that Jupiter was no longer obligated to connect the two roads, but City Commissioners did not rule this option out because of the need to resolve the dispute.

According to Collins (2001), an agreement was finally reached between the four municipalities. At the Northern Palm Beach County Traffic Summit on March 30, 2001, Martin County Commissioners publicly announced their decision to allow the construction of the
Western Corridor going through Section 28 despite the lawsuit. The decision was made after three new county commissioners were elected to office in Martin County. Jennifer Sorentrue (2003) stated that the road would not extend either Limestone Creek or Longshore/Northfork Drive into Martin County. Instead the new road extended north from Indiantown Road connecting to Island Way in Martin County. The road kept west of Limestone Creek and the Longshore/Northfork Drive area. Construction began in 2004, bringing the long case of the Western Corridor to an end.

**Case Analysis**

The history of this case demonstrates how complex this transportation issue was. The following will break down the key elements of this dispute: the parties, the substance, procedures, and outcomes of the Western Corridor Dispute.

**Parties**

The primary parties in this case consist of Palm Beach County, Martin County, the City of Tequesta, and the City of Jupiter. Their spokespeople consisted of the commissioners for each municipality and each commissioner possessed an equal amount of decision-making power in their respective jurisdictions. These commissioners represent their particular jurisdictions and theoretically act within their jurisdiction’s interest because they are elected by these citizens. The secondary parties in this dispute are the neighborhood and special interest groups lying within the county/city jurisdictions. These secondary parties include groups from the Longshore/Northfork Community, the Loxahatchee River Road Association, the Limestone Creek Community, the South Martin Coalition, Tequesta Country Club, as well as some others. These parties have spokespeople that are heads of their respective communities. These spokespeople inform those within the organization on developments that may affect their
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communities and help develop plans for action. These spokespeople communicate with the commissioners to inform them of their interests.

The parties in this case are well-defined because of the jurisdictional boundaries for each neighborhood, city, or county. They showed both an ability to work together to solve the problem and a failure to collaborate. They were able to work together and develop options to mitigate the traffic along Loxahatchee River Road. However, when an agreement could not be reached, these parties looked at higher jurisdictions to provide assistance. For example, the TCRPC attempted to intervene and provide support for this problem, the State of Florida interceded following the TCRPC’s ruling, and a mediator became involved at the request of the four governmental units when a consensus agreement could not be reached. The end agreement, though, resulted from these four groups ability to work together. The State of Florida’s ruling required them to reach an agreement that satisfied each of the four jurisdiction’s interests.

Substance of the Problem

The central issue in this dispute is to relieve traffic at the Martin County/Palm Beach County Border, particularly Loxahatchee River Road. It is a typical example of a Not-In-My-Backyard disagreement. The conflict focused on the interests of the particular neighborhoods as well as the values of the governmental jurisdictions. Both Limestone Creek and the Longshore/Northfork communities did not want the transportation route to affect the quality of life in their communities, which were their interests. But, at the same time, this dispute showed a conflict amongst values because initially Martin County did not value the need for the Western Corridor. Therefore, they refused to extend any connector roads at Palm Beach County’s request. Thus, Martin County saw the idea of a Western Corridor as non-negotiable. In the same way, City of Jupiter Commissioners saw extending the Western Corridor through
Longshore/Northfork Drive as a non-negotiable “option” because they vetoed the connector road from their transportation plan. It was Martin County’s change in position from not valuing a Western Corridor to seeing it as a priority that allowed for serious negotiation and a consensus agreement. Eventually, the four jurisdictions saw the Western Corridor as necessary and each agreed that the best route would bypass the neighborhoods through Section 28.

**Procedure**

TCRPC’s initial decision to allow the extension of Longshore/Northfork Drive went directly against the policy established by all four local governments. As a result, the State of Florida ruled against it. Again, this policy ensures that each government endorses the decision. Therefore, a consensus agreement had to be reached and each party had to be satisfied with the decision. A consensus agreement suits this decision because of the effects the Western Corridor could have. Such a transportation route may cause more development that a jurisdiction may not be able to accommodate in the form of services. Thus, this process of reaching a consensus is the best option for all parties to be satisfied.

In order to reach a consensus, the jurisdictions utilized many avenues ranging from mediation to hard tactics. Mediation allowed for the issues to be discussed and options to be considered, but was ultimately slighted by Martin County’s position to not extend roadways into their county. This pushed Palm Beach County to use the hard tactics of threatening to close Loxahatchee Road in stimulate an agreement. Overall, this process of reaching a consensus was a long road with many twists and turns, but was required by the State and allowed for the best decision to be made.
Outcomes

The long Western Corridor Dispute ended with a transportation route that avoided constructing a road through the residential neighborhoods of Longshore/Northfork and Limestone Creek. Instead, the corridor will run through an undeveloped section close to the neighborhoods. All participants were relieved and excited once a decision had been finally made. All participants were satisfied with the resolution because it required a consensus agreement. However, the agreement seemed long overdue for residents in the Loxahatchee River Road Community who had to remain patient throughout the process and continue to bear the traffic burden. Although the road has yet to be completed, this region as a whole anticipates the project’s completion.

Some Palm Beach County officials and Loxahatchee River Road residents felt that the process was not efficient. But, the attempt to sidestep a consensus agreement by seeking the ruling of the Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council was seen by Jupiter and Tequesta as dishonest and unfair. This action upset these municipalities and made the future negotiations more difficult. The consensus effort suffered as a result of this. Once the State of Florida intervened and negotiations resumed through mediation, the consensus process resumed. Only this time, it was halted by Martin County’s decision to refuse to extend roads in their county. While the county commission cited that a transportation route was unnecessary at that time, the lawsuit concerning Section 28 was a major setback in reaching an agreement because Martin County officials were weary of the implications of the lawsuit. These issues contributed to the Western Corridor Dispute being a long and inefficient process to many.

While the process did indeed turn out to be long with many obstacles, the only cost throughout the course of action was merely time. No deaths or injuries could be directly
attributed to Loxahatchee River Road being unsafe. Therefore, the benefits of reaching an agreement that satisfied all parties outweigh the cost of time spent on the solution. The decision to route the road around the neighborhoods was more costly than running it through Limestone Creek or Longshore Drive. But, this did not concern Palm Beach County or Martin County residents because a decision had finally been made. All four governments would ultimately share the cost of the project translating into less of an impact for any single jurisdiction. In general, the process was practical because an agreement that pleased each local government was reached. It was also relatively cost-effective, although the cost was a minor issue because the need for the Western Corridor was seen as so great.

Conclusions

The critical challenge in this case was getting the competing jurisdictions of Palm Beach County, Martin County, the City of Jupiter, and the City of Tequesta to reach a consensus agreement. These different governmental units serve different constituencies that have different interests. These different interests conflicted with each other at various points throughout the negotiation process. It appeared that the more jurisdictions or parties involved in this process, the more difficult and time-consuming it was to reach an agreement. For example, in the initial agreement, Martin and Palm Beach Counties agreed with extending Longshore Drive while Tequesta and Jupiter did not. But, after mediation, Palm Beach County, Tequesta, and Jupiter agreed to the new route running through Section 28 while Martin County refused. Because of the many competing jurisdictions, reaching an agreement was difficult.

Another challenge in this case was the strength of the neighborhood groups in Palm Beach County. Both the Limestone Creek and Longshore Neighborhoods took strong positions against the Western Corridor running through their neighborhood. While these groups had no
formal decision-making power, they pressured officials within their jurisdictions to ensure that the road would not come through their neighborhoods. The Loxahatchee River Road Community also displayed their power by creating a petition that was given to the Palm Beach County Commission requesting the closing of the road at the Martin County border. The strength of these groups significantly influenced the decisions of the commissioners generating another challenge in this case.

Both the ruling by the State of Florida allowing Jupiter to remove the Longshore/Northfork extension into Martin County from their transportation plan and the change of administration in Martin County contributed to the existing agreement to be reached. Jupiter’s ability to veto the Longshore/Northfork extension gave them the power to refuse the option because they were not obligated to follow through on this alternative. This, in turn, pushed the alternative route running through Section 28 because it seemed no other logical opportunities for the Western Corridor existed. Also, the election of three new county commissioners in Martin County brought a change of attitude from this county. These new members recognized the need to alleviate traffic in the region, not to mention respond to developer’s requests for the road. Consequently, Martin County view on the Western Corridor transformed as the administration changed. Both of these were major factors contributing to the end-result.

The case of the Western Corridor Dispute in southern Martin County and northern Palm Beach County presented an example of the complexities associated with developing transportation routes. Efforts by local governments to mitigate traffic can spawn a number of negative reactions from their citizens because of the implications of such decisions. Thus, transportation issues can be controversial, and the case of the Western Corridor Dispute proved to be no different.
Works Cited

Banstetter, Trebor. (1999). Dispute Brings Rage Over Road. *Palm Beach Post*, 1C.


Draw a Line in Martin. (1999). *Palm Beach Post*, 14A.


Appendix: Timeline of Western Corridor Dispute

Pre-1995: Residents of Loxahatchee River Road Community in Palm Beach County complain that too much traffic exists on Loxahatchee River Road and that it inhibits their ability to enjoy life. As a result, Palm Beach County entertains options to alleviate such traffic by proposing the construction of another road that will connect traffic in southern Martin County and northern Palm Beach County.

October 1995: The Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council votes 13-3 for a “western corridor” that will connect Island Way in Martin County to Indiantown Road in Palm Beach County. The City of Jupiter opposes the action saying it wants assurance that Longshore Drive in The Shores neighborhood in Jupiter is never connected. The City of Tequesta opposes that action for fear that traffic spilling east will spur unwanted development in their city.

December 1995: The State of Florida object to the ruling and states that the road should turn through the Limestone Creek Neighborhood. They also claim that Palm Beach County should have acted with the support of Jupiter, Tequesta, and Martin County. The City’s of Jupiter and Tequesta request the removal of connector roads to Martin County in their transportation plans.

February 1996: A Pre-mediation meeting is held by the Florida Conflict Resolution Consortium to help define the participants and issues of the dispute, as well as assist in the selection of a mediator.

1996 – 1998: Mediation with Harry Goodheart (fails to produce an agreement)

December 1998: Palm Beach County Metropolitan Planning Organization chooses to hold off on expansion of Loxahatchee River Road and Northfork Drive (which stops 2,000 feet short of Martin County Line). These items held off the 2015 blueprint in order to provide more time to resolve the Western Corridor Issue.

May 1999: Palm Beach MPO requests that Martin County extend road improvements into their county. Martin County denies the request because they feel existing access is adequate and that it could lead to more, unwanted development.

July 1999: Regional Planners reject City of Jupiter’s request to remove plans to extend Northfork Drive to Island Way in Martin County. This leaves this route as an option, along with another option connecting Indiantown Road through Section 28 to Island Way. However, this option is not being
considered by Martin County because of a lawsuit with the developer of Section 28, Jack Palace.

September 1999: Because of a petition by the Loxahatchee River Road Community, Palm Beach County considers closing Loxahatchee River Road (even to emergency vehicles). Martin County responds by saying they will take whatever action is necessary, including a lawsuit. The City of Tequesta claims they will close Country Club Drive if Loxahatchee River Road closes in order to sever even more traffic.

March 2000: The Florida Department of Community Affairs rules that Jupiter may take the connection of Northfork Drive and Island Way off of its long-term road plan. Despite the ruling, Martin County Commissioners keep this option open if the plans for the Indiantown Road/Island Way fall through.

March 2001: The first regional forum on traffic, the Northern Palm Beach County Traffic Summit, is held discussing the Western Corridor Issue. Three new county commissioners were elected to the Martin County Council and they favor the plan that would connect Indiantown Road to Island Way through section 28, despite the lawsuit outcome.

December 2001: Martin County agreement calls for the construction of the Western Corridor connecting Indiantown Road to Island Way through Section 28. The agreement sets deadlines for designs, property acquisitions, and other tasks. The construction completion deadline is set for September 2006.

January 2002: U.S. Supreme Court upholds December 2000 ruling that overturned the decision that the county did not have to pay $4.75 million to Jack Palace, the developer of Section 28.

July 2003: Martin County reconsiders the path of the proposed western corridor. The new path brings traffic closer to the Northfork neighborhood in order to keep traffic away from wetlands. However, there is no evidence that this route is indeed more environmentally friendly. This disturbs residents in the Northfork/Shores area.

August 2003: Martin County Commissioners agree (4-1) to revert western corridor path back to original design, taking traffic further away from the Northfork neighborhood.

2004: Construction on the project begins.