A Case Study of the
BLAIR STONE ROAD EXTENSION
By
Paul Flavien
URP 5122, Spring 2003
Dr. Taylor
INTRODUCTION

The Blair Stone Road extension project has been a controversial topic in Tallahassee for the past two decades. The City, through its planning department and various other proponents of growth, has been advocating the extension of Blair Stone Road from Park Avenue to Centerville Road in order to alleviate traffic congestion on Tallahassee’s other roadways. Residents of the neighborhoods near the proposed project have been fighting it since its inception. These opponents of the project had varying levels of success in their quest to kill the project, but they ultimately lost the fight.

This case study will outline the history of the conflict, the parties involved and their issues, the process used to resolve the conflict, and the outcome of the process. Although there were numerous groups that opposed the project, this case study will focus on the citizen participation process used to resolve the issue.

DATA COLLECTION

The majority of the data used in this case study was obtained through newspaper articles from the Tallahassee Democrat, reports from the Tallahassee Leon County Planning Department (TLCPD) and the Transportation Consulting Group, and a report from the Blair Stone Road Community Advisory Committee. The Tallahassee Public Works Department website contained invaluable information particularly regarding the chronology of the project. Interviews were conducted
with TalTran Senior Planner Dewayne Carver and FSU Associate Professor Dr. Gregory Thompson.

**CHRONOLOGY**

- **1978**: Transportation Planners and Traffic Engineers indicate a need to extend Blair Stone Road.
- **1989**: Citizens approved Local Option One-Cent Sales Tax referendum.
- **June, 1990**: Scope of services was amended by City Commission to create a citizen task force.
- **October, 1991**: Blair Stone Road Corridor Location Study Traffic Justification Report completed. City Commission authorizes consultant to proceed into Phase II.
- **March, 1992**: Blair Stone Road Extension Corridor Study Contract was tabled until April, 1992.
- **April, 1992**: City Commission voted to discontinue the Blair Stone Road Corridor Location Study.
- **June, 1993**: Transportation Planning Advisory Committee (comprised of citizens) request City Commission reconsiders their action to discontinue the Blair Stone Road Corridor Location Study.
- **October, 1993**: City Commission directed staff to reinitiate the Blair Stone Road Corridor Location Study.
- **January, 1995**: Corridor study began.
- **April, 1995**: Tallahassee-Leon County Planning Department began a corridor study to identify a specific route between East Park Ave. and Capital Circle N.E. Citizens Advisory Committee spends 10 months developing a recommendation to City Commission.
- **December, 1995**: City Commission approves recommendation.
- **1996**: A second Citizens Advisory Committee forms to determine the method of extending Blair Stone Road along Centerville Road to Capital Circle.
- **April, 1997**: City Commission approves one-way pair concept.
- **1997**: 
Roadway design began (completed 2001)

During design, engineers met several times with the community to discuss and incorporate their input into the plans

During the right-of-way acquisition and environmental permitting, many design plans were changed to accommodate public input and concern

- **March, 2001**: Phase I (East Park Ave-Miccosukee Road) bid
- **August 15, 2001**: Groundbreaking Ceremony
- **August 15, 2001**: Construction begins

**COMPETING INTERESTS GROUPS**

The City of Tallahassee is the capital of the State of Florida. It is located in the North West or “panhandle” of the State. It is approximately 172 miles west of Jacksonville, Florida and has approximately 200,000 residents. The major employment center in the City is located in the Downtown area, while a large percentage of the workers commute into the Downtown area from the North East sector of the City. This large number of North East commuters causes most of the North/South arterial roadways (Magnolia, Centerville, and Capital Circle) in the Eastern sector of the City to be congested. With this mind, the TLCPD decided that the best way to relieve the congestion was to extend Blair Stone Road.

The opponents of the project included two distinct groups. Both were made up of residents of the affected neighborhoods. The first group called itself the Neighborhood/Environmental Preservation Coalition and its sole purpose was to kill the project by using any means necessary. The group used a number of tactics to derail the project including political lobbying, protesting, and litigation.
This group almost stopped the project in 1992, when the City Commission voted to stop the Blair Stone location study.

The second opposition group named the Blair Stone Road Community Advisory Committee (CAC). It was made up of residents from the affected neighborhoods, but also included representatives of landowners in the project area. It is important to point out that this group did not want Blair Stone to expanded, but they felt it was important that they accept the City’s offer to participate in the planning process.

**ISSUES**

The City’s most pressing issue in pursuing the expansion of Blair Stone Road was to relieve traffic congestion on existing roads. These roads include: Magnolia, Centerville, and Capital Circle. Currently these roads experience high levels of congestion and that congestion will continue to increase because of the increasing development taking place in the northeast and southeast sectors of the City. A secondary benefit of the extension would be the economic development effects that such a large construction project would have in the City.

The CAC’s issues were many. They included:

- Preserving the character and integrity of their neighborhoods
- The increase in cut-through traffic in the neighborhoods
- The increase in storm water run-off that the new road would produce
• The increase in pollution due to auto emissions
• The increase in flooding in certain neighborhoods
• The destruction of green space and the degradation of wetlands
• The potential increase in crime due to increased access to neighborhoods
• The cost of the project

PROCESS
The City invited the residents of the affected neighborhoods and other stakeholders to participate in the design phase of the project. To that end, the CAC was formed. The CAC was charged with choosing the “least objectionable route” for extending Blair Stone Road from three possible alternatives (red, green, and blue). It must be noted that the City did not give the CAC the option of choosing not to build the project. Nine meetings and several neighborhood workshops were held in order to give the residents the opportunity to be heard and give them some feeling of ownership in the final product. The CAC chose the “green route” because it had the following attributes:

• Offered the lowest level of direct and indirect impact on residences when compared to the other alternatives
• Would decrease cut-through traffic on several neighborhood streets

The CAC also made the following recommendations to the City:

• Calming techniques be used to limit speeds
• Build road as far away as possible from existing homes
• Adequate drainage facilities should be built to prevent new flooding problems
• No filling or degradation of wetlands
• Limit the destruction of the natural landscape
• Make the road a controlled access road
• No commercial development at intersections (except for Park & Blair Stone)
• Never expand road beyond four lanes
• Acquire enough right-of-way to preserve a greenway buffer

OUTCOME
The citizen participation process used to design the Blair Stone extension project appeared to have been very successful. The criteria used to determine the success of the process is the level of integration of the CAC’s recommendations into the project. When completed, the project will include the following:
• Storm water facilities that exceed minimum standards
• Decreased flooding in several areas
• City purchased right-of-way to create natural buffers between the road and neighborhoods
• Bridge built to preserve wetlands
• Eight foot screening walls built
• Over 2,400 trees to be planted along the roadway
• Blair Stone to be the most heavily landscaped roadway in the City
• Park to be built

• Special lighting used to prevent backlighting into backyards

• City willing to purchase any home within 100 feet of roadway if homeowner willing to sell at fair market value and relocate