A Co-Orientational Analysis of Public Involvement Perceptions in the Transportation Process: A Case Study

Kristen E. Carson

University of South Florida

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd

Part of the American Studies Commons

Scholar Commons Citation

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact scholarcommons@usf.edu.
A Co-Orientational Analysis of Public Involvement Perceptions in the Transportation Process: A Case Study

by

Kristen E. Carson

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
Department of Mass Communications
College of Arts and Science
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Derina R. Holtzhausen, Ph.D.
Kenneth C. Killebrew, Ph.D.
Timothy E. Bajkiewicz, Ph.D.

Date of Approval: April 5, 2005

Keywords: Co-Orientational theory, trust, government, Florida Department of Transportation, public involvement

© Copyright 2005, Kristen E. Carson
Dedication

I would like to thank my husband, Chad, who kept me going on this project when some days and night I did not feel like finishing it. I really appreciate the late nights you stayed up with me reading aloud the qualitative data as I typed it. You are an incredible man and husband and I thank you for your support during some very stressful times. I love you very much.

I would also like to thank my parents, who have helped me with this degree, not only financially, but also emotionally. You both are wonderful parents and I am who I am today because of you. I only hope one day I can follow in your footsteps and become an amazing parent, instilling in my children faith, love, and support.

I would also like to thank Dr. Derina Holtzhausen. She has been an incredible role model, mentor, and friend throughout this thesis process and my entire graduate college career. Thank you for your guidance.
# Table of Contents

List of Tables iii  
List of Figures v  
Abstract vi  

Chapter One: Introduction 1  
Legal Requirements Governing the Rights of the Public 7  
Sunshine Law 8  
Public Records Act 10  
This Study 11  

Chapter Two: Literature Review 13  
Co-Orientational Theory and Model 13  
Situational Theory 17  
Excellence Theory 18  
Communication in the Public Sphere 20  
Public Participation 20  
Public Hearings 22  
Public Trust 26  
Government Agency Public Involvement 29  
Relationship Management 31  
The Strategic Communication Process 33  
Issues Management 34  
Risk Communication 36  
Crisis Management 37  
Summary 40  
Research Questions 41  

Chapter Three: Methods 42  
The Organization: The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) 43  
Respondents and Survey Administration: Survey to the Public and FDOT Management 45  
Survey Instrument 46  
Focus Groups 50  
Observation 51  

Chapter Four: Results 53  
Observation 53
Table of Contents (Continued)

Survey Responses from the Public: the Quantitative and Qualitative Data 56
Survey Responses from FDOT Management: the Quantitative and Qualitative Data 88
Co-orientation Perceptions 127
Focus Group 142

Chapter Five: Discussion 143
Research Questions 143

Chapter Six: Conclusions 158
Implications for Public Relations 164
Study Limitations 165
Future Research 165

References 167

Appendices 172
Appendix A: Breakdown of FDOT Districts 173
Appendix B: FDOT Mission, Vision, and Values 174
Appendix C: IRB Approval Letter 176
Appendix D: IRB Modification Request Letter 177
Appendix E: Public Survey 178
Appendix F: Manager Survey 181
Appendix G: Focus Group Questions 184
# List of Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1</td>
<td>Frequency Table of Public Responses: Satisfaction</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2</td>
<td>Frequency Table of Public Responses: Expectations</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3</td>
<td>Frequency Table of Public Responses: Purpose of meetings</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4</td>
<td>Frequency Table of Public Responses: Feelings</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5</td>
<td>Frequency Table of Manager Responses: Public Satisfaction</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6</td>
<td>Frequency Table of Manager Responses: Expectations</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 7</td>
<td>Frequency Table of Manager Responses: Purpose of meetings</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 8</td>
<td>Frequency Table of Manager Responses: Feelings</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 9</td>
<td>Comparison of Frequency Table of Manager Responses versus Public Responses: Meeting organization</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 10</td>
<td>Comparison of Frequency Table of Manager Responses versus Public Responses: Meeting format</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 11</td>
<td>Comparison of Frequency Table of Manager Responses versus Public Responses: Written materials</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 12</td>
<td>Comparison of Frequency Table of Manager Responses versus Public Responses: Audio visual</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 13</td>
<td>Comparison of Frequency Table of Manager Responses versus Public Responses: Comfort</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 14</td>
<td>Comparison of Frequency Table of Manager Responses versus Public Responses: Comments</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 15</td>
<td>Comparison of Frequency Table of Manager Responses versus Public Responses: Listening</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 16</td>
<td>Comparison of Frequency Table of Manager Responses versus Public Responses: Satisfaction</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Tables (Continued)

Table 17  Comparison of Frequency Table of Manager Responses versus Public Responses: Meaningful participation 135
Table 18  Comparison of Frequency Table of Manager Responses versus Public Responses: Opinion 136
Table 19  Comparison of Frequency Table of Manager Responses versus Public Responses: Needs 137
Table 20  Comparison of Frequency Table of Manager Responses versus Public Responses: Trust 138
Table 21  Comparison of Frequency Table of Manager Responses versus Public Responses: Expectations 139
Table 22  Comparison of Frequency Table of Manager Responses versus Public Responses: Purpose of public meetings 140
Table 23  Comparison of Frequency Table of Manager Responses versus Public Responses: Feelings 141
# List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1.</td>
<td>FDOT District Seven Five Year Adopted Work Program</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.</td>
<td>Co-Orientation Measurement Model</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3.</td>
<td>Themes from Public Surveys</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4.</td>
<td>Themes from FDOT Management Surveys</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5.</td>
<td>Focus Group Themes: FDOT Management</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6.</td>
<td>Co-Orientation Model – FDOT and the Public</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A Co-Orientational Analysis of Public Involvement Perceptions in the Transportation Process: A Case Study

Kristen E. Carson

ABSTRACT

This study explored public involvement within the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) using the co-orientational theory. Effective public involvement gives the public opportunities to be involved early in the planning and implementation of transportation projects that directly affect or may concern them. The co-orientational model looks at what an organization (FDOT) thinks about an issue (public involvement), what the public thinks of the issue, what the organization thinks the public thinks about the issue, and what the public thinks the organization thinks about the issue.

This study investigated whether the FDOT management has an accurate understanding of the perceptions of the public and communicates effectively with them. To achieve accurate perceptions of the public, management must interact with the public to identify issues that could become potential crises if not addressed at an early stage. This study examined whether there is true consensus or dissensus among the public and the FDOT management and looked at the perceptions of both groups and the distance between them to see if the needs of the public and the Department can both be met.

A critical part of this research included analyzing the opinions of the public to see if the public trusts government and the FDOT. Furthermore, this study set out to determine a
relationship between trust and involvement and the different techniques used to communicate.

Research was gathered through surveys to the public and to FDOT management. The public surveys were handed out at transportation public meetings across the state of Florida over a period of six months to gain the public’s perception of the issue and the public’s estimate of the management perceptions. Surveys were also distributed to FDOT managers throughout the state of Florida to gain the manager’s perception of the issue and the manager’s estimate of the public’s perceptions.

A focus group was also conducted with the FDOT’s District Public Information Officers/Directors to gain the management’s perception of the issue and the management’s estimate of the public’s perceptions.

The FDOT management was not accurate in their perceptions of the public. False conflict exists when one party believes the other disagrees, but in actual fact, agrees. The latter is mainly the state where the FDOT and the public exist. The FDOT mostly thought the public had negative opinions about public involvement, but in reality, the public was satisfied with FDOT’s public involvement.

The following theoretical perspectives guided this study: co-orientation theory, situational theory, excellence theory, and issues, risk, and crisis communication.
Chapter One
Introduction

The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) is made up of eight districts, including the Florida Turnpike Enterprise, which oversees the state toll roads in the state of Florida (see Appendix A). Each district puts on numerous public meetings each year, totaling approximately between 80 to 100 public meetings and public hearings statewide. The attendance at public hearings can range from 30 to hundreds of people, depending on the issue and the sensitivity of the project.

“Transportation agencies at all governmental levels are engaging in more public participation activities than ever before. This increased level of activity is in part due to the more specific requirements for consulting the public during the transportation decision-making process, but it is also reflective of the understanding that a thorough public involvement process, initiated at the earliest point possible in the project development process, results in better projects” (Texas Transportation Institute, 2000, p. 1).

A typical public hearing can easily cost between $30,000 and $40,000, including the elaborate video presentations which normally cost around $10,000. Included in these costs are the costs for renting the meeting room, legal advertisements, color copies of graphics, stenographer fees, mailings, postage, and general preparation briefings, including man hours of FDOT employees and consultants. These costs do not include the
costs to complete the transportation and environmental studies, which run around $750,000 (L. Royal, personal communication, March 6, 2004). Not all FDOT public meetings are quite this expensive. The FDOT does engage in less formal and less expensive public involvement activities when the meetings are not official public hearings.

Some very important questions I will address in this thesis include: What do members of the public who attend these meetings think about them? Do they find them useful? What do they think about public involvement, the DOT, and what do they think the DOT thinks about their own public involvement methods?

It can take eight to ten years for a road concept to reach construction. Since time is such a factor in road projects, the FDOT, the agency responsible for building and maintaining roadways, needs public involvement early on in the planning and design process. However, it is a challenge to gain early public interest and involvement because it is hard for citizens to envision road projects so far off in the future. The Department of Transportation struggles with informing the public about the many steps involved in a transportation project and the time involved with each phase.

I am intimately involved and passionate about this subject because I work in the Public Information Office for the Florida Department of Transportation, District Seven, which is located in the Tampa Bay area. I am also a graduate student at the University of South Florida. The idea for this thesis originally came from a survey I did in a graduate class which queried the FDOT management on their thoughts about public involvement. I thought it would be appropriate to take the study one step further and research the subject of public involvement in depth, a subject that is understudied and a subject where
I could actually take the results back to FDOT management to review and implement changes. I wanted to know not only what the FDOT management thought, but also what the public thought about FDOT’s public involvement process and what they thought about each other.

There are many phases to a transportation project according to the FDOT process. The first phase is the Project Development and Environment (PD&E) Study, which takes approximately 18 to 24 months. The next step is the design phase, which can take between 12 and 24 months. After the design is complete, the Department must then buy the property needed for the transportation project, or right-of-way (ROW). This process can take up to 24 months to be complete. Finally, construction usually takes anywhere from one to two years, depending on the size of the project (Florida Department of Transportation, 2003).

Several factors contribute to the complexity of a transportation project, including the environmental, social, and economic impact studies that must be completed to determine the best alternative. Local governments and the public must also have an opportunity to review and comment on the proposed project. Permits must be secured. Residents, businesses, and utilities in the path of the road project must be relocated.

Communication is the key to providing effective public involvement to the community. Effective public involvement gives the public opportunities to be involved in the planning and implementation of transportation projects that directly affect or may concern them. Even FDOT’s public involvement position (see Appendix B) states that since the FDOT uses tax dollars, public comments, ideas, thoughts, and concerns are essential.
Establishing an information exchange *early* on in a project will result in better communication with the public. This is important because road projects can literally connect or divide a community. However it is difficult to gain citizen interest in the planning stage, the stage where citizens need to first be involved, because most citizens do not react until they see the construction equipment outside their door or in their neighborhood. They think, “Oh this project is several years off and probably won’t affect me.”

In just Hillsborough County there are twenty projects on state roads at any given time with just the interstate projects costing over $400 million. FDOT has a multi-billion budget in the state of Florida (Figure 1). In the FDOT’s District Seven, which includes Citrus, Hernando, Pasco, Hillsborough, and Pinellas counties, $1,029,246,598 is programmed on road maintenance and improvement projects for fiscal year 2004/2005 alone (Florida Department of Transportation, 2004).

Within the State, there are more than 39,000 state highway lane miles. The FDOT also has the responsibility for 6,253 bridges in the state. The state transportation system also includes 828 aviation facilities, 14 seaports, 2,888 railway miles, 23 bus systems, and numerous bicycle and pedestrian facilities and rest areas (Florida Department of Transportation, 2003).

As mentioned above, with the budget, the number of projects, and the number of facilities that the FDOT is responsible for, there are obviously going to be numerous public involvement opportunities. There are many different versions of public meetings within the FDOT. There are public workshops, official public hearings, public information meetings, and construction open houses. Occasionally, FDOT will hold
smaller, neighborhood meetings; however, this is rare (L. Royal, personal communication, March 6, 2004).

The format of each meeting varies as well. Some meetings are more formal than others. Public workshops and hearings are mandated by statute, and are usually more structured. They are usually three hours, normally from 4:30 – 7:30 p.m. There is an informal portion in the beginning where the public can walk around and view maps and a video presentation. Next, there is a formal portion where official public comment is taken. This is where a FDOT representative officially “opens” the public hearing for comment and the public can stand in front of a microphone and state their comments “on the record.” However, many people believe this portion of the hearing is an open microphone “question and answer” session, when in reality, it is not. It is just a time period where the public can state their feelings and comments about the proposed project. Questions are not answered during the “formal” portion of the hearing. If citizens do ask questions at the microphone, they are told who they can speak to on a one-to-one basis to get their questions answered after the formal portion of the meeting is over.

There are also other ways to comment, including talking to a court reporter or writing down comments and placing them in the comment box or mailing them at a later date. After the “formal” portion of the public hearing is over, it then returns to an informal meeting, where the public can again walk around and ask questions of department staff and view maps and aerial photographs.

Design public information meetings and construction open houses are less formal than public hearings. These types of meetings do not have an open microphone session, rather the public is invited to walk around, view the display boards and maps, and speak
with the FDOT representatives that are present (L. Royal, personal communication, March 6, 2004).

Figure 1: FDOT District Seven Five Year Adopted Work Program

Fiscal Years July 1, 2004 - June 30, 2009 (millions)

- Construction: $1,802.7 (55.3%)
- Other: $50.3 (1.5%)
- PTO (Public Transportation): $173.3 (5.3%)
- Maintenance: $253.4 (7.8%)
- Engineering & Right-of-Way (ROW): $979.5 (30.1%)

Total Program: $3,259.2

Fuel tax dollars fund the development and implementation of transportation projects and systems (Florida Department of Transportation, 2003). FDOT is a trust funded agency. This means funds for the operations and improvements to the transportation system come from user fees such as highway fuel faxes, motor vehicle license fees, and aviation fuel taxes. These monies are then deposited into the State
Transportation Fund. Each time gas is purchased, a plane ticket is bought, or a car is rented or purchased, taxes are paid that help fund federal, state, and local transportation projects. Since the FDOT uses tax dollars, public input is vital.

**Legal Requirements Governing the Rights of the Public**

Public involvement has advanced over many years. Citizen input used to be sparse due to the many processes involved and mainly because the planning went on within the agency, not with the public. The FDOT started the practice of providing opportunities for the public to offer input during the transportation decision-making process in the late 1960s. Public involvement practices were implemented primarily in response to the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) and a growing importance in federal and state law to consider the effects of transportation actions on the environment. At that time, public involvement activities were very limited (Florida Department of Transportation, Central Office, 2004).

In the 1980s and 1990s, the process expanded to include public participation in the development of the State Transportation Plan and in the Annual Work Program process, the Department’s project prioritization plan delivered to the citizens of Florida. In 1993, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration jointly issued regulations that guided the development of statewide and metropolitan local plans. These regulations also included significant public participation requirements.

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended, and the Americans with Disabilities Act are some other Federal rules that govern the rights of the public. Various
state statutes also require the opportunity for public comment during the transportation project development process (Florida Department of Transportation, Central Office, 2004).

Public involvement is not only important, but as noted previously, there are actual laws that mandate certain actions. There are two Florida Statutes that are important in the public involvement process and in regards to media relations: the Sunshine Law and the Public Records Act.

**Sunshine Law**

Florida's Government-in-the-Sunshine Law was enacted in 1967. The Sunshine Law can be found in Chapter 286.011 of the Florida Statutes. “The Sunshine Law establishes a basic right of access to most meetings of boards, commissions and other governing bodies of state and local governmental agencies or authorities” (retrieved June 6, 2004 from the World Wide Web: [http://myfloridalegal.com/sunshine](http://myfloridalegal.com/sunshine)).

Florida's Government in the Sunshine Law, commonly referred to as the Sunshine Law, provides a right of access to governmental proceedings at both the state and local levels. The Sunshine Law states “The law is applicable to any gathering, whether formal or casual, of two or more members of the same board or commission to discuss some matter on which foreseeable action will be taken by the public board or commission” (retrieved June 6, 2004 from the World Wide Web: [http://myfloridalegal.com/sunshine](http://myfloridalegal.com/sunshine)).

There are three basic requirements:

1. meetings of public boards or commissions must be open to the public;
(2) reasonable notice of such meetings must be given; and

(3) minutes of the meetings must be taken.

The Government in the Sunshine Law applies to "any board or commission of any state agency or authority or of any agency or authority of any county, municipal corporation, or political subdivision" (retrieved June 6, 2004 from the World Wide Web: http://myfloridalegal.com/sunshine).

The FDOT, as well as every other state agency and authority, must comply with the Sunshine Law. Recently, the Tampa-Hillsborough County Expressway Authority’s problems with their Reversible Lanes project has been in the news. This is the project where some of the piers sank into the ground during construction. The Expressway board, of which the FDOT District Seven Secretary is a member, must advertise all of its board meetings and make sure it complies with all of the Sunshine Law regulations. Not only is the media present at all of the board meetings, they and members of the public also regularly attend the board committee meetings. Members of the public and the media closely monitor these types of boards, especially the Expressway Board, to make sure they are in compliance with the Sunshine Law.

FDOT is involved not only with this board, but many other boards, including all of the Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO), which are the boards that actually prioritize the projects for the FDOT. It is crucial for all of these boards and committees to act in accordance with the Sunshine Law, or face severe ramifications.

Private organizations generally are not subject to the Sunshine Law unless the private organization has been delegated by the authority to perform some governmental function.
Public Records Act

Another law that state agencies must comply with includes the Public Records Act. Chapter 119 of the Florida Statutes states:

Public records include: all documents, papers, letters, maps, books, tapes, photographs, films, sound recordings, data processing software, or other material, regardless of the physical form, characteristics, or means of transmission, made or received pursuant to law or ordinance or in connection with the transaction of official business by any agency (retrieved June 6, 2004 from the World Wide Web: http://myfloridalegal.com/sunshine).

Basically everything a state agency produces, writes, or e-mails is a public record and can be examined by anyone who requests it, including the media. Before all official public hearings, the FDOT must place all of the hearing documents in a local library so the public can view the documents before the meeting. The FDOT receives numerous requests for documents, maps, and engineering plans from the public, including attorneys that may be working for members of the public or hope to be in the future. It is very important for the FDOT to carefully organize all documents and have them readily accessible for the public, especially in regards to a public hearing or any public meeting.

This legal background further emphasizes the importance of effective public communication for the FDOT. The FDOT must make sure it is in compliance with the Sunshine Law and act swiftly and accordingly with anyone who requests public records. All of this can either help or hinder effective communication with the public.
This Study

Research on the role of communication in the transportation process is important and will therefore focus on how the FDOT management prioritizes and executes public involvement and relationship and community building. Another critical part of this research was to analyze the opinions of the public to see if the public trusted government and the FDOT. Does the public think they are being involved enough? Furthermore, this study set out to determine a relationship between trust and involvement and the different techniques used to communicate.

This study investigated whether the FDOT management has an accurate understanding of the perceptions of the public and communicates effectively with them. To achieve accurate perceptions of the public, management must interact with the public to identify issues that could become potential crises if not addressed at an early stage. This study also examined whether there is true consensus or dissensus among the public and the FDOT management and looked at the perceptions of both groups and the distance between them to see if the needs of the public and the Department can both be met.

In this study, data was gathered through a survey to the public and FDOT management and also through a focus group with FDOT management. The surveys were distributed to the Public Information Officers and Managers statewide who then distributed them at FDOT transportation public meetings across the state of Florida over a period of six months to gain the public’s perception of the issue and the public’s estimate of the management perception. There were approximately 20 public meetings where the surveys were distributed. Questionnaires were also distributed to FDOT managers throughout the state of Florida to gain the manager’s perception of the issue.
and the manager’s estimate of the public’s perception. There were a total of 23 surveys returned statewide from FDOT management and 66 surveys returned from the public.

The following theoretical perspectives guided this study: co-orientation theory, situational theory, and excellence theory. This study looked at co-orientation theory through the research of Broom (1977), Austin, and Pinkleton (2001). This study looked at the situational theory through Hunt and Grunig (1994) and the excellence theory through Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier (2002).
Chapter Two

Literature Review

**Co-Orientational Theory and Model**

Broom (1977) introduced the co-orientational model, which included indicators such as mutual understanding, accuracy, and congruency to measure the effects of public relations. Broom argued that public opinion surveys do not “provide all the information needed to adequately describe corporate-public relationships on issues of mutual concern” (p. 110). Public relations practitioners need to look deeper. There is the assumption that a public’s opinions and behavior are determined in part by its perceptions of the issue. If corporate and public definitions of an issue are similar, public opinion and behavior related to the issue will be consistent with corporate needs and corporate views of what is in the public interest (p. 111).

In the same approach, a public relations problem exists if there is a discrepancy between the corporate definition of an issue and the perceptions held by members of an important public (Broom, 1977).

The established view is that public relations should be viewed as a two-way symmetrical communication process, or a balanced process (Grunig, J.E., 2001). Two-way symmetrical communication is based on research, negotiation, compromise, and the use of communication to manage conflict. Public relations increases organizational
effectiveness when it builds long-term relationships of trust and understanding with strategic publics of the organization. The use of the two-way symmetrical model results in more trusting relationships than would the other models. It is also generally viewed as the most ethical and the most effective model because it uses communication to create a dialogue with the public, rather than a monologue. This model wants the public to participate in decision-making (Hunt, & Grunig 1994).

In the same vein, the evaluation process must also be examined as a two-way process in regards to looking at both sides of a relationship and how they perceive each other. The co-orientation model can help in three areas: identifying organization-public relationship problems, providing information useful in planning communication messages, and assessing public relations efforts (Broom, 1977).

There is a need to take into account perceptions of agreement in addition to actual agreement. Monolithic consensus, or true consensus, is an agreement that is accurately perceived by the parties involved. “A state of dissensus exists if disagreement is accurately perceived” (Broom, 1977, p. 111). Dissensus exists when organizations and publics hold conflicting perceptions on a topic and both parties are aware of this disagreement.

Two co-orientation states exist that are based on inaccurate perceptions of the other party’s perceptions. False consensus exists if there is disagreement, but the parties involved think they agree. There is also pluralistic ignorance, or a state of actual agreement, but where those involved think they disagree. This is also referred to as false conflict. If perceptions are inaccurately evaluated, the parties involved will act on their misperceptions, or what they believe to be the other group’s definition of the issue.
Co-orientation theory states that people and organizations relate to one another successfully when they think similarly about ideas (Austin & Pinkleton, 2001). The co-orientation model shows the ways two parties may relate to the same idea. “Each party will have impressions both about the idea and about what the other party thinks about the idea” (p. 270). The model is a good way to diagnose the potential for miscommunication that can ultimately hurt the organization’s reputation and the relationship between the organization and its stakeholders (p. 62).

The co-orientation model focuses on relationships and states that “successful communication depends on accurate perceptions from all parties involved, with ultimate success defined as consensus” (Austin & Pinkleton, 2001, p. 62). This model looks at what an organization thinks about an issue, what the public thinks of an issue, what the organization thinks the public thinks about the issue, and what the public thinks the organization thinks about the issue. Determining the distance between the two perceptions is key to this model. This model will help the public relations practitioner account for actual disagreement and perceived disagreement.

“The most effective communication takes place when both parties agree and when they know they agree, which means they have achieved consensus” (Austin & Pinkleton, 2001, p. 272). Relational satisfaction, or the degree to which a relationship seems fulfilling, may be the most important measure of an effective relationship. “Co-orientation theory demonstrates the importance of taking a long-term view of the organization’s relationship with its stakeholders despite the temptation to focus on short term goals” (p. 273). Measures such as trust and commitment are also very important in co-orientation theory.
In Figure 2, the boxes on the left represent measures of A’s perceptions of object “X” and A’s estimate of B’s perceptions of that same object (Broom, 1977). The comparison of these two measures, indicated by the arrow labeled “congruency,” represents the degree of similarity between A’s perceptions and those he attributes to B. The right side of the model represents identical measures and a similar intrapersonal congruency variable for B.

A-B interpersonal relationships regarding X are represented by the arrows connecting A measures with B measures. The “agreement” variable indexes the extent to which A and B have the same evaluations of X. “Understanding” indicates the extent to which A and B hold similar definitions of X. “Accuracy” represents the extent to which A’s estimate of B’s perceptions match what B really thinks about X (Broom, 1977).

Figure 2: Co-Orientation Measurement Model
Situational Theory

J. Grunig’s situational theory of publics is a theory that needs to be discussed in relation to this study. The situational theory segments publics based on their perceptions of a situation and their subsequent behavior (Grunig, L.A., Grunig, J.E., & Dozier, 2002). This approach involves analyzing the levels of a public’s organized cognitions about an issue. This theory “addresses a public’s cognition in terms of a group’s information processing and information seeking and how these variables influence a group’s communication behavior” (Cozier & Witmer, 2001, p. 616).

Publics can be categorized in an attempt to predict their communication behaviors. They can also be categorized by the extent they passively or actively communicate about an issue and the extent they actively behave in a way that either helps or hinders an organization’s mission. The public is more likely to be active when they perceive that what an organization does involves them (level of involvement), that the consequences of what an organization does is a problem (problem recognition), and that they are not constrained from doing something about the problem (constraint recognition) (Hunt & Grunig, 1994).

Stakeholders are any individuals or groups that are linked to an organization because they and the organization can affect each other by each other’s actions. Many public relations practitioners use issues management to monitor and scan the environment to identify stakeholders. Once stakeholders are mapped out, it is important to rank them by importance and finally to plan on-going communication programs with them, before conflict has occurred (Hunt & Grunig, 1994).
Publics can be latent publics, or a group that is passive, but have the potential to be active. Active publics are easier to communicate with because they seek out information, however they are not easy to persuade. When active publics feel an organization is unresponsive to their concerns, they communicate and behave actively. One way to deal with publics is to conduct focus groups so publics can be brought together to discuss the issues that affect them (Hunt & Grunig).

Understanding accurate perceptions closely relates to the co-orientation theory as both theories discuss how effective communication depends on knowing the public’s perceptions and being able to predict their behaviors.

**Excellence Theory**

In 1985, the International Association of Business Communicators Research Foundation funded the Excellence study, a study where the results were not published until almost ten years later (Grunig, L.A., Grunig, J.E., & Dozier, 2002). Ideally, an organization should use an excellent model of public relations. The excellence theory involves building mutually beneficial relationships with strategic constituencies and increasing employees’ satisfaction, which enhances productivity and quality. The excellence theory states that public relations is most effective when the senior public relations manager can help shape organizational goals, identify the important external publics, and is a part of the dominant coalition. Excellent public relations also involves identifying active and strategic publics and developing symmetrical communication programs (Austin & Pinkleton, 2001, p. 274).
Excellent public relations must be viewed as symmetrical, idealistic, and managerial.

“To be idealistic and critical means that public relations practitioners have the freedom to advocate the interests of the public to management and to criticize management decisions that affect publics adversely. To be managerial means that public relations fulfills the managerial role of negotiating and mediating the conflict that occurs between management and strategic publics” (Grunig, L.A., Grunig, J.E., & Dozier, 2002, p. 11).

The Excellence Theory also states that organizations must have an integrated communication function, which means that all public relations functions are managed under a single department or a mechanism is provided to coordinate programs managed by different departments. If organizations define public relations according to this theory, public relations will serve the interests of both the organization and the public (Grunig, L.A., Grunig, J.E., & Dozier, 2002, p. 11).

Public relations is also used to respond to stakeholder needs, mitigate harm, and repair images after a crisis. “Public relations professionals are expected to participate in crisis and issue monitoring, risk assessment and communication, and crisis planning, as well as in post-crisis information dissemination, management, and image restoration” (Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2001, p. 156).
Communication in the Public Sphere

Public participation methods, public trust, and government agency public involvement are all intertwined. If government agencies do not conduct successful public involvement, public trust can erode.

Public Participation

Government agencies, including the FDOT, are holding more public meetings than ever before. The demands for more citizen participation in government have come from government officials as well as from citizens. In a perfect world, citizens try to influence government and government officials try to make government more accessible and responsive to citizens. Two citizen-participation movements have grown in the last decade: the citizen-initiated movement and the citizen-action movement. The citizen-initiated movement stresses the importance of citizen action to influence and monitor government. The citizen-action movement includes grassroots groups and public-interest groups. As a result of this, there are now rules and regulations that exist at all levels of government mandating citizen participation (Langton, 1978, pp.1-2).

A thorough search of literature found that little is known about the effectiveness of participation. Likewise, there is no consensus about the goals and objectives of citizen participation, or in the ability to evaluate it. There must be measurement criteria to evaluate public hearings, newsletters, and workshops. There is an assumption that more citizen participation will produce better public policy, but is this the case and can it be measured (Rosener, 1978, p. 457)?
Public participation can be defined as “forums for exchange that are organized for the purpose of facilitating communication between government, citizens, stakeholders and interest groups, and businesses regarding a specific decision or problem” (Renn, Webler, & Wiedemann, 1995, p. 2). Public participation must be fair and competent. However, people may participate with no intent to reach an agreement. They might use the public participation activities as an opportunity to make statements about their unwillingness to cooperate. Practitioners should be aware of this (p. 2-10).

The key to effective citizen participation is attention to details. The public and major stakeholders should meet to negotiate and create consensus. Many people should have the opportunity to serve on planning committees, though the numbers cannot be too large. Participants must also be educated on all the details so they can fully understand the changes taking place. Finally, serious consideration must be given to the type of information provided and the manner in which it is disseminated (Perlstadt, Jackson-Elmoore, Freddolino, & Reed, 1998).

Too often officials are too late to get the public involved. Public hearings tend to be used to satisfy legal requirements, and are often too technical for the public to understand. Public participation efforts need to employ a wide array of methods and use simple language that a lay person can understand (Kasperson, 1986, p. 280).

One traditional citizen participation method is the citizen committee. The citizen committee that is well informed can be very effective. Another participation method is the survey. A major advantage of surveys is that “a scientifically selected random sample of the population can obtain an accurate representation of the views of all types of people” (Milbrath, 1981, p. 482). A survey may appear to be costly, but if it measures
beliefs and values, it can be very cost effective in the long run. The persons responsible for policy decisions should work closely with the researchers in designing the survey.

Public relations practitioners can benefit from conducting focus group interviews and using surveys to identify how the community views the organization and what form of information dissemination is most well-received by the public. This will aid in the development of public trust and in identifying the issues of potential concern (Williams & Olaniran, 1998, p. 387).

Kweit & Kweit (1987) state, “Democratic decision-making is based on the assumption that all who are affected by a decision have the right to participate in the making of that decision” (p. 22). Two methods used for public involvement are the public hearing and the survey. Public meetings are usually faced with low attendance. Surveys, on the other hand, may be more useful, but many times, the responses are not well thought out (Kweit, & Kweit, 1987, p. 30).

**Public Hearings**

Public hearings are just one method of public participation, but are utilized by government officials and agencies quite regularly, especially since many times, they are mandated by statute.

There are three stages at which most public hearings are held: preliminary hearings, pre-final decision hearings, and final hearings. Hearings have the potential to reach large groups of people, but can the public participation be meaningful at these meetings? Hearings tend to be a “one-shot exercise” and the format does not encourage discussion about change. The end result of the public’s involvement should be a decision
that takes the public’s wishes into account. This is the true test of public participation (Sinclair, 1977, pp. 105-108).

In the case studies Steiner (1978) presented, public hearings were usually “unveilings of the finished product instead of working sessions” (p. 114). Citizen input was sparse due to the many processes involved and mainly because the planning went on within the agency, not with the public. The 1962 Federal Highway Act and 1962 Environmental Protection Act changed many of these inconsistencies. Now, the route for any proposed facility must be consistent with the required master transportation plan. Government employees must also be responsive to suggestions made by citizens.

McComas (2003) conducted a study over a 2-year period to explore how public meeting participants viewed government and if the participants considered their participation meaningful. Specifically, the researcher examined the perceptions of the public about government-sponsored public meetings held about local waste sites. Using Heberlein’s research (1976), McComas’ study took a critical look at public meetings to find out why people participate. Heberlein suggested that agencies use public meetings for four reasons including to inform the public about decisions already made, to co-opt the public into supporting the decision, to satisfy legal requirements for public involvement, or to seek public input. McComas’ data was gathered through mailed questionnaires, direct observation, interviews with people attending public meetings, and a review of newspaper coverage. The questionnaire specifically examined participants’ opinions about public meetings (p. 92).

The results of the study demonstrated that citizen participation did little to affect government decisions, which is exactly what the participants thought would happen.
Citizens also went to public meetings with low expectations and viewed their participation as meaningless (McComas, 2003, p. 109). The results also showed only one-third of the participants felt comfortable making comments at the hearings and fewer than half of the respondents believed that those in charge were genuinely interested in listening to their comments. The results suggested that trying to influence decisions might not be the main reason why people attend public meetings since public meeting participants overwhelmingly believed that their participation made no difference. The results also indicated that people arrived with low expectations and left feeling worse about the situation. McComas found some possible explanations why people attend public hearings including to acquire information, to gather informal information about how other people in the community feel about an issue by listening to public comments, to offer support to neighbors or friends, to provide some psychological relief that they are at least doing something, to have some sense of control over a risky situation, and to serve as a type of ritualistic purpose for participants (p. 110). The most notable finding of McComas’ study was how meaningless most participants viewed their part in the decision-making process.

What is the most effective means to obtain public input? “As long as individuals trust the decision-maker to act in their best interest, they have no need to participate; however, as trust erodes, the demand for participation tends to increase” (Heberlein, 1976, p. 212). The workshop and the quasi-experiment hold “the most promise” of the public involvement methods examined.

Public participation success is defined by two criteria: the participation process and the outcome of the process. For some, successful participation is judged solely by
the outcome, or the results. Others define successful public participation by the participatory processes, including fairness, information exchange, and procedures. There are also those that believe a middle ground should be taken. (Chess & Purcell, 1999, pp. 2685-2687).

Public meetings are among the most used and frequently criticized methods of public participation in community planning. Public agencies must use meetings to meet the minimum legal requirement for public participation, but do the opinions of those participating really make a difference? Many opinions about public meetings are negative due to their “adversarial formats, overly technical presentations, minor impact on ensuing decisions, and unrepresentative audiences” (McComas, 2001, pp. 36-38).

Checkoway (1981) stated that public hearings can be useful as a way to gain effective citizen participation, but alone, they are not enough. Meetings can influence government decisions; however, the use of large public meetings, by themselves, is discouraged. Public agencies would be mistaken to place total reliance on public hearings. He studied the shortcomings of public hearings as a participation method. For example, those who attend public hearings are not representative of their area population. Affected groups and persons do not always participate and the views presented do not always represent the general community (pp. 568-577).

Opinions obtained at public meetings appear to represent the public only if the meetings are well publicized, if they are held so that all parties have easy and equal access, and if all participants at the meeting are consulted about their opinions, not easy tasks (Gundry & Heberlein, 1984, p. 181). Not every participant is going to speak on the public record, so how can you truly gain the opinions of everyone?
The public hearing has not made much of a difference in changing government policy, but the hearing process may have positive results for the participants, promoting awareness of government and individual leadership (Cole & Caputo, 1984, p. 415).

“Participation and association are also means of developing new leadership, involving larger segments of the population in the creation of public policy, and thus encouraging the development of more responsive policies.” Research also indicates that groups under outside pressure are more active in pursuit of their goals and are more highly organized and cohesive (Gittell, 1980, p. 21).

**Public Trust**

Trust has been linked good communication and the building of good relationships. Generally, poor communication leads to a decrease in trust. Whether poor government communication has led to a decline in public trust is unclear.

Trust is the assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something. Trust can also be defined as one party’s level of confidence in and willingness to open oneself to another party. Trust includes dimensions such as integrity, dependability, and competence (Grunig & Hon, 1999, p. 28). Integrity is the belief that the organization is fair and just. Dependability is the belief that an organization will do what it says it will do. Competence is the belief that an organization has the ability to accomplish what it says it will do. When dealing with an organization and its publics, trust also includes factors such as knowing that when important decisions are made, the organization will think about its constituents and take their opinions into account and that
the organization can be relied on to keep its promises. Trust also helps people feel confident about the organization’s skills. (Grunig & Hon, 1999, p. 4).

Public trust in government has declined since the 1960s (Thomas, 1998). Some believe it is because of the performance of elected officials. Still others argue that the public is dissatisfied in general with government institutions. There are three conceptions of trust, including fiduciary trust, mutual trust, and social trust. Fiduciary relationships are where an individual places trust in another to act in his or her capacity. These individuals are trusted to carry out their duties in regards to others while not taking personal advantage of their position. This is an asymmetrical relationship because it is difficult for citizens to monitor or control performance. “Elected officials can be voted out of office, but civil servants are relatively immune from such control. Therefore, citizens must place their trust in government agencies and their employees to act in their interest” (p. 171).

Mutual trust is more symmetrical than fiduciary trust. Individuals develop interpersonal relationships based on mutual trust. Social trust provides a basis for stable interaction in a society (Thomas, 1998).

Trust can be lost through lying and the misuse of power. Trust can also be lost through individual incompetence and role fluctuations with reorganizations in an agency.

“Trust is the belief that those with whom you interact will take your interests into account, even in situations where you are not in a position to recognize, evaluate, and/or thwart a potentially negative course of action by those trusted. Confidence exists when the party trusted is able to empathize with your interests, is competent to act on that knowledge, and will go to considerable lengths to keep its word.
Trustworthiness is a combination of trust and confidence” (La Porte & Metlay, 1996, p. 341).

Every organizational action can have a potential impact on an agency’s trustworthiness. Organizations facing a serious deficit of trust and confidence must develop a new culture of awareness (La Porte & Metlay, 1996).

If an organization has lost the trust of the public, it means that the public and stakeholders believe that the organization does not intend to take their interests into account. To increase public trust and confidence, the organization needs to restructure how it interacts with outsiders. Organization leaders must give all citizens opportunities for involvement and must demonstrate fairness in negotiating.

“Organizations should make commitments to involve stakeholder groups before key decisions are made through frequent contact, characterized by complete candor and by rapid and full response to questions, carry out agreements in a timely manner, reach out consistently and respectfully to state and community leaders and to the general public to inform, consult, and collaborate with them about the technical and operational aspects of the agency’s activities, and maintain a presence of very high leaders, who make themselves visible and accessible to citizens at important field sites” (La Porte & Metlay, 1996, p.343).

There are many steps to enhancing trust: meeting with the community early, responding to community concerns and clearly explaining what action will take place to address their concerns, maintaining a presence in the community, working with the community on equal footing, openly sharing information, involving stakeholders in decision-making and data gathering, and keeping communication channels open (U. S.
Environmental Protection Agency, 2001, p. 4). These steps to enhancing trust will also lead to an organization practicing two-way symmetrical public relations.

Trust also involves empowerment (Culbert, S.A., & McDonough, J.J., 1986). Empowerment is the key to understanding trust and trusting relationships in an organization. When people feel empowered, they feel vital, energized, and are filled with a sense that their input is valued by others. People trust those who they believe will see events in ways that value the unique and distinctive contributions that they have sought to produce. People do not trust those whom they believe are proceeding with a way not harmonious with their own. In order to feel empowered, individuals need to feel confidence that management has a real understanding of their commitments. People will scrutinize the words and behavior of higher management for its sensitivity to the situations and dilemmas with which they struggle to make a contribution (p. 183).

**Government Agency Public Involvement**

Government agencies have always struggled with public involvement and gaining public trust. The US Department of Transportation’s documents on public involvement examine public involvement techniques for transportation, including public hearings and media strategies, getting feedback from participants, and new ways to communicate.

“People have a key role in the decisions shaping what transportation systems and services will be part of their communities. Consulting with the public, the transportation consumer, is a crucial way to identify public values and needs, to gather information, and to build consensus on transportation programs. Finally, and
most importantly, public participation makes for better transportation decisions” (U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration, 1996).

Burgess (2000) studied the FDOT public involvement process to see if the public influenced transportation actions. The researcher, with the help of the Center for Urban Transportation Research (CUTR), surveyed the FDOT and Metropolitan Planning Organizations through a fax-back method to obtain information on practitioners’ knowledge and use of community impact assessment and public involvement techniques. She found, according to FDOT staff, “the approach (for public involvement) was to do just what made sense, start real early” and keep the communication lines open (p. 72).

Dow’s (1978) study explored transportation planning, social impact assessment, and citizen participation by examining the Hillsborough County, Florida Fletcher Avenue Environmental Impact Statement and Corridor Location Study. The researcher came to several conclusions, including that sincerity and trust is essential, formality is not always the key because some citizens are not comfortable speaking in front of large groups, and accessibility outside the meeting room is important as a smaller, less formal atmosphere might be what citizens want (p. 91).

Transportation tends to be poorly understood and usually criticized, making the most controversial projects the only ones that get noticed. This type of exposure makes it difficult for engineers to gain public support. That is why an effective public relations function is necessary. A public relations program can keep the public informed, assess public opinion, and gain support for transportation proposals (Bochner, 1977, p. 2).

Researching how other state agencies conduct public involvement could prove helpful. In January 2001, a report was published by the Environmental Protection
Agency (EPA), stating that they had increased their efforts to give an opportunity to the public to play key roles in the decision-making process. The agency took a “fresh look” at their efforts to involve the public by evaluating stakeholder involvement and public participation activities. One of the key components of the EPA report states “establishing trust is integral;” however, it was noted that this takes time to develop (p. 4).

**Relationship Management**

Relationship management holds that relationships should be at the core of public relations scholarship and practice. An organization’s mission and direction is affected by relationships with key constituents. Relationship management states that public relations is the management of relationships between an organization and its key publics (Ledingham, J.A., & Bruning, S. D., 2000, p. 56).

Research indicates that relationship management characteristics such as openness, trust, involvement, investment, and commitment influence perceptions of satisfaction with the organization by the publics (p. 59).

The goal of public relations is to build and maintain relationships (Grunig & Hon, 1999). It is extremely important for an organization to measure relationships. Grunig and Hon developed a public relations measurement scale, which includes six elements of a relationship. They include: 1) control mutuality, 2) trust, 3) satisfaction, 4) commitment, 5) exchange relationship, and 6) communal relationship.

Control mutuality is the degree to which parties agree on who has power over another (Grunig & Hon, 1999). Trust is the willingness of one individual to open up to another individual. Satisfaction is the extent to which each party feels that the benefits
outweigh the costs. Commitment refers to how a person believes that a relationship is worth exerting energy to maintain. An exchange relationship is where one party gives benefits because the other has done so as well. Finally, a communal relationship is where both parties provide benefits to the other, not expecting anything in return.

Ledingham (2001) tested the idea to see if and how public relations techniques and processes can help build relationships and build community (p. 286). His study found that citizens were positive when they perceived that local government provided benefits, acted in the best interest of the public, and dedicated resources to support matters of importance to citizens. His study also found that the building and nurturing of organization-public relationships must involve mutual benefit. The public expects mutuality in their dealings with an organization. The public seeks a balance between “the social costs of interaction with their local government and the social benefits gained in the exchange” (p. 292). However, when the costs exceed the rewards, an organization can expect relationships to decline.

Ledingham (2001) also found that public relations can function as a community-builder. “When shared interests are the basis for public relations initiatives grounded in a commitment to mutual benefit, and when those initiatives are designed to accommodate differing interests, then community can be the result” (p. 292).

Public relations can help an organization build relationships with key publics (Grunig & Hon, 1999). When this happens, an organization saves money by reducing the costs of litigation, regulation, legislation, pressure campaigns, boycotts, and lost revenue from bad relationships. Cultivating good relationships can actually help an organization make money by building relationships with publics who support the goals of the
organization. There are other internal benefits as well. Good relationships help attain employee satisfaction. A satisfied employee will support their organization and not interfere with the mission of the organization.

“Effective organizations are able to achieve their goals because they choose goals that are valued both by management and by strategic constituencies both inside and outside the organization” (Grunig & Hon, 1999). This is achieved through developing relationships. Organizations usually make better decisions when they listen to their publics before final decisions are made. It is not about simply trying to persuade the publics to accept the organizational decisions.

Public opposition to management goals and decisions can result in crises. Therefore, developing and maintaining relationships is vital in issues, risk, and crisis management.

The Strategic Communication Process

Building trust is at the core of risk communication. In the strategic management of communication, issues, risk, and crisis management go hand-in-hand. Issues management helps identify trends in the public, trends that can evolve into risks or perceived risks. Risk communication takes a proactive approach to exchanging information and communicating with the public early about these perceived risks. Practitioners who establish and prioritize issues and risk communication programs are able to manage crisis events when they happen and handle their effects in a much more efficient manner (Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2001).
**Issues Management**

*Issues management* includes “the identification, monitoring, and analysis of trends in key publics’ opinions that can mature into public policy and regulative or legislative constraint” (Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2001, p. 156). Simply put, organizations need to monitor the environment for potential crises and hot topics and issues management is a tool to do this.

Issues-driven public relations is similar to establishing a radar system to help management anticipate and prepare for issues. The ideal is to get involved with an issue early. Early involvement provides practitioners with the opportunity to help shape how an issue develops (Tucker & Trumpfheller, 1993, p. 36).

There are five steps to setting up an issue management system for an organization. The first step is anticipating issues and establishing priorities. The second step is analyzing issues. Next is the recommendation of an organizational position on the issue. The fourth step is identifying publics and opinion leaders who can help advance the organization’s position. Finally, the last step includes identifying desired behaviors of publics and opinion leaders (p. 37)

Issues management can also be defined as “the organized activity of identifying emerging trends, concerns, or issues likely to affect an organization in the next few years and developing a wider and more positive range of organizational responses toward that future” (Gaunt & Ollenburger, 1995, p. 200). Most organizations react after-the-fact and are forced to accept new regulations and guidelines. Organizations who do not identify and analyze trends find themselves the defendant in the court of public opinion when a critical issue reaches the public policy decision-making point (p. 201).
An issue is created when the public attaches significance to a situation or perceived problem. Issues will go through many cycles. They do no appear overnight and there may be more than one emerging at any given time. One big question is whether or not issues management is considered a function of public relations. Some feel that public relations practitioners are better qualified to act as communication technicians rather than as management counselors (Gaunt & Ollenburger, 1995). Yet others disagree. However, if an organization truly follows the excellence model of public relations, public relations practitioners will be both communication technicians and management counselors.

Research has shown that few public relations practitioners have incorporated issues management and have done little to develop it as a public relations function. Public relations professionals are responsible for relationships with all stakeholders. Issues management runs parallel in value to strategic planning among top management (Tucker & Broom, 1993, p. 39).

A qualified issues manager must possess an understanding of the organization, the social and political environment in which the organization exists, how to manage relationships with publics and stakeholders, and the ability to translate issues management into operational benefits (p. 40). If practitioners do not incorporate issues management as a public relations function, they will not be able to monitor the concerns and perceptions of the public, perceptions that may be inaccurate and can grow quickly out of hand. Identifying perceptions is where risk communication is critical.
Risk Communication

Risk communication research suggests that organizations should encourage “exchange of information among interested parties about the nature, significance, or control of a risk” (Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2001, p. 157). Public relations practitioners have a duty to provide an information exchange in disseminating messages. Risk communication is important in crisis management because it establishes pre-crisis perceptions and creates positive stakeholder relations.

Risk communication involves perceptions. The public is usually distrustful of government agencies. The public relations practitioner must accept the public’s perceptions as reality and deal with them. Risk communication messages should be clear, should help people quantify risk, should use language people can understand, and should include strong facts (Gordon, 1991). Risk communication also involves taking the initiative. It is better for the public to hear negative news from the government agency, rather than the media. If the media reports it, it will look like the agency was hiding something.

Effective risk communication involves strong media relations. The media are the crucial link in disseminating risk messages to key publics. Public relations practitioners must fully understand how to present the facts to the media, must be dependable and believable, must make journalists understand and care about the risks, and must understand journalists’ limitations. It is also important to understand what journalists need to get the story right the first time (Adams, 1992, p. 29). Public relations practitioners should not use technical jargon, downplay risks, ignore public concerns, or stonewall. Educating the news media about risk and the organization’s efforts is a good
way to keep the public informed (p. 30). These are also the same tips that can and should
be used when dealing with the public. Management must be in the loop and must support
risk communication activities. The spokesperson or expert must be trained and
knowledgeable in order to be credible. It is also very important to understand the
organization’s target audiences and how the media can effectively communicate to them
(p. 31).

The common thread to risk communication is being proactive. If trust and
credibility are missing, the goal should be to build them. “Only when trust and
credibility have been established, can other goals, such as education and the sharing of
information follow” (Sheldon, 1996, p. 17). Trust and credibility will not be built
quickly. They will be the result of ongoing partnerships, actions, and communication.
There are four factors that influence perceptions of trust and credibility: “perceived
caring and empathy,” “perceived competence and expertise,” “perceived honesty and
openness,” and “perceived dedication and commitment” (p. 18).

Even if practitioners perfect issues and risk management, crises are inevitable.
However, it is how the practitioners manage the crises that will affect the organization,
the public, and their relationship in the long run.

**Crisis Management**

Crises are part of an organization’s development. In the past, public relations
practitioners have dealt with crises by disseminating information after the crisis is over
and planning strategies for image restoration.
A crisis is a major event with a potentially negative outcome affecting an organization, its publics, services, and its name. “Crisis management is strategic planning to prevent or respond during a crisis or negative occurrence, a process that removes some of the risk and uncertainty and allows the organization to be in greater control of its destiny” (Fearn-Banks, 2001, p. 480). The process of crisis communication is the interaction between the organization and its publics, which often occur through the media. This includes the interaction before, during, and after the negative occurrence.

There are five stages in a crisis. The first stage, detection, includes the organization watching for warning signs. The second stage, preparation/prevention, is where the organization makes plans to avoid and or cope with the crisis through a proactive campaign. The third stage is containment, or limiting the damage. The fourth stage is recovery, which refers to the efforts to return to business as normal. Finally, the fifth stage is learning. The learning stage is the stage where evaluation is done (Fearn-Banks, 2001, p. 480).

Organizations with effective crisis communication plans are able to better prepare, deal with the unexpected, and respond when needed (Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2001). The crisis planning approach involves three activities: development of a crisis management team, development of checklists, and the capability of maintaining crisis responses.

The first step of crisis management is the establishment of a crisis management team. These teams bring together the experts and management. “Such teams include public relations, legal affairs, operations, security, top management, a designated crisis
spokesperson, and others with appropriate skills and resources” (Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2001, p. 158).

Checklists are another important part of crisis management. The checklists should include local contacts, generic press releases and templates, internal and external resources, media outlets, and medical facilities. These preprepared documents will serve the organization by helping management respond quickly.

Finally, the third step in crisis planning is keeping the crisis plan up-to-date. It is critical to assess, update, and revise plans regularly. If a crisis plan is not reviewed from time to time, it will not be effective.

Excellent organizations with effective public relations programs have several things in common in terms of crisis communication. They include: the public relations head is part of the dominant coalition, strong media relations, issues management is part of a two-way symmetrical program, a practice of risk communication activities is developed, and the organization maintains a reputation for being open and honest (Fearn-Banks, 2001, pp. 480-481).

There are several guidelines for practicing crisis management. They include communicating accurately, quickly, and openly, and maintaining openness and flexibility with stakeholders. Also important is closely monitoring the media and reactions in the media from various stakeholder groups, maintaining consistent messages with a credible spokesperson, using a crisis management team to assess the crisis response, and working to establish positive stakeholder relations and corporate image prior to and after the crisis (p. 163).
Summary

Trust is an underlying theme in this study. Whether it is dealt with using co-orientation theory with how one group perceives another and what they think they understand about each other or in the discussion of communicating with the public, trust is key to this research. Even in the strategic communication process, including issues, risk, and crisis management, without trust from the public and without the exchange of information with the public, practitioners would be lost.

In summary, to achieve accurate perceptions of the public, management must interact with the public to identify issues that could become potential crises if not addressed at an early stage. Issues management helps identify risks while risk management takes a proactive approach to exchanging information and communicating with the public about their perceived risks. However all of this exchange of information with an organization and its publics will not do any good, especially in crisis situations, if each side does not fully understand each other. The co-orientation theory is a good way to diagnose the potential for miscommunication that can ultimately hurt the organization’s reputation and the relationship between the organization and its stakeholders.

The excellence theory also is critical because it entails building mutually beneficial relationships with strategic constituencies. In order to build mutually beneficial relationships, each side must understand each other, listen to each other, and understand each other’s perceptions. This seems to be the way for organizations to achieve successful communication and make better decisions.
Research Questions

As mentioned, this research study utilized both quantitative and qualitative data gathering techniques. This study will aim to answer the following research questions:

**RQ1:** Can the FDOT communicate more effectively with the public? How do accurate perceptions play a role?

**RQ2:** Why do people who participate in public hearings find them valuable, if at all?

**RQ3:** Is there an increased level of trust for people who do participate in public hearings?

**RQ4:** What is the role of trust in the relationship between the public and the FDOT?

**RQ5:** Is the FDOT management accurate in their perceptions of the public?

**RQ6:** If there is a gap in perception, does it affect trust?

**RQ7:** What is the level of co-orientation?
Chapter Three

Methods

This methods section is divided into five subsections identified as a) The Organization, b) Respondents and Survey Administration, c) Survey Instrument, d) Focus Group, and e) Observation.

This case study specifically looked at the FDOT’s public involvement process, how the public and FDOT management perceive the process, and how they perceive each other’s perceptions. This was analyzed through surveys that were handed out to the public at various public meetings across the state of Florida.

A case study is an “exploration of a bounded system or a case over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context. This bounded system is bounded by time and place, and it is the case being studied – a program, an event, an activity, or individuals” (Creswell, 1998, p. 61). Extensive and multiple sources of information are used to provide an in-depth picture. The focus on the case may be on an issue or issues, with the case used to highlight the issue, or an instrumental case study. The case may focus on an agency.

Many researchers call their case studies “fieldwork.” Some researchers call them case studies because it draws attention to the question of what specifically can be learned from the single case (Stake, 2000, p. 435.) Either way, the concentration is on trying to
understand its complexities. Stake (2000) defines a case study as “both a process of inquiry about the case and the product of that inquiry” (p. 436).

Case studies are valuable because they can refine theory and suggest complexities for further investigation, as well as help establish the limits of generalizability. “Case study can also be a disciplined force in public policy setting and reflection on human experience. The purpose of a case report is not to represent the world, but to represent the case” (Stake, 2000, p. 448).

The Organization: The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT)

This study was motivated and inspired by the work of Katherine A. McComas, specifically by her 2003 article, “Trivial Pursuits: Participant Views of Public Meetings.” The research site chosen for this study was the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT). The FDOT is a state agency that builds and maintains state of Florida roads and highways. This study specifically looked at the FDOT’s public involvement process to analyze what the FDOT management thought about the process, what the public thought about the process, and how they perceived each other’s perceptions.

This study analyzed the survey data using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The combination of both methods worked well for this study because it was possible to quantify the qualitative data. Babbie (1998) states that “measurements begin with observations” (p. 2). Every observation is qualitative at the outset, even a checkmark marked on a questionnaire. Observations are not numerical or quantitative, but it can be helpful to convert them to a numerical form. To quantify a non-numerical
concept, it is necessary to be explicit about what the concept means. “Quantification often makes our observations more explicit” (Babbie, 1998, p. 37).

Quantitative studies emphasize the measurement and analysis of relationships between variables, not processes (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). Quantitative methods can also make it easier to compare and summarize data. The difference between quantitative and qualitative data is the difference between numbers and no numbers (Babbie, 1998).

Quantitative data has advantages because numbers over words are easier to measure. However, the disadvantages that numbers have include a “potential loss in richness of meaning” (Babbie, 1998, p. 37).

Qualitative research stresses the “socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 8). Qualitative researchers seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning. Qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. Qualitative data are usually richer in meaning and contains more details, however the data can have the disadvantage of being purely verbal descriptions. Measurement is one of the keys to social research. The other is interpretation (Babbie, 1998). This is why I chose to use both methods.

Using the co-orientation model, four variables were examined to see if the FDOT is close in its thinking about public involvement compared to what the public thinks about FDOT’s public involvement methods. The variables include: (1) the management’s perception of the issue – the issue being the FDOT Public Involvement
Process, (2) the public’s perception of the issue, (3) the management’s estimate of the public’s perceptions, and (4) the public’s estimate of the management perceptions.

Respondents and Survey Administration: Survey to the Public and FDOT Management

A survey may appear to be costly, but if it measures beliefs and values, it can be very cost effective in the long run, however the persons responsible for policy decisions should work closely with the researchers in designing the survey (Milbrath, 1981, p. 482).

Surveys are one of the most common research methods. They insure that the same observation technique is used with everyone in the study. Survey research is one of the best methods available to the social scientist collecting data for a large population too big to observe directly (Babbie, 1998). “Surveys are excellent vehicles for measuring attitudes and orientations in a large population” (Babbie, 1998, p. 256).

In this study, data was gathered through a survey to the public and FDOT management using mostly open-ended nominal level questions. The survey research was approved by the Institutional Review Board (see Appendices C and D). The surveys were distributed to the Public Information Officers and Managers statewide who then distributed them to the public at various public meetings. The public questionnaires were handed out at FDOT transportation public meetings across the state of Florida from all eight FDOT districts over a period of six months to gain the public’s perception of the issue and the public’s estimate of the management perceptions. There were approximately 20 public meetings where the surveys were distributed. Questionnaires
were also distributed to FDOT managers throughout the state of Florida, across all eight FDOT districts, to gain the manager’s perception of the issue and the manager’s estimate of the public’s perceptions. There were a total of 23 surveys returned statewide from FDOT management and 66 surveys returned from the public.

The FDOT public meetings where the surveys were distributed were advertised in a variety of ways, including, but not limited to letters to those property owners in the project corridor area, ads in the local papers, media coverage, and electronic signs on the side of the road listing the details of the meeting.

The surveys were collected through availability sampling. Results from the survey reported both qualitative and quantitative measures. The frequency data is presented in tables and the qualitative data is presented in figures and categories.

**Survey Instrument**

Appendices E and F illustrate the survey instruments administered to the public and FDOT management respectively. The questionnaires sent to FDOT managers contained 23 items, asking for both quantitative and qualitative responses. This questionnaire was an attempt to gain the manager’s perception of the issue and the manager’s estimate of the public’s perceptions. A 22-item questionnaire was handed out to the public across the state of Florida in an attempt to measure the public’s perception of the issue and the public’s estimate of the management perceptions. Again, quantitative and qualitative responses were asked for in the public questionnaire.

The following questions were used to gain the manager’s perception of the issue:

- Do you think FDOT meetings are organized?
• Do you think the format of FDOT meetings is helpful to the public to get the information they need?

• Do you believe that FDOT staff is genuinely interested in listening to comments from citizens?

• Do you think the FDOT really cares about the opinions of the public?

• Do you think the FDOT understands the needs of the public?

• What do you think is the purpose of a public meeting/hearing?

• Do you think the FDOT uses public meetings to:
  □ Inform the public about decisions already made
  □ To urge the public to support a decision
  □ To satisfy legal requirements
  □ Or to seek public input?

• Do you think public meetings/hearings really accomplish a true “dialogue” with the public?

• Overall, how do you think the Department is doing at public involvement? What suggestions do you have to improve public involvement and participation?

The following questions were used to gain the manager’s estimate of the public’s perceptions:

• Do you think the public feels FDOT meetings are organized?

• Do you think the public feels the format of FDOT meetings is helpful to get the information they need?

• Did you think the public finds the written materials informative and easily understood?
• Did you think the public finds the audio visual presentations informative and easily understood?
• Do you think the public feels comfortable making comments and discussing their questions/concerns with FDOT staff?
• Do you think the public feels their comments will make a difference?
• Do you believe the public thinks that FDOT staff is genuinely interested in listening to comments from citizens?
• Do you think the public has high or low expectations of public meetings?
• Do you think the public is satisfied with public meetings as a way of involving them in FDOT project decisions?
• Do you think the public thinks their participation is meaningful?
• Do you think the public feels the FDOT really cares about their opinions?
• Do you think the public feels the FDOT understands their needs?
• Do you think the public feels better, worse, or the same after attending a FDOT public meeting?
• Do you think the public trusts the Department of Transportation?

The following items were used to gain the public’s perception of the issue:
• Did you get the information tonight that you were looking for?
• Was the meeting time convenient for you?
• Was the meeting location convenient for you?
• Was the meeting organized?
• Was the meeting format helpful to get the information you need?
• Did you find the written materials informative and easily understood?

• Did you find the audio visual presentation informative and easily understood? (if applicable)

• Did you feel comfortable making comments and discussing your questions/concerns with FDOT staff?

• Do you feel your comments will make a difference?

• Did you believe that the FDOT staff were genuinely interested in listening to comments from citizens?

• Did you have high or low expectations of the meeting?

• Are you satisfied with public meetings as a way of involving you in FDOT project decisions?

• Do you think your participation is meaningful?

• Do you think the FDOT really cares about your opinion?

• Do you think the FDOT understands the needs of the public?

• Do you feel better, worse, or the same after attending the public meeting?

• Do you trust the Department of Transportation?

• What do you think is the purpose of a public meeting or hearing?

• Do you think the FDOT uses public meetings to:
  □ Inform the public about decisions already made
  □ To urge the public to support a decision
  □ To satisfy legal requirements
  □ Or to seek public input?
• What suggestions do you have for the FDOT to improve public involvement and participation?

The following items were used to gain the public’s estimate of the management perceptions:

• What do you think the FDOT thinks about their own public involvement methods?

Focus Groups

A focus group (see Appendix G) was conducted with the Florida Department of Transportation’s District Public Information Officers/Directors to gain the management’s perception of the issue, public involvement, and the management’s estimate of the public’s perceptions. The focus group was conducted at the annual Public Information Officers conference, held July 26-28 2004 in Deerfield Beach, FL. A tape recorder was used to record comments. All of the 25 participants signed a consent form. The perceptions of the public were co-orientated through the focus group with DOT Public Information managers. The data from the focus group is presented in figures and categories. It was not feasible to conduct a statewide focus group with members from the public.

Focus groups, or group interviews, are a way to listen to people and to learn from them (Madriz, 2000). Focus groups provide participants a safe environment where they can share ideas, beliefs, and attitudes. In a typical focus group, there are usually around 12 to 15 people that are brought together to engage in a guided discussion of some topic (Babbie, 1998). There are five advantages to focus groups, including low cost, speedy
results, flexibility, and high face validity. Finally, focus groups are a technique that can capture real-life data in a social environment.

Many group participants find focus groups more gratifying and stimulating than one-on-one interviews. “The focus group is a collectivistic rather than an individualistic research method that focuses on the multivocality of participants’ attitudes, experiences, and beliefs” (Madriz, 2000, p. 836). Focus groups allow social scientists to observe the most important sociological process, collective human interaction. The interactive processes include spontaneous responses from the members of the group that ease their involvement and participation. There are such dynamics that occur in focus groups because aspects emerge that probably would not have with an individual interview (Babbie, 1998).

The interaction among the group usually decreases the interaction between the facilitator and the individual members of the group. “This gives more weight to the participants’ opinions, decreasing the influence the researcher has over the interview process” (Madriz, 2000, p. 837.) Focus groups are a valuable tool, which allow researchers to gather large amounts of information in limited periods of time.

**Observation**

An observation was recorded at a DOT public meeting in which I was not involved. I was simply there to observe the actions of the DOT staff, its consultants, the public, and the environment.

Going into a social situation and looking is another way of gathering information about the social world. Observational techniques can note body language and other cues
to help with meaning. Social scientists can observe human activity and the places where the activities take place (Angrosino, & Mays de Perez, p.673). Aspects such as the physical setting, activities, and even your own reactions should be recorded (Creswell, 1998, p. 125).

Angrosino and Mays de Perez note that observation in natural settings can be rendered as descriptions through open-ended narrative (p. 674). This observation usually does not interfere with the people or activities under observation. The observational ethnographer will be able to describe the account of the lives of particular people, rather than attempting to describe the culture of a group (p. 695).

Ultimately, anything the field researcher, or participant-observer, does or does not do will have some effect on what is being observed. Sometimes the researcher can identify too much with the viewpoints of the participants. This is called “going native” (Babbie, 1998, p. 279). There is also the other extreme where the observer studies a social process without becoming a part of it in any way. A full appreciation may not be developed and in turn, the observations may be vague.
Chapter Four

Results

This results section is divided into five subsections identified as Observation, Survey Responses from the Public: Quantitative and Qualitative data, Survey Responses from FDOT Management: Quantitative and Qualitative data, Co-orientation Perceptions, and Focus Group. There were a total of 23 surveys returned statewide from FDOT management and 66 surveys returned from the public.

**Observation**

When I was looking for the DOT meeting location, I was a little uneasy, being in an unfamiliar place and county. However, I soon saw directional signs on the side of the road that said, “DOT Public Meeting” with arrows. It was very comforting to see these signs as they guided me to the meeting perfectly.

There was plenty of parking at the meeting facility. Again, there was another directional sign indicating which way I should go to enter the building. When I first entered, it was a little overwhelming, seeing many DOT employees with nametags on and seeing maps and large aerial pictures posted on the walls. It seemed many people who walked in felt some sort of anxiety by the looks on their faces. However, the anxiety soon turned to relaxation when they heard the young woman at the sign-in table welcome them and ask them to sign in. She then proceeded to give them several handouts and
explain that the meeting was informal and that there was not a formal presentation. People were welcome to walk around, ask questions of Department staff, and view the video presentation, which was on a loop. Most people seemed to soften their body language and relax their shoulders and start to walk around.

One citizen that walked in did not speak English. Immediately, the young woman at the sign-in table got a staff member that spoke Spanish to assist this person. The DOT brochures, however, were only printed in English.

I started to walk towards one of the large maps, which showed aerial pictures of the current road and surroundings with the proposed improvements overlaid on top. The pictures were excellent, with everything labeled to help the public get a sense of what they were looking at and where. I observed several people, who seemed to have many questions, specifically questioning what the colored lines meant on the map. One individual decided to ask one of the DOT employees for help. This employee was very knowledgeable and very friendly. He explained the maps and pictures very clearly and seemed to want to make sure the citizen understood the concepts. Another citizen had a more specific question. The DOT employee did not have the answer, but gave the citizen his business card and also wrote down their name and number. He told them he would have to research their question, and he would get back with them. The citizen seemed pleased.

There were many other tables set up around the room, including a “Right-of-way” table, where staff were present to discuss acquisition or relocation questions. There was also an “Access management” table where staff discussed access issues, such as medians and driveway locations. Finally, there was a “Community Traffic Safety Team” table
that had brochures on car seat safety, the importance of seat belts and small trinkets such as pens, key chains and coloring books for children. These brochures were also available in Spanish.

I walked on to the video presentation room. The sound quality was good and the screen size was large enough so that the last row of seats had no problem seeing the video. The video was very helpful and thorough. It was simple and was easy to understand, not too technical or filled with too many “engineering” terms. The people watching the video seemed very impressed with the graphics. There was a flyover view where you could see what the proposed improvements would look like. The video actually flew you along as if you were above the roadway so you could see what the road would look like in the future. The video was very well done and very high-tech. One nice feature about the video is that it was on a loop and I noticed several people stayed to watch it again, digesting all the information and even taking notes.

When I left the video room, I decided to meander around the maps and aerials again. The meeting wasn’t that busy and most of the FDOT employees and consultants seemed to be talking to each other. I noticed a citizen had to approach some of the staff to help them. Again, the DOT employees seemed very helpful and knowledgeable, however it would have been nice if they had approached the citizen first.

Most of the comments I heard were in support of the proposed improvements, which consisted of widening the road. There were some concerns expressed about the length of construction, which was going to take around three years.

Overall the meeting seemed very organized and very well thought out. I overheard several comments about how convenient the meeting was, including the
location and the time. It was nice that people were able to pop in the meeting any time between 5 and 7 p.m. and get the information they needed without having to sit through a long presentation. It seemed most people there appreciated the fact that DOT realized their time was valuable. There were a few people that questioned why there was not a formal presentation and a public question and answer session.

Probably the only point I was a little disappointed in was the fact that the staff seemed to really be talking mostly to each other and socializing. Perhaps this was due to the fact that the meeting was not very well attended.

Working for DOT I have obviously attended many DOT public meetings, hearings, and construction open houses. I have found that those people who are happy with the project attend the meetings for a short while and do not write comments. It is those who are unhappy with the project, mostly due to personal issues, such as business access or traffic issues, who write many comments and contact the media.

**Survey Responses from the Public: Quantitative and Qualitative Data**

A total of 64 respondents answered the question about being an area resident. The percentage of those who “checked” that they were an area resident was 73.4 percent (n=47) while 26.6 percent (n=17) did not check this question, meaning they were not area residents.

A total of 64 respondents answered the question about being local business owners. The percentage of those who “checked” that they were local business owners was 15.6 percent (n=10) while 84.4 percent (n=54) did not check this question, meaning they were not local business owners.
Table 1 represents the results in frequencies from the public survey regarding their satisfaction. Respondents were asked to answer the question “yes,” “no,” or “not sure.”

**Table 1. Frequency Table of Public Responses: Satisfaction**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public Responses</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Yes % (n)</th>
<th>No % (n)</th>
<th>Not Sure % (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did you get the information tonight that you were looking for?</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>69% (40)</td>
<td>22.4% (13)</td>
<td>8.6% (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was the meeting time convenient for you?</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>98.4% (63)</td>
<td>1.6% (1)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was the meeting location convenient for you?</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>93.9% (62)</td>
<td>6.1% (4)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was the meeting organized?</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>85.7% (54)</td>
<td>6.3% (4)</td>
<td>7.9% (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was the meeting format helpful to get the information you need?</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>75% (48)</td>
<td>14.1% (9)</td>
<td>10.9% (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you find the written materials informative and easily understood?</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>80.6% (50)</td>
<td>8.1% (5)</td>
<td>11.3% (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you find the audio visual presentation informative and easily understood?</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>66.7% (22)</td>
<td>9.1% (3)</td>
<td>24.2% (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you feel comfortable making comments and discussing your questions/concerns with FDOT staff?</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>87.3% (55)</td>
<td>11.1% (7)</td>
<td>1.6% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel your comments will make a difference?</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>10.5% (6)</td>
<td>49.1% (28)</td>
<td>40.4% (23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you believe that the FDOT staff were genuinely interested in listening to comments from citizens?</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>62.9% (39)</td>
<td>16.1% (10)</td>
<td>21% (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you satisfied with public meetings as a way of involving you in FDOT project decisions?</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>61.7% (37)</td>
<td>20% (12)</td>
<td>18.3% (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think your participation is meaningful?</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>44.3% (27)</td>
<td>29.5% (18)</td>
<td>26.2% (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think the FDOT really cares about your opinion?</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>33.9% (21)</td>
<td>33.9% (21)</td>
<td>32.3% (20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think the FDOT understands the needs of the public?</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>33.3% (20)</td>
<td>33.3% (20)</td>
<td>33.3% (20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you trust the Department of Transportation?</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>50% (29)</td>
<td>24.1% (14)</td>
<td>25.9% (15)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q1. Did you get the information tonight that you were looking for?

A total of 58 respondents answered this question with 69 percent (n=40) checking “yes.” The percentage of those respondents who checked “no” was 22.4 percent (n=13) and 8.6 percent (n=5) checked “not sure.”

There were several themes that could be categorized from the qualitative answers from this question. For those respondents who checked “yes,” the following items were very important to the public: the visuals and maps at the meeting, the schedule of the project, bike trails, sidewalks, and other pedestrian features, and general information about the project.

For those respondents who checked “no,” the items of concern included medians and median locations, not enough or desired information, still not happy with the project overall, and not happy with the public meeting.

Still not happy with the project overall

- “DOT still fails the public interest”

Not happy with the public meeting

- “would have wanted open meeting to ask questions”
- “timeline of project and info to residents and businesses poor.”

For those respondents who checked “not sure,” the following concerns were listed: speed limits, access during construction, and aesthetic features.
Q2. Was the meeting time convenient for you?

A total of 64 respondents answered this question with 98.4 percent (n=63) checking “yes.” The percentage of those respondents checking “no” was 1.6 percent (n=1) and none checking “not sure.”

Only two respondents wrote comments out for this question and they included:

- “Yes, I was able to come after closing the museum”
- “No, correct time in newspaper would have been better”

Q3. Was the meeting location convenient for you?

A total of 66 respondents answered this question with 93.9 percent (n=62) checking “yes.” The percentage of those respondents who checked “no” was 6.1 percent (n=4) and none checked “not sure.”

For those respondents who checked “no,” comments were made that suggested other locations would have been more convenient and the lack of parking was inconvenient.

Q4. Was the meeting organized?

A total of 63 respondents answered this question with 85.7 percent (n=54) checking “yes.” The percentage of those respondents who checked “no” was 6.3 percent (n=4) and 7.9 percent (n=5) checked “not sure.”

There were several themes that could be categorized from the qualitative answers from this question. For those respondents who checked “yes,” items such as visuals, staff and the meeting set-up were very important.
**Visuals**

- “loved the aerial photos and handouts”

**Staff**

- “had enough personnel on hand”
- “all staff were courteous”
- “one-on-one session”
- “ability to ask questions of staff/project manager”

**Meeting set-up**

- “open house format”
- “kept on track”
- “on time”

For those respondents who checked “no,” the items that were of concern included feeling lost and the meeting was too informal.

**Felt lost**

- “no directions as to where or what map we were supposed to view and discuss”
- “no structure”
- “just DOT people standing around, talking among themselves”
- “I didn’t know who I could ask questions to. People with nametags were only talking to each other.”

**Too informal**

- “meeting needed a speaker”
Q5. Was the meeting format helpful to get the information you need?

A total of 64 respondents answered this question with 75 percent (n=48) checking “yes.” The percentage of those respondents who checked “no” was 14.1 percent (n=9) and 10.9 percent (n=7) checked “not sure.”

There were several themes that could be categorized from the qualitative answers from this question. For those respondents who checked “yes,” themes such as staff, good format, and visuals were very important to the public.

**Staff**
- “one-on-one contact with FDOT personnel”
- “plenty of project people on hand”
- “the way it was explained”

**Good format**
- “regardless of arrival time all info was available”
- “open discussion, no lecture”
- “informal, no stilted presentation”
- “could proceed at own pace”

**Visuals**
- “being able to study the maps and then ask questions.”

For those respondents who checked “no,” the themes of concern that were evident included the decisions were already made, not enough detail in the materials, informal format, and honesty.

**Decisions already made**
- “public meeting needs to be prior to decisions made”
“it seemed as if we were told what would happen”

**Materials**

- “no handouts that could be taken home”
- “not enough detailed information in the materials”
- “want more specifics on the area of interest”

**Disliked informal format**

- “no Q&A period during main session so all could hear one another’s thoughts”

**Truth**

- “tell the truth about what the DOT intends to do”

For those respondents who checked “not sure,” the comments included questions about the project start and duration and the overall view of project.

**Q6. Did you find the written materials informative and easily understood?**

A total of 62 respondents answered this question with 80.6 percent (n=50) checking “yes.” The percentage of those respondents who checked “no” was 8.1 percent (n=5) and 11.3 percent (n=7) checked “not sure.”

There were several themes that could be categorized from the qualitative answers from this question. For those respondents who checked “yes,” themes such as the visuals and graphics, simple terms, and the layout were important to the public.

**Visuals and graphics**

- “renderings, aerials, and maps were very good”

**Informative**

- “FAQ’s helpful”
• “it answered my questions”
• “good general overview”

*Easy to understand*

• “simple layman’s terms”

*Layout*

• “you put it all on one sheet.”

For those respondents who checked “no,” items such as lack of enough information and the need for better visuals were of concern.

*Lack of enough information*

• “not enough information”

*Need better visuals*

• “should have a detailed photo as to how many lanes”
• “road names could be improved on written materials”

For those respondents who checked “not sure,” the items that were most concerning included not enough details and not in agreement with the project.

*Not enough details*

• “would have liked more details in the handout”
• “it didn’t answer a question in my mind and we weren’t allowed to ask questions”

*Not in agreement with project*

• “the detailed waste for some items, such as flowers, decorative walks, lights (too many) etc.”
Q7. Did you find the audio visual presentation informative and easily understood?

A total of 33 respondents answered this question with 66.7 percent (n=22) checking “yes.” The percentage of those respondents who checked “no” was 9.1 percent (n=3) and 24.2 percent (n=8) checked “not sure.”

For those respondents who checked “yes,” themes such as visuals and the material being easy to follow were important.

**Visuals**

- “the clarity and details”
- “large drawings”
- “the pictures were simple – nothing to distract attention”

**Easy to follow**

- “simplified complicated subject”
- “easy to comprehend and understand.”

For those respondents who chose “no” and “not sure,” the items of concern included comments about the audio visual presentation.

**Audio Visual presentation**

- “need better realism in the simulation”
- “sound system was terrible, screeching with feedback”
- “hard to follow, needs more road names and more time, and wider angle”
Q8. Did you feel comfortable making comments and discussing your questions/concerns with FDOT staff?

A total of 63 respondents answered this question with 87.3 percent (n=55) checking “yes.” The percentage of those respondents who checked “no” was 11.1 percent (n=7) and 1.6 percent (n=1) checked “not sure.”

For those respondents who checked “yes,” the themes that were very important included the staff was approachable, they listened and responded, they were knowledgeable, and honest.

Approachable

- “made first contact, shook hands, offered names”
- “asked if we had questions”
- “they were available and listened”
- “I had questions I knew were silly, but felt comfortable asking”
- “asked if we had questions and then proceeded to go into details”

Listened and responded

- “engaged in conversation”
- “quite wiling to discuss the project”

Knowledgeable

- “explained plans”
- “answered my questions”
- “knowledge of safety concerns, issues of closure and reconfiguring of roads”

Honest

- “discussed issues openly”
• “answered questions honestly”
• “spoke freely about the project as it is planned now”
• “very straightforward and friendly”

For those who checked “no,” the themes that were of concern included arrogance and indifference of the staff.

Arrogance

• “some of the people are arrogant and not concerned with community problems”
• “did not care”
• “not allowed to ask questions”

Indifference

• “they were just fulfilling an obligation”
• “not a feeling of discomfort, just a feeling of indifference”
• “they said nothing could be changed”
• “not approachable, stood around in groups”

Those who checked “not sure” had the following comments:
• “felt like they didn’t want to hear anything bad about design”
• “staff had obviously been advised to strictly adhere to DOT instructions and to hell with any disagreement”

Q9. Do you feel your comments will make a difference?

A total of 57 respondents answered this question with 10.5 percent (n=6) checking “yes.” The percentage of those respondents who checked “no” was 49.1 percent (n=28) and 40.4 percent (n=23) checked “not sure.”
For those few respondents who checked “yes,” the following comments were written:

- “felt they understood concerns addressed”
- “that is what a public hearing does.”

Many checked “no” for the answer to this question. The themes that were evident included no results, too late in the process, big government, and not caring.

**No results**

- “Some comments were made at last year’s meeting, with no results”
- “I was at the other meeting and find nothing has changed”
- “I objected to the 2-lane design in 2001. Made zero difference”
- “at no time did I receive a positive to any comment. A line dance is more active”
- “Will anything really change from these comments?”

**Too late in the process**

- “too late and they won’t listen anyway”
- “too late to change plans”
- “project too far along – earlier, maybe yes”

**Big government**

- “business more important than homeowner and family”
- “they were there because it was mandatory”
- “inflexibility of standards paralyzes innovative thinking”

**Not caring**

- “I don’t believe that DOT cares about the community because it is a predominately a black community”
• “the FDOT is going to do what it wants to do anyhow”

For those who chose “not sure,” the themes that presented themselves included not knowing where suggestions end up and changes.

Suggestions

• “I never know where comments end up…trash, in one ear and out the other…I hope they matter”

• “previous comments not addressed in design concept”

• “don’t know how firm FDOT’s plans are or if they are really interested or open to what our area needs”

Changes

• “not affordable at present time”

• “have tried for years to get information from DOT – no one knows why, who, where”

Q10. Did you believe that the FDOT staff were genuinely interested in listening to comments from citizens?

A total of 62 respondents answered this question with 62.9 percent (n=39) checking “yes.” The percentage of those respondents who checked “no” was 16.1 percent (n=10) and 21 percent (n=13) checked “not sure.”

A major theme that came out from the qualitative comments included listened and responded.

Listened and responded

• “they listened and provided explanations”
• “asked questions and received answers”
• “quite willing to listen to my concerns”
• “took time to help me”
• “very attentive and informative”
• “listening yes, reacting maybe, responsive, unsure”

For those citizens who checked “no,” the categories that were evident included no change and not caring about the community.

No change

• “I believe it is their job to listen, but with no concern for change”
• “comments will not change plans”
• “no open microphone for questions”
• “don’t want to hear no road”
• “decisions made and contract let prior to meetings”

Community

• “I don’t believe that DOT cares about the community.”

Those respondents who chose “not sure” offered the following comments:

• “late in the design phase”
• “I am not optimistic the staff present, although interested in my concerns, are in any position to do anything about it.”
Q11. Are you satisfied with public meetings as a way of involving you in FDOT project decisions?

A total of 60 respondents answered this question with 61.7 percent (n=37) checking “yes.” The percentage of those respondents who checked “no” was 20 percent (n=12) and 18.3 percent (n=11) checked “not sure.”

For those who chose “yes,” their comments were broken down into themes including open discussion and informative.

Open discussion

- “like the openness – also want regular question/answer/input meeting”
- “meetings in convenient locations and times – always open discussion”

Informative

- “good to have all involved in one place for full explanation”
- “the meetings are a first-rate means of allowing public comment and highly positive for getting questions answered”
- “how else would they reach out?”

The themes that were evident from those who chose “no” included too late in the process and DOT does not listen.

Too late in the process

- “a little late to make a difference”
- “the decision had already been made”
- “we should be heard before the plans are set”
- “public should be involved at earlier stages for input”
**DOT does not listen**

- “the involvement is so limited that expectation for change is null”
- “they don’t listen to how we feel about the design, going to be very dangerous”
- “public has no involvement”
- “DOT doesn’t care about our problems”

The following comment was written by someone who checked “not sure”

- “I believe the DOT only listens to the public when a lot of people complain about the same thing.”

**Q12. Do you think your participation is meaningful?**

A total of 61 respondents answered this question with 44.3 percent (n=27) checking “yes.” The percentage of those respondents who checked “no” was 29.5 percent (n=18) and 26.2 percent (n=16) checked “not sure.”

For those respondents who checked “yes,” the themes that were very important to the public included have to get involved and changes implemented.

*Have to get involved*

- “without public input, decisions may not have full knowledge to weigh factors involved”
- “we are voters and taxpayers – we matter”
- “it gives me an opportunity to suggest a few new segments for the project”

*Changes implemented*

- “prior comments made during prior meetings were considered”
For those respondents who checked “no,” the themes were of concern included too late in the process and DOT does not listen.

Too late in process

- “too late to make a difference”
- “design is complete. Too late to affect the project”
- “their answer was “no funding”

DOT does not listen

- “my comments as well as others have fell on deaf ears for two years”
- “who cares about my participation?”
- “DOT doesn’t care about our problems”
- “I’ve been through it far too many times and nothing ever changes”
- “FDOT doesn’t care about those who are against the road”

Those respondents who checked “not sure” commented on the outcome of the project.

Outcome

- “time will tell”
- “for me it is meaningful as I am glad there is dialogue between government and citizens, however I am unsure if citizen’s comments in this public meeting ultimately change any outcome or decisions”
- “It’s better than nothing, but neither is it real dialogue, more of a dog and pony show.”
Q13. Do you think the FDOT really cares about your opinion?

A total of 62 respondents answered this question with 33.9 percent (n=21) checking “yes.” The percentage of those respondents who checked “no” was 33.9 percent (n=21) and 32.3 percent (n=20) checked “not sure.”

For those respondents who chose “yes,” the categories that were evident included limitations, contact, and safety.

**Limitations**

- “yes, but they are too controlled by others (budget, political)”

**Contact**

- “frequently express my opinion to FDOT, so I’m sure what I have to say crosses their minds a lot”
- “plenty of prior questions - asked for opinion”
- “questions helpful in Q&A”

**Safety**

- “DOT seems to care about safety”

For those respondents who chose “no,” the themes that were of concern to the public included no changes, future vision, decisions made, and community concerns.

**No changes**

- “if they did they would have changed the design prior to this meeting”
- “they say this is the way it is going to be - don’t have enough money”
- “they were just accomplishing what was necessary by law”

**Future vision**

- “depends on adjustments made”
• “short-sighted – should be 4-lanes to accommodate future growth”

Decisions made

• “why ask after decisions made?”
• “they want to build a new road”
• “things were already planned”

Community concerns

• “they know people don’t like change and I don’t think they care if my family and I get a road closer to home or they think they can buy me out. They will turn our little town into South Florida”
• “DOT will not do anything about the community concerns”
• “because you only see what you have planned and have no concern for wee-little peons”

For those who checked “not sure,” they offered the following comments:

• “previous experience”
• “don’t feel individuals will influence final decisions”

Q14. Do you think the FDOT understands the needs of the public?

A total of 60 respondents answered this question with 33.3 percent (n=20) checking “yes.” The percentage of those respondents who checked “no” was 33.3 percent (n=20) and 33.3 percent (n=20) checked “not sure.”

The theme that was important to the members of the public that chose “yes” included design.
Design

- “based on the design, I would think so”
- “I particularly like the sidewalks”
- “they seem to be interested in feedback and design suggestions”

For those respondents who checked “no,” the items were of concern included roadway design and community concerns.

Roadway design

- “sometimes the design is not functional”
- “not when it comes to bike/pedestrian facilities”
- “minimal access provided to cross streets”
- “they wait until traffic is unbearable before they make any effort to change the situation – too little, to late”
- “there is no need for widening”

Community needs

- “they think now - by the time the project is done stats are different”
- “I think they understand traffic flow, but not the needs of area residents”
- “they are not in tune with the people”
- “they do not care about the public”

For those respondents who chose “not sure,” the following comments were offered:

- “we are asked to comment now, but may not help”
- “only the ones who have to travel the roads, highways in question”
Q15. Do you trust the Department of Transportation?

A total of 58 respondents answered this question with 50 percent (n=29) checking “yes.” The percentage of those respondents who checked “no” was 24.1 percent (n=14) and 25.9 percent (n=15) checked “not sure.”

The following comments were important to the public who checked “yes”:

- “local folks working in their own community”
- “no reason not to”
- “I have to”

For those who checked “no,” the themes that were evident included DOT does not listen and does not care about the community. The public also had concerns with the staff.

**DOT does not listen**

- “because they are going to proceed with their plan even it though it will make this street less accessible by those who live and work here”
- “because haven’t listened to anyone”

**Community**

- “they don’t care about the black community”
- “the public does not count”

**Staff**

- “never get the same answer from DOT people two times in a row”
- “I’ve been personally misled by the employees too many times”
- “their engineering overrides common sense”
- “they have closed meetings”
Table 2 represents the results in frequencies from the public survey about their expectations. Respondents were asked to answer the question about their expectations “high,” “low,” or “not sure.”

**Table 2. Frequency Table of Public Responses: Expectations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public Responses</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>High % (n)</th>
<th>Low % (n)</th>
<th>Not Sure % (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did you have high or low expectations of the meeting?</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>41.4% (24)</td>
<td>29.3% (17)</td>
<td>29.3% (17)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Q16. Did you have high or low expectations of the meeting?**

A total of 58 respondents answered this question with 41.4 percent (n=24) checking “high.” The percentage of those respondents who checked “low” was 29.3 percent (n=17) and 29.3 percent (n=17) checked “not sure.”

Those respondents who checked “high” had the following comments:

- “previously met contractor”
- “public opinion is important”
- “attended FDOT meetings before so familiar with format”
- “any and all information is helpful”

Those who checked “low” had comments that were grouped into themes including no change, DOT attitude, and informative.

**No change**

- “same place, same format, no change”
- “nothing new – road going forward”
- “I’ve always seen the same attitude and mode of operation”
DOT attitude

- “DOT doesn’t care about the community”

Informative

- “not sure that it would be that informative, but it was.”

Those respondents who chose “not sure” did not really have any expectations.

No expectations

- “no large expectations”
- “did not know what changes would be presented”
- “did not know what to expect”
- “don’t know how firm FDOT’s plans are or if they are really interested or open to what our area needs”

Table 3 represents the results in frequencies from the public survey regarding the purpose of public meetings. Respondents were asked to check the answer about which category they felt they agreed with. The results are based on the question being “checked” or “not checked.”

Table 3. Frequency Table of Public Responses: Purpose of meetings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public Responses</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Checked % (n)</th>
<th>Not Checked % (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public meetings are used to inform the public about decisions already made.</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>75% (48)</td>
<td>25% (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public meetings are used to urge the public to support a decision.</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>39.1% (25)</td>
<td>60.9% (39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public meetings are used to satisfy legal requirements.</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>53.1% (34)</td>
<td>46.9% (30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public meetings are used to seek public input.</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>25% (16)</td>
<td>75% (48)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q17. Do you think the FDOT uses public meetings to: Inform the public about decisions already made, To urge the public to support a decision, To satisfy legal requirements, Or to seek public input?

A total of 64 respondents answered this question. Seventy-five percent (n=48) checked that public meetings are used to inform the public about decisions already made. Those respondents who did not check this answer was 25 percent (n=16). The total number of respondents who checked that public meetings are used to urge the public to support a decision was 39.1 percent (n=25) while 60.9 percent (n=39) did not check this answer. The total number of respondents who checked that public meetings are used to satisfy legal requirements was 53.1 percent (n=34) while 46.9 percent (n=30) did not check this answer. Finally, the total number of respondents who checked that public meetings are used to seek public input was 25 percent (n=16) while 75 percent (n=48) did not check this answer.

Those respondents who checked the purpose of public meetings was to inform the public about decisions already made offered the following comments:

- “highway expansion does not depict public approval”
- “I don’t think they were in the least bit interested in what the public thought”
- “many decisions look to be completed”

Those respondents who checked the purpose of public meetings was to urge the public to support a decision offered the following comments:

- “They design roads in Tallahassee, not locally”
- “Our input is taken, then ignored”
“FDOT has to work within a time frame and financial distribution, so what benefits the majority will be”

Those respondents who checked the purpose of public meetings was to satisfy legal requirements made the following comments:

- “because after the last meeting, nothing was changed even though everyone protested the plans”
- “they will do what they want”
- “no changes will be made to their plans”

Table 4 represents the results in frequencies from the public survey. Respondents were asked to answer the question about their feelings by checking “better,” “worse,” “the same,” or “not sure.”

Table 4. Frequency Table of Public Responses: Feelings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public Responses</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Better % (n)</th>
<th>Worse % (n)</th>
<th>Same % (n)</th>
<th>Not Sure % (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel better, worse, or the same after attending the public meeting?</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>38.7% (24)</td>
<td>17.7% (11)</td>
<td>43.5% (27)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q18. Do you feel better, worse, or the same after attending the public meeting?

A total of 62 respondents answered this question with 38.7 percent (n=24) checking “better.” The percentage of those respondents who checked “worse” was 17.7 percent (n=11) while 43.5 percent (n=27) checked “same.” None checked “not sure.”

Respondents who checked “better” felt more informed.
Better informed

- “time frame was shorter than expected”
- “at least I know where it’s going”
- “now we know how and in what order the construction is going to be done”
- “always better to know rather than fear of the unknown”
- “because I am pleased with what I saw and think the project will make the area safer”

Those respondents who chose “worse” offered the following comments that were grouped into themes including no changes, community needs, and empty promises.

No changes

- “I know that our voices are unheard because the plan is essentially the same”
- “I am left with the same situation as before”

Community needs

- “I need a turn lane into my business, which I will not be able to get”
- “they will come in and take our family’s property - we don’t want to move”

Empty promises

- “DOT keeps changing what was originally promised”

Those who checked “same” or “not sure” were concerned about the process.

Process

- “nothing going to change, the plans are made”
- “like every other public meeting, no one knows the answers to questions”
- “they have been surveying for years”
“It was exactly what I’ve seen many times before and unfortunately, being an optimistic person I always expect a change, but now I just shrug, laugh, and go home to silently curse the whole process”

The following questions asked the respondents for their thoughts and comments:

Q19. What do you think is the purpose of a public meeting or hearing?

Many respondents said the purpose of a public meeting was to present information and inform the public. Here are some of their comments:

- “to inform the public and to answer specific questions”
- “to inform taxpayers”
- “to let the public know what to expect”
- “to relay information concerning projects”
- “to answer concerns of the public”
- “calm people”

Other respondents stated the purpose of public meetings was to satisfy a legal requirement. Here are some of their comments:

- “because they have to”
- “appease voters/property owners”
- “to blow smoke”
- “just a formality really”
- “satisfy federal/legal requirements – try to explain decision”
• “should be to involve public, but I think the meetings are more directed at completing a project checklist need than soliciting comments for project change/confirmation”
• “so the people can’t say they didn’t have a chance for input”

Still other respondents stated that public meetings are used to inform the public about decisions already made. Here are their comments:

• “to tell us what they have decided”
• “to gain support for decisions they made”
• “to show the public after contract is let – public meeting should be held before decisions made”
• “to show the power and authority of the DOT”

Finally, there are those who felt the purpose of public meetings was to seek public input. Here are their comments:

• “information and input from public”
• “public opinion”
• “to hear opinions/questions – heed off problems, give contact for more information”
• “to involve public – get input, inform public”
• “to distribute information and communicate (two-way dialogue)”
Q20. What do you think the FDOT thinks about their own public involvement methods?

After grouping the respondent’s comments into themes, there are several categories that emerged including DOT knows best, must satisfy law, and good intentions.

DOT knows best

- “so long as the big money is happy, we can put a good spin on the rest of them”
- “they believe they know best regardless of the public involvement”
- “they do what they want – not the public’s input”
- “they think their endeavors are enough”
- “they probably feel that they have the right format to reach the public”
- “they probably think they do a good job”

Must satisfy law

- “a required evil. They know what has to be done to be safe from legal liability”
- “I think FDOT considers public involvement being a necessary nuisance”
- “Done more to satisfy legal requirements than to inform the public”

Good intentions

- “I think they are generally interested in presenting their designs and doing their best as good stewards of public funds.”
Q21. What suggestions do you have for the FDOT to improve public involvement and participation?

The themes that were evident from the comments included listen to the public, show changes due to public opinion, involve the public earlier, hold smaller meetings, research the community, and provide more information.

Listen to the public

- “do everything possible to listen to home and business owners concerns, then do everything possible to accommodate them on implementation of plans”
- “when the majority speak heed their wishes”
- “listen to the people”
- “attempt to incorporate suggestions into designs”
- “show interest in trying to resolve a resident’s concerns”

Changes due to public opinion

- “Have FDOT publish the role of public comments in planned projects and whether any projects would proceed contrary to public comment”
- “show where public opinions were actually implemented as a result of the public meeting”

Involve public earlier

- “more involvement beforehand”
- “ask for public input prior to making final decisions that adversely affect the public”
- “let the public have a say-so”
- “be open to options”
Hold smaller meetings

- “hold small town hall meetings with their plan on paper so we can comment. This meeting was to tell us what they are going to do”
- More people would participate in smaller groups”

Research the community

- “have a Q&A after the formal portion as well as before it. Working people couldn’t make a 4pm Q&A time”
- “be more sensitive to the needs of the community. Listen to the community concerns and act appropriately on them”

More information

- “more information on the web”
- “more media releases, more detailed diagrams of proposed traffic changes, more Q&A at meetings with engineers of respective segments of project”

Figure 3 on the next page represents the themes that were evident from the public surveys regarding the meeting format, FDOT staff, and the meeting materials.
Figure 3: Public Themes

THEMES FROM PUBLIC SURVEYS

Meeting Format
- Like open house format – open discussion, no lecture, could proceed at own pace
- Felt lost with informal meeting, no structure, too informal
- Want a formal public question and answer session
- Need smaller community meetings, almost like focus groups
- Need to involve public earlier
- Meetings are held too late in the process – too late to make changes, plans are set
- Formal meetings are too bureaucratic – Big Government
- Like the blend of informal plus formal meetings, but need to answer questions publicly in a formal Q&A session
- Need to show where public opinions have actually made a difference from public meetings – might get more people to show up

Staff
- FDOT does not understand community needs – more research needs to be done
- Staff mainly talked to each other
- Enough staff on hand
- Staff is courteous
- Liked the one-on-one contact
- Staff approachable and seemed to listen, however not sure if any changes can be made
- Some staff arrogant and indifferent
- Other staff informative and knowledgeable
- Staff needs to listen more and not check watches

Meeting Materials
- FAQ’s helpful
- Some material too technical, need to simplify
- Liked the visuals: aerial photos, maps, boards, renderings, large drawings
- Visuals helped provide clarity and details
- Videos at meetings were very helpful to simplify complex material
Survey Responses from FDOT Management: Quantitative and Qualitative Data

Table 5 on the next page represents the results in frequencies from the manager survey regarding public satisfaction. Respondents were asked to answer the question “yes,” “no,” or “not sure.” A “sometimes” column was included because many of the FDOT managers wrote this on the surveys as their response.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manager Responses</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Yes % (n)</th>
<th>No % (n)</th>
<th>Not Sure % (n)</th>
<th>Sometimes % (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you think FDOT meetings are organized?</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>95.7% (22)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.3% (1)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think the public feels FDOT meetings are organized?</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>78.3% (18)</td>
<td>4.3% (1)</td>
<td>17.4% (4)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think the format of FDOT meetings is helpful to the public to get the information they need?</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>100% (23)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think the public feels the format of FDOT meetings is helpful to the public to get the information they need?</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>72.7% (16)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>27.3% (6)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think the public finds the written materials informative and easily understood?</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>39.1% (9)</td>
<td>13.0% (3)</td>
<td>43.5% (10)</td>
<td>4.3% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think the public finds the audio visual presentations informative and easily understood?</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>69.6% (16)</td>
<td>4.3% (1)</td>
<td>26.1% (6)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think the public feels comfortable making comments and discussing their questions/concerns with FDOT staff?</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>87.0% (20)</td>
<td>4.3% (1)</td>
<td>8.7% (2)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think the public feels their comments will make a difference?</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21.7% (5)</td>
<td>39.1% (9)</td>
<td>34.8% (8)</td>
<td>4.3% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you believe that FDOT staff is genuinely interested in listening to comments from citizens?</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>69.6% (16)</td>
<td>4.3% (1)</td>
<td>26.1% (6)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you believe the public thinks that FDOT staff is genuinely interested in listening to comments from citizens?</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>39.1% (9)</td>
<td>30.4% (7)</td>
<td>26.1% (6)</td>
<td>4.3% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think the public is satisfied with public meetings as a way of involving them in FDOT project decisions?</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>43.5% (10)</td>
<td>26.1% (6)</td>
<td>26.1% (6)</td>
<td>4.3% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think the public thinks their participation is meaningful?</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>56.5% (13)</td>
<td>8.7% (2)</td>
<td>34.8% (8)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think the FDOT really cares about the opinions of the public?</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>82.6% (19)</td>
<td>4.3% (1)</td>
<td>13.0% (3)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think the public feels the FDOT really cares about their opinions?</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>34.8% (8)</td>
<td>34.8% (8)</td>
<td>21.7% (5)</td>
<td>8.7% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think the FDOT understands the needs of the public?</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>59.1% (13)</td>
<td>18.2% (4)</td>
<td>18.2% (4)</td>
<td>4.5% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think the public feels the FDOT understands their needs?</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>17.4% (4)</td>
<td>39.1% (9)</td>
<td>39.1% (9)</td>
<td>4.3% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think the public trusts the Department of Transportation?</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>30.4% (7)</td>
<td>17.4% (4)</td>
<td>52.2% (12)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q1. Do you think FDOT meetings are organized?

A total of 23 respondents answered this question with 95.7 percent (n=22) checking “yes.” The percentage of those respondents who checked “no” was zero and 4.3 percent (n=1) checked “not sure.” None answered “sometimes.”

There were several themes that could be categorized from the qualitative answers from this question. For those respondents who checked “yes,” the items that were very important included being well organized, visuals, and time and effort.

Well-organized

- “they are informal, but well organized. People are directed where to go for the information they need”
- “all aspects of what the public would want to know is very well thought out and anticipated”
- “well prepared to address expected issues”

Visuals

- “aerial videos are used throughout and staff is present to answer questions”
- “we go great lengths to make sure meetings are organized, boards, handouts, people etc.”

Time and effort

- “a lot of time, preparing, and resources are put into the meetings”
- “a lot of effort goes into finding an appropriate and convenient location, making sure people can get to it, having good presentation materials, well-informed staff, handouts etc.”
For those respondents that checked “not sure,” the items were of concern included:

- “it depends on the individual in charge of meeting”
- “they seem to be more of an afterthought than an important part of our process”
- “engineers get too technical for the lay person”
- “they are organized from an implementation sense – not necessarily from the perspective of receiving the best public input”

Q2. Do you think the public feels FDOT meetings are organized?

A total of 23 respondents answered this question with 78.3 percent (n=18) checking “yes.” The percentage of those respondents who checked “no” was 4.3 percent (n=1) and 17.4 percent (n=4) checked “not sure.” None answered “sometimes.”

For those respondents who checked “yes,” the themes that were evident included sufficient staff and meeting structure.

Sufficient staff

- “sufficient staff/consultants are available for interaction”

Meeting structure

- “the meetings are always very well organized. I think the public sees that”
- “organizational structure is easy to follow”
- “the meetings run smoothly and there is no chaos”
- “received positive feedback regarding the meetings, their format, and viewing materials”

For those respondents who checked “no,” the items that were of concern included:
• “most design public meetings are an open forum format. There is usually no formal presentation or agenda”
• “gets too technical for the lay person”
• “they usually want info dealing with their personal issues which cannot be provided at the time”

For those who checked “not sure,” they had the following comments:
• “I believe some people leave frustrated because they didn’t get the answer they wanted or needed”
• “a lot of the time, the public seems confused and afraid to ask questions when they enter a FDOT meeting”
• “some expectations may be that the meeting was supposed to be more formal”

Q3. Do you think the format of FDOT meetings is helpful to the public to get the information they need?

A total of 23 respondents answered this question with 100 percent (n=23) checking “yes.” The percentage of those respondents who checked “no” was zero. None answered “sometimes.”

All respondents checked “yes.” The themes that were evident included one-on-one contact, the format of meetings, and the information at the meetings.

One-on-one contact

• “most meetings have an informal workshop during the first portion of the meeting - allows one-on-one time”
• “question and answer sessions are routinely a part of public meetings”
• “the personnel can usually answer 90-95 percent of the questions asked right on the spot”
• “flyers and information are available and they usually have access to one-on-one with FDOT representative”

Format of meetings
• “format allows public to get information they need without having to listen to a formal presentation or speak into a microphone”
• “some however may object to the fact that we typically do not have a public Q&A session”
• “it allows direct interaction and individual attention while not requiring people to stay for several hours”

Information
• “the maps are boards are very helpful”
• “relevant project information is available, visual displays provided, staff available to discuss information”

Q4. Do you think the public feels the format of FDOT meetings is helpful to get the information they need?

A total of 22 respondents answered this question with 72.7 percent (n=16) checking “yes.” The percentage of those respondents who checked “no” was zero and 27.3 percent (n=6) checked “not sure.” None answered “sometimes.”

For those respondents who checked “yes,” the themes that were evident included one-on-one contact and format.
One-on-one contact

- “the public get to ask direct questions to the right person”

Format

- “promote public confidence through the open exchange of information”
- “based on feedback we have gotten from the public, they like the format and are able to get their questions answered”
- “they can quite easily get the info they need – they may not like the info, but they get it”

For those managers that chose “not sure,” the categories of concern included expectations, information, and format.

Expectations

- “the public has an opinion of a project before the FDOT public meeting occurs. They hear what they want to hear”
- “it’s not always what the public expects”

Information

- “the public may not like the answer, but it is getting the information”
- “most attendees just want specific info that cannot be provided”

Format

- “some may object to the fact that we typically do not have a public Q&A session”
- “I’m not sure our formal approach and demeanor solicits all of the public’s input”
Q5. Did you think the public finds the written materials informative and easily understood?

A total of 23 respondents answered this question with 39.1 percent (n=9) checking “yes.” The percentage of those respondents who checked “no” was 13 percent (n=3) and 43.5 percent (n=10) checked “not sure.” The percentage of those respondents that answered “sometimes” was 4.3 percent (n=1).

For those managers who chose “yes,” the following comments were made:

• “They may not agree with the information, but they mostly understand.”

For those who chose “no,” the materials were too technical for the public.

Technical

• “public does not read most of the written materials because it is too wordy and far too technical”

• “FDOT projects are often complex and difficult to understand. Engineers try to present written information in an easily understandable format, but fall short sometimes”

• “Engineering not English makes reading these materials a struggle”

For those managers who checked “not sure,” there were several themes that were clear including the technical nature of the information and the explanation provided.

Technical

• “depends on the complexity of the information and the skill of the person putting the information together”

• “often contains jargon that should be explained”

• “too much engineering”
Explanation

- “sometimes they want further explanation”
- “some people simply do not have the comprehension level in reading to understand”
- “some will understand more than others. Based on questions, it is clear that some do not understand materials clearly”

Q6. Did you think the public finds the audio visual presentations informative and easily understood?

A total of 23 respondents answered this question with 69.6 percent (n=16) checking “yes.” The percentage of those respondents who checked “no” was 4.3 percent (n=1) and 26.1 percent (n=6) checked “not sure.” None answered “sometimes.”

For those managers who chose “yes,” the explanation of the material was very important.

Explanation

- “audio visual presentations tend to clarify complex issues”
- “I believe the videos assist in explaining the projects well”
- “the use of graphics and other visual tools aids in comprehension”
- “I do think that the public is awed by our visuals. The maps may be a bit confusing, but the videos are easily understood”
- “FDOT audio-visual presentations are always very well produced and of high quality. My children could watch them and tell me what the message was”
For those managers who chose “no,” the material was still too technical.

**Technical**

- “at times we can be too technical”
- “They certainly could be presented much more creatively and in a more entertaining and simple way”

The technical theme was the same for those who chose “not sure.”

**Technical**

- “can at times contain too much jargon and technical information”
- “the quality of the materials can vary depending on who prepares them”
- “way too much engineering”

Q7. Do you think the public feels comfortable making comments and discussing their questions/concerns with FDOT staff?

A total of 23 respondents answered this question with 87 percent (n=20) checking “yes.” The percentage of those respondents who checked “no” was 4.3 percent (n=1) and 8.7% (n=2) checked “not sure.” None answered “sometimes.”

For those respondents who checked “yes,” the themes that were evident included comfort, staff, methods of commenting, and the ability to express opinions.

**Comfort**

- “FDOT truly makes it as comfortable as we can for them”
- “one-one-one conversations seem to go well”
- “once engaged in conversation, the public seems comfortable letting us know what they think. The challenge, however, is to engage them to begin with”
Staff

- “special efforts are taken to select staff who are very open and approachable”
- “we do attempt to get them to the person with the answers”
- “staff always responsive”
- “I believe they find us approachable and knowledgeable”

Methods of commenting

- “The various methods to comment allow for all to participate. If they don’t want to discuss it, they can send it in writing and we will respond”

Expressing opinions

- “people have no qualms about expressing their opinions”
- “they never have a problem making a comment”
- “those that attend are generally not shy”
- “they do not think that we really listen, but they will voice their concerns”
- “always willing to express themselves”

The one respondent who checked “no” thought that the public were comfortable with written comments but may feel intimidated speaking at meetings.

Finally, those who checked “not sure” said:

- “This would depend upon the individual, however the DOT has offered a variety of ways to comment which further improves communications”
- “I am sure that some people are comfortable and some people are not”
Q8. Do you think the public feels their comments will make a difference?

A total of 23 respondents answered this question with 21.7 percent (n=5) checking “yes.” The percentage of those respondents who checked “no” was 39.1 percent (n=9) and 34.8 percent (n=8) checked “not sure.” The percentage of those respondents who answered “sometimes” was 4.3 percent (n=1).

Those respondents who chose “yes” thought that commenting really does matter.

Comments do matter

- “those individuals who take the time to attend the various meetings already expect that their voices will be heard and counted”
- “although they may feel like decisions may already be made, they do write comments while there”
- “I think those that make comments do so in order to make themselves feel better - they did their part”

For those managers who checked “no,” the themes of no difference and big government were clear.

No difference

- “many people will say to my face they don’t think it will make a difference”
- “depending on the project, the public ultimately feels the DOT does what they want in the end”
- “the public feels that their comments do not matter and that we will not change anything. Basically they feel their input does not matter, but it does”
- “sometimes they ask for things we can not change and then feel they are ignored”
• “most will tell you they don’t believe we would do anything with their comments
  – we have already made up our mind”

**Big government**

• “people are taught to be skeptical of government. You can’t fight City Hall”
• “the public may feel, or at least, choose to say that bureaucracy does what
  bureaucracy wants”

For those managers who chose “not sure,” the themes that were clear included no
difference, adjustments, and comments do matter.

**No difference**

• “some think DOT will do what they want regardless”
• “some feel that decisions have already been made”
• “depends on where the public thinks we stand on an issue. If they believe we are
  going to do what we want, then no, I don’t think they feel their comments make a
  difference”

**Adjustments**

• “some are thrilled to see our adjustments to the design based on their comments”
• “depends on previous experience. We need to do a better job of communicating
  to the public about how their input is considered”

**Comments matter**

• “activists know they can make a difference one way or another”
• “others feel they can initiate change”
Q9. Do you believe that FDOT staff is genuinely interested in listening to comments from citizens?

A total of 23 respondents answered this question with 69.6 percent (n=16) checking “yes.” The percentage of those respondents who checked “no” was 4.3 percent (n=1) and 26.1 percent (n=6) checked “not sure.” None answered “sometimes.” For those managers who checked “yes,” the theme that was evident was time and effort.

*Time and effort*

- “FDOT employees go to great lengths to document and incorporate the ideas from the public and provide complete and satisfactory information”
- “The FDOT staff that I know are true public servants. They seek input from public customers and incorporate their concerns where possible”
- “always prompt response to community issues”
- “I think most of us would like to make all the people happy all of the time and listen well as a result.”

For those managers who checked “no” and “not sure,” frustration seemed to be a key theme.

*Frustration*

- “if they are comments, and not attacks”
- “there is a sense of frustration on both sides when the issues have no easy resolutions”
“staff expects to hear some comments they know they cannot satisfy. This tends to frustrate both parties. When constructive comments and input is received, it is received well”

Other comments included concerns about staff.

**Staff**

- “the majority of staff at meetings would rather talk to each other than the public”
- “some people really want to get comments early, others do not”
- “some are interested only as long as they agree with FDOT plans”
- “explanations about standards and funding are just more bureaucratic excuses. That gives the perception that FDOT doesn’t listen”
- “some staff go to public meetings hoping no one will show up”

Q10. Do you believe the public thinks that FDOT staff is genuinely interested in listening to comments from citizens?

A total of 23 respondents answered this question with 39.1 percent (n=9) checking “yes.” The percentage of those respondents who checked “no” was 30.4 percent (n=7) and 26.1 percent (n=6) checked “not sure.” The percentage of those respondents who answered “sometimes” was 4.3 percent (n=1).

Those managers who chose “yes” commented on how the public does matter.

**Public matters**

- “members of the public who take the time to attend public meetings feel FDOT is interested and their comments matter”
- “anyone who comes to our meetings cannot leave feeling otherwise”
“many comments from the public thanking us for listening and providing information”

However, those managers who checked “no” thought trust and past experience were items of concern.

Trust

- “they have been ignored too many times”
- “some feel that decisions have already been made”
- “unless we give the public the answers they want to hear, I do not think that the public thinks we are interested in listening”

Distrust

“distrust comes from contractor foul-ups when a job begins. Design errors also a reason”

Those managers who chose “not sure” had the following comments to say:

- “sometimes, as long as they are constructive individuals”
- “depends if they speak with a person that can provide them knowledgable information”
- “some who receive specific attention and results may, most however probably do not”

Q11. Do you think the public is satisfied with public meetings as a way of involving them in FDOT project decisions?

A total of 23 respondents answered this question with 43.5 percent (n=10) checking “yes.” The percentage of those respondents who checked “no” was 26.1
percent (n=6) and 26.1 percent (n=6) checked “not sure.” The percentage of those respondents who answered “sometimes” was 4.3 percent (n=1).

Those managers who checked “yes” thought public meetings were the best method.

*Best method*

- “I think there is no better way to do it. But the meetings are only as good as the input we get from the public”
- “the public is generally seeking information. The more we provide, the better the input and ultimately our decisions”
- “this is the most visible way for them to present their issues”
- “if people are more interested in information, in gaining some familiarity with the project, its scope, and schedule”

For those managers who checked “no,” the themes that were evident included more input and involvement.

*More input*

- “they want more input and claim they were never contacted”
- “most public meetings take place after the project is decided in terms of preliminary designs. They should take place earlier in the process, planning/conceptual development”

*Involvement*

- “unless the public gets a yes to his/her special interest request, public involvement has failed”
“people become involved because they personally will be affected by a project; yet getting even those people who will be affected to care six years before the bulldozers arrive is challenging”

“they don’t feel involved, simply informed if they attend. Many don’t attend - not perceived as a two-way involvement activity”

“look at any newspaper. There are simply too many to choose from. I think the public sees them as wallpaper and ignores them”

A few managers checked “not sure.” Here are their comments:

“I think they would say yes if things went their way and no if they didn’t”

historically, probably not. I do think it has gotten better over the recent years though”

Q12. **Do you think the public thinks their participation is meaningful?**

A total of 23 respondents answered this question with 56.5 percent (n=13) checking “yes.” The percentage of those respondents who checked “no” was 8.7 percent (n=2) and 34.8 percent (n=8) checked “not sure.” None answered “sometimes.”

For those managers who checked “yes,” the themes that were important included changes to projects, outcome, and public involvement.

*Changes to projects*

- “as ideas or comments are incorporated into projects, this builds public confidence”
- “they see changes based on their comments”
• “as long as the FDOT follows up with concerns and gives valid reasons for decisions”

**Outcome**

• “the public thinks their participation is meaningful and important, but they may not always think FDOT values their participation”
• “yes, although they are not always happy about the outcome”

**Public involvement**

• “it depends to what level they are vocal or become involved. If they just come, get brochures and leave, then they are not meaningful”
• “the public is generally seeking information. The more we provide, the better the input and ultimately our decisions”

One manager who chose “no” made the following comment:

• “by the time the public is involved, most decisions have been made”

Those managers who checked “not sure,” thought that participation and public wants were key themes.

**Participation**

• “if the community has a point of view, it will be heard and their participation will be as meaningful as they want it to be”
• “those that comment – yes, those that do not – no.”

**Public wants**

• “unless they have gotten something they wanted – they don’t believe we listen or care”
• “unless the public gets the answers they want, I do not believe that most find the meetings meaningful”

Q13. Do you think the FDOT really cares about the opinions of the public?

A total of 23 respondents answered this question with 82.6 percent (n=19) checking “yes.” The percentage of those respondents who checked “no” was 4.3 percent (n=1) and 13 percent (n=3) checked “not sure.” None answered “sometimes.”

For those managers who checked “yes,” the themes that were clear included time and effort, incorporation of ideas, and limited changes.

Time and effort

• “we take the time and effort to provide these meetings”

• “we even schedule Spanish speaking representatives in the event the public requires communication in their spoken/understood language”

Incorporate ideas

• “I have seen FDOT go to great lengths to document and incorporate ideas from the public”

• “FDOT utilizes the information received from the public to better a proposed project”

• “have seen planning/design change as a result of input”

Limited in changes

• “care to a great extent but that doesn’t mean we can change projects to suit all the opinions of the public”

• “I think the FDOT tries to work within valid parameters.”
Those managers who checked “no” or “not sure” had the following comments:

- “depends entirely on what the issue is”
- “generally we take the approach we know best”
- “we do seem to not want people mad at us. If they write a letter to an elected official or newspaper, suddenly the issue is important to us”
- “FDOT cares, to a degree, but at the same time, feel we are the experts and know what is best, and in many cases, that is true. FDOT knows best”

Q14. Do you think the public feels the FDOT really cares about their opinions?

A total of 23 respondents answered this question with 34.8 percent (n=8) checking “yes.” The percentage of those respondents who checked “no” was 34.8 percent (n=8) and 21.7 percent (n=5) checked “not sure.” The percentage of those respondents who answered “sometimes” was 8.7 percent (n=2).

Those managers who chose “yes” made the following comments:

- “The FDOT gains public trust through on-going efforts to incorporate public input”
- “that is why they take the time to come”
- “I believe the majority of citizens feel they have been listened to and that we will try to address their concerns”
- “it probably varies depending on the issues and responses to them”

Those who checked “no” felt the public sees the FDOT as rigid and not caring.
Rigid

- “we are perceived to be big government and we don’t do anything to change that attitude”
- “regulations and rules can make FDOT seem very rigid and uncaring in the eyes of the public”
- “the opinions of the public seldom change what FDOT plans to do. Sometimes FDOT cannot change because of requirements and regulations”

Not caring

- “unless the public gets the answers they want, I do not feel that the public thinks we care about their opinions”
- “I think there is distrust”
- “we don’t promote a caring/listening side so no, I don’t think the public thinks we care”

A few managers who chose “not sure” made comments about changes.

Changes

- “sometimes, if it’s a yes answer to their needs, people think FDOT cares”
- “some input is valuable and results in substantial changes. The public that provided this opinion feel that the FDOT does care”
- “I believe anyone who engages with us in a dialogue will come to this conclusion”
Q15. Do you think the FDOT understands the needs of the public?

A total of 22 respondents answered this question with 59.1 percent (n=13) checking “yes.” The percentage of those respondents who checked “no” was 18.2 percent (n=4) and 18.2 percent (n=4) checked “not sure.” The percentage of those respondents who answered “sometimes” was 4.5 percent (n=1).

Those managers who checked “yes” made the following comments:

- “for the most part, FDOT does understand what people need in terms of transportation better than they do themselves”
- “public input is very valuable. They often bring forth issues that FDOT has overlooked”
- “from a transportation standpoint yes, from an overall long term impact to the local community, no”

Some managers thought that FDOT does not understand the needs of the public because the focus gets lost

*Focus*

- “we think too much about the cars”
- “too often we forget why we are undertaking a project”
- “we tend to get lost in the project process while forgetting what matters to the public. Did we build what they wanted, did we do it effectively and efficiently?”

Still other managers chose “not sure” because of not being able to grasp needs.

*Grasp needs*

- “I don’t think the FDOT always comprehends business and community impacts”
- “common sense engineers seem to be rare”
• “not entirely, that is one of the purposes of the meeting”
• “I believe we think we pretty well understand”

**Q16. Do you think the public feels the FDOT understands their needs?**

A total of 23 respondents answered this question with 17.4 percent (n=4) checking “yes.” The percentage of those respondents who checked “no” was 39.1 percent (n=9) and 39.1 percent (n=9) checked “not sure.” The percentage of those respondents who answered “sometimes” was 4.3 percent (n=1).

For those managers who chose “yes,” they thought that the public’s concerns were addressed.

*Concerns addressed*

- “if they attend and engage us. Even if they call or write without a meeting, I have never seen someone’s concerns dismissed out of hand”
- “people see us as more accessible than other agencies”

Those managers who chose “no” had the common theme of public wants.

*Public wants*

- “still feel FDOT will do what they want anyway”
- “I think the public feels more roads/lanes need to be added and repaired”
- “unless you give the public the answers they want, I do not think that the public feels we understand their needs”
- “FDOT will always appear to be a bureaucracy, bound by rules/standards, lengthy timeframes to produce projects, and funding five years from now instead of today when we need it”
Those managers who checked “not sure” also discussed public wants.

Public wants

- “only if FDOT installed noise walls with every project and completely eliminated traffic jams. The public wants the impossible”
- “FDOT is government and people distrust government and bureaucrats”

Q17. Do you think the public trusts the Department of Transportation?

A total of 23 respondents answered this question with 30.4 percent (n=7) checking “yes.” The percentage of those respondents who checked “no” was 17.4 percent (n=4) and 52.2 percent (n=12) checked “not sure.” None answered “sometimes.”

Those managers who checked “yes” made the following comments:

- “customer satisfaction often determines the level of trust”
- “If they did not, they would second guess every intersection, and stay off all the bridges. I believe the public has great trust in the Department”
- “They trust us to do the best for the public at large”

The managers who chose “no” said:

- “I don’t trust government either. Unless you work here and understand how good the people are, it is hard to believe they have your best interest at heart”
- “I think that there is a general mistrust of government”

Finally those managers who checked “not sure” said there is a trust issue.

Mistrust

- “FDOT is a fine organization, but suffers from the stigma of state government”
- “there is a general distrust of government”
“when they speak with us, I believe that some of that mistrust goes away”

“once again, we are grouped into the big government versus the little person syndrome”

Table 6 represents the results in frequencies from the manager survey regarding public expectations. Respondents were asked to answer the question about their expectations “high,” “low,” or “not sure.”

Table 6. Frequency Table of Manager Responses: Expectations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manager Responses</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>High % (n)</th>
<th>Low % (n)</th>
<th>Not Sure % (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you think the public has high or low expectations of public meetings?</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>26.1% (6)</td>
<td>39.1% (9)</td>
<td>34.8% (8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q18. Do you think the public has high or low expectations of public meetings?

A total of 23 respondents answered this question with 26.1 percent (n=6) checking “high.” The percentage of those respondents who checked “low” was 39.1 percent (n=9) and 34.8 percent (n=8) checked “not sure.”

Those managers who chose “high” had the following comments:

- “those members of the public who attend public meetings do so with the highest expectations or they would not take time from their schedules to voice their opinions”
- “they expect to have all their questions answered”
- “they still hope they can change the decision of FDOT regarding certain design issues”
• “those who come are there specifically to learn about projects and/or ask questions”

For those managers who checked “low,” several themes emerged including waste of time, change, and level of service.

Waste of time

• “most people go into them with a what are they going to do to me now attitude?”
• “most people don’t expect it will make a difference whether they attend or not, but some are willing to take the chance”
• “low attendance rate for lots of public meetings”
• “They attend to see what’s going on, but don’t generally expect to learn much – also why so many don’t attend at all – waste of time”
• “public has low expectations because they feel that we are not going to change anything”

Change

• “they are usually unprepared for the changes”

Level of service

• “I think some people are amazed at the level of service we can provide.”

A few managers who checked “not sure” stated:

• “I think they think of them as informational”
• “I believe they mostly come to check on the progress of the job and to find out when it is getting started.”

Table 7 represents the results in frequencies from the manager survey regarding the purpose of public meetings. Respondents were asked to check the answer about
which category they agreed with. The results are based on the question being “checked” or “not checked.”

Table 7. Frequency Table of Manager Responses: Purpose of meetings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manager Responses</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Checked % (n)</th>
<th>Not Checked % (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public meetings are used to inform the public about decisions already made.</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>65.2% (15)</td>
<td>34.8% (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public meetings are used to urge the public to support a decision.</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>52.2% (12)</td>
<td>47.8% (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public meetings are used to satisfy legal requirements.</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>60.9% (14)</td>
<td>39.1% (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public meetings are used to seek public input.</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>69.6% (16)</td>
<td>30.4% (7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q19. Do you think the FDOT uses public meetings to: Inform the public about decisions already made, To urge the public to support a decision, To satisfy legal requirements, Or to seek public input?

A total of 23 respondents answered this question. More than sixty-five percent (n=15) checked that public meetings are used to inform the public about decisions already made. Those respondents that did not check this answer was 34.8 percent (n=8). The total number of respondents who checked that public meetings are used to urge the public to support a decision was 52.2 percent (n=12) while 47.8 percent (n=11) did not check this answer. The total number of respondents who checked that public meetings are used to satisfy legal requirements was 60.9 percent (n=14) while 39.1 percent (n=9) did not check this answer. Finally, the total number of respondents who checked that
public meetings are used to seek public input was 69.6 percent (n=16) while 30.4 percent (n=7) did not check this answer.

Those managers who believe that public meetings are used to inform the public about decisions already made stated:

- “it depends how far the project has progressed. There is a stage when urging public support and seeking input are a key purpose”
- “Rarely do we ever change something based on comments from a public meeting.

Other managers who checked that public meetings are used to satisfy legal requirements made the following comments:

- “yes, it is statutorily mandated – and for a reason. It is important to get input and keep the public informed of decisions that were made”
- “some project managers would not have hearings unless required.

Those managers who checked that public meetings are used to seek public input made these comments:

- “I believe we seek input. I think the other responses figure to lesser degrees”
- “I want to make as many accommodations as I can early in the process”
- “although public meetings are a requirement, I feel that the FDOT sees these meetings as opportunities to clarify the will of the public or to best accommodate their requests/comments”

Finally, other managers checked all the responses. Here are their comments:

- “all meetings are different. Sometimes FDOT feels like their hands are tied and they are going through the motions. However, at other times, drastic changes are made due to public input”
• “depending upon which project or what public meeting you are holding”
• “we should always seek input and always accept comments”

Table 8 represents the results in frequencies from the manager survey regarding public feelings. Respondents were asked to answer the question by checking “better,” “worse,” “the same,” or “not sure.”

Table 8. Frequency Table of Manager Responses: Feelings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manager Responses</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Better % (n)</th>
<th>Worse % (n)</th>
<th>Same % (n)</th>
<th>Not Sure % (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you think the public feels better, worse, or the same after attending a FDOT public meeting?</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>56.5% (13)</td>
<td>4.3% (1)</td>
<td>17.4% (4)</td>
<td>21.7% (5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q20. Do you think the public feels better, worse, or the same after attending a FDOT public meeting?

A total of 23 respondents answered this question with 56.5 percent (n=13) checking “better.” The percentage of those respondents who checked “worse” was 4.3 percent (n=1) while 17.4 percent (n=4) checked “same.” The percentage of those who checked “not sure” was 21.7 percent (n=5).

For those managers who chose “better,” the themes that were clear included information and listening.

Information

• “hearing the information for the very first time which can only enhance their involvement in the overall process”
• “knowledge is power”
• “expectations are low, so I think we generally exceed them. People appreciate having their questions answered”
• “information, communication, personal contact all remind the public that FDOT remains a presence in the community, even when information presented isn’t what they want to hear”
• “I think they know more and can make a better informed decision”
• “new info, whether to their benefit or not, gives them more insight as to what is happening”

Listened to

• “usually better, they are generally pleased to have had someone listen to them”
• “many people have told me that they appreciate the effort and help we provide at the meetings”

The one manager who chose “worse” made the following comment:

• “only because they are not prepared for the changes”

Other managers who chose “same” stated:

• “I believe that on many FDOT projects, the public meeting serves to validate whatever position a member of the public has. The public meeting rarely changes opinions”

Finally, those managers who checked “not sure” said that it really depends on the issue and the project:

• “depends on the information received. They should feel more informed – whether they liked the information or not will dictate how they actually feel”
The following questions asked the respondents for their thoughts and comments:

**Q21. What do you think is the purpose of a public meeting/hearing?**

Several managers thought the purpose of a public meeting was to present information and inform the public. Here are their comments:

- “to inform and seek public input”
- “these types of forums are opportunities for the FDOT to gather as well as convey information to the public”
- “the purpose may vary. Sometimes it is to tell the public what will happen. Others, it is to solicit input. It is usually a combination”
- “To inform public what is going on”

Other managers thought the purpose of public meetings was only to fulfill a legal requirement. Here are their comments:

- “by statute, there may be some things FDOT must say, but the Department must remember who the audience is and what it needs”
- “it is the mandatory meeting to obtain federal money”

Still other managers said the purpose of public meetings was to seek public input:

- “ideally, we should be presenting our ideas and getting feedback from the community in support or opposition to those ideas”
- “to determine what changes to plans may be desirable and to mitigate public concerns/issues”
- “to gain community input in the design”
• “to give people an opportunity to understand various projects and have input into the decision-making process”
• “to disseminate information and receive input and feedback”
• “to solicit input, garner support and identify potential problems that may develop before and during a project”
• “the purpose is twofold – first it provides a forum for the DOT to communicate its plans to the public. Secondly, it provides a forum for the public to comment on that plan. The objective being to ultimately provide a better product”

Q22. Do you think public meetings/hearings really accomplish a true “dialogue” with the public?

The comments to this question were split about evenly. Those managers that thought that public meetings did accomplish a true dialogue had the following comments:

• “It usually does, but depends on the size and significance of the project”
• “I believe public meetings are the best attempt at doing so. This type of forum provides a method for instantaneous feedback which increases public confidence”
• “yes and an on-going relationship. After I meet people at the meetings, they will call me for several years later for information”
• “mostly yes, but that public too often is small in number”
• “we are willing to have a dialogue. It is up to the public to provide their part”
• “yes, to the extent possible within the time restraints and staff present”
Those managers who did not think a true dialogue was accomplished at public meetings said the following:

- “I don’t think so. They are structured as we talk, then they talk. No real dialogue takes place”
- “no, but they are a start”
- “in a public meeting, we should not converse with the public”
- “it’s more for informational purposes”
- “no, especially our hearings. We simply allow the public to comment, but do not respond”

Finally those managers who were not sure about whether or not a true dialogue was accomplished at public meetings said:

- “not with the public at large. A dialogue with vocal opponents does occur though”
- “it depends on how the FDOT follows up the public comments”
- “meetings should support dialogue. But true dialogue should go beyond just holding meetings”
- “sometimes the FDOT staff and consultants don’t understand the community and context in which the project will operate”
- “the vast majority of public are generally uninterested in the discussion until it directly affects them – which is way too late”
Q23. Overall, how do you think the Department is doing at public involvement?

What suggestions do you have to improve public involvement and participation?

Many of the FDOT managers thought that smaller meetings would be more productive.

**Smaller meetings**

- “need small work groups”
- “need to rely more on grassroots one-on-one contact and less on formal hearings or meetings”
- “Public involvement is a two-way street. FDOT is genuinely trying”
- “smaller meetings and neighborhood meetings can be more productive”
- “Meeting with residential, neighborhood boards, or chamber boards sharpens the focus on the public/community thinks it needs or wants”

Many of the FDOT managers thought that FDOT was doing a good job.

**FDOT doing good job**

- “We have definitely improved. Years ago, the thinking was a successful public meeting was where no one showed up, times have really changed”
- “I think we do a good job. I think the public gets useful information. Overall, it is a positive experience”
- “I think the Department is doing an excellent job overall”
- “the Department is going above and beyond”
- “for an organization as large as the FDOT, and with the sheer magnitude of projects we produce, we do as good of a job communicating with the public as possible. Production constraints prevent us from having an intimate dialogue with
every member of the public on every project. We certainly try to involve as many public members as possible with our decision making process”

Still other managers thought that FDOT does need some improvement in public involvement.

*Needs improvement*

- “We need to build more trust and be more proactive in getting the public engaged”
- “if we could speed up the implementation of their ideas, I think we might begin to create believers”
- “we need to emphasize that getting input up front can save time and frustration in the long run”
- “we are doing better, but we are still not quite there”
- “we can always improve upon our outreach efforts”
- “the Department’s doing better than in the past, but the public meetings and workshops need to occur earlier in the process”
- “working with opinion leaders/community leaders early on is also important”
- “there needs to be a better way to advertise meetings. The advertisement sometimes read too bureaucratic and doesn’t always convey the significance of a project”
- “I believe we are improving. Meetings need to be held at a time when the public comments can be most useful”

Some FDOT managers listed public responsibilities as very important in the public involvement process.
Public responsibility

- “Largely, the onus is on the public. FDOT is available; FDOT does answer phone calls; FDOT does answer letters; FDOT does host meetings; FDOT will continue to build projects; the public will continue to choose to be interested and/or involved”

Other managers believed that more media coverage is necessary to assist with public involvement.

Media coverage

- “proactively partnering with the media to keep developing projects alive in the public mind is important”

- “more advertising in local neighborhood papers and public announcements on TV and radio. Also, although we have brochures in Spanish, there are NO announcements of the meetings in any of the Spanish media. This segment of the population is not adequately reached as evidenced by attendees at meetings”

Many of the FDOT managers said that FDOT has come a long way.

Come long way

- “the public now knows about our projects and activities in advance so they are not surprised”

- “I think that the Department has made a great stride in the public involvement area. When I started with the Department in the late 1980’s, we did not engage the public as much as we do now”
Finally, there was one interesting comment in regards to FDOT having *too much* public involvement:

- “If DOT needed to have public approval for everything, we wouldn’t do anything. If we tried to build the Interstate in today’s open political environment, we would never be able to build it. Some activities have too much public involvement.”

Figure 4 on the next page represents the themes that were evident from the manager surveys regarding the meeting format, materials and frustration levels.
### Figure 4: Management Themes

#### THEMES FROM FDOT MANAGEMENT SURVEYS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meeting Format</th>
<th>Materials</th>
<th>Frustration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- format is good, but the public expects a question and answer session</td>
<td>- Always have good visuals</td>
<td>- Public thinks too late in the process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- well organized</td>
<td>- Too technical for the lay person</td>
<td>- Public thinks their comments will not make a difference – Big Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- a lot of time and effort spent preparing for meetings</td>
<td>- Videos assist well in explaining the project material</td>
<td>- Public comments do matter, if they are received in time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- not sure if they are the best method to receive public input</td>
<td>- Handouts help with material explanation</td>
<td>- Sometimes it is too late in the process to accept public comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- DOT does listen!</td>
<td>- Good information provided on brochures</td>
<td>- Sometimes no easy resolutions to public issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Public intimidated speaking at public meetings, especially in a microphone</td>
<td>- Need to have someone not associated with project review handouts to make sure they are understandable</td>
<td>- Cannot satisfy all public comments and requests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Sufficient staff at meetings</td>
<td>- Need to have enough information on mail-outs so if public cannot make the meeting, they understand the project and how to reach FDOT</td>
<td>- Must look at big picture and community at large – can’t just look at one individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Structure easy to follow</td>
<td>- Too technical for the lay person</td>
<td>- Hard balance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- One-on-one contact appreciated</td>
<td>- No formal presentation or agenda at some meetings – not sure if public likes this or not</td>
<td>- Public does matter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Format is good at informal meetings – public can walk around and ask questions</td>
<td>- Format is good at informal meetings – public can walk around and ask questions</td>
<td>- Government in general not trusted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Some public thinks meetings are a waste of time</td>
<td>- Low attendance rate at meetings – hard to get public to show up</td>
<td>- Need public participation – low attendance at meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- DOT bound by funding limitations and standards – public thinks these are excuses</td>
<td>- Public does not come to meetings, then complains when we cannot make changes because it is too late – very frustrating</td>
<td>- Public’s past experience with government or DOT can either help or hinder</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Co-orientation Perceptions

The following charts detail a qualitative analysis of how the results compared between the manager perceptions and the public perceptions.

Table 9 represents the comparison results from the manager surveys and the public surveys regarding meeting organization. According to the manager results, 95.7 percent of the managers felt that FDOT meetings were organized, and 78.3 percent thought that the public felt the FDOT meetings were organized. This was close to what the public actually thought with 85.7 percent of the public responding that they thought the meetings were organized. The perceptions were accurate on the FDOT’s part.

Table 9. Comparison of Frequency Table of Manager Responses versus Public Responses: Meeting organization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MANAGER RESULTS</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Yes % (n)</th>
<th>No % (n)</th>
<th>Not Sure % (n)</th>
<th>Sometimes % (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you think FDOT meetings are organized?</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>95.7% (22)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.3% (1)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think the public feels FDOT meetings are organized?</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>78.3% (18)</td>
<td>4.3% (1)</td>
<td>17.4% (4)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PUBLIC RESULTS</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Yes % (n)</th>
<th>No % (n)</th>
<th>Not Sure % (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Was the meeting organized?</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>85.7% (54)</td>
<td>6.3% (4)</td>
<td>7.9% (5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 10 represents the comparison results from the manager survey and the public survey regarding meeting format. According to the manager results, 100 percent of the managers felt the format of FDOT meetings was helpful to the public, and 72.7 percent thought that the public felt the format of FDOT meetings was helpful. This was very close to what the public actually thought with 75 percent of the public responding that they thought the format of the meeting was helpful to get the information they needed. The perceptions by FDOT were correct.

Table 10. Comparison of Frequency Table of Manager Responses versus Public Responses: Meeting format

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MANAGER RESULTS</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Yes % (n)</th>
<th>No % (n)</th>
<th>Not Sure % (n)</th>
<th>Sometimes % (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you think the format of FDOT meetings is helpful to the public to get the information they need?</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>100% (23)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think the public feels the format of FDOT meetings is helpful to get the information they need?</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>72.7% (16)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>27.3% (6)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PUBLIC RESULTS</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Yes % (n)</th>
<th>No % (n)</th>
<th>Not Sure % (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Was the meeting format helpful to get the information you need?</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>75% (48)</td>
<td>14.1% (9)</td>
<td>10.9% (7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 11 represents the comparison results from the manager survey and the public survey regarding written materials. According to the manager results, 39.1 percent of the managers felt that the public thought the written materials were informative and easily understood, with 80.6 percent of the public responding that they did think the written materials were informative and easily understood. The perceptions were not accurate on the FDOT’s part.

Table 11. Comparison of Frequency Table of Manager Responses versus Public Responses: Written materials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MANAGER RESULTS</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Yes % (n)</th>
<th>No % (n)</th>
<th>Not Sure % (n)</th>
<th>Sometimes % (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you think the public finds the written materials informative and easily understood?</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>39.1% (9)</td>
<td>13.0% (3)</td>
<td>43.5% (10)</td>
<td>4.3% (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PUBLIC RESULTS</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Yes % (n)</th>
<th>No % (n)</th>
<th>Not Sure % (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did you find the written materials informative and easily understood?</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>80.6% (50)</td>
<td>8.1% (5)</td>
<td>11.3% (7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 12 represents the comparison results from the manager survey and the public survey regarding audio visual presentations. According to the manager results, 69.6 percent of the managers felt that the public found the audio visual presentations informative and easily understood, with 66.7 percent of the public responding that they thought the audio visual presentations were informative and easily understood. The perceptions by FDOT were correct.

Table 12. Comparison of Frequency Table of Manager Responses versus Public Responses: Audio visual

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MANAGER RESULTS</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Yes % (n)</th>
<th>No % (n)</th>
<th>Not Sure % (n)</th>
<th>Sometimes % (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you think the public finds the audio visual presentations informative and easily understood?</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>69.6% (16)</td>
<td>4.3% (1)</td>
<td>26.1% (6)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PUBLIC RESULTS</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Yes % (n)</th>
<th>No % (n)</th>
<th>Not Sure % (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did you find the audio visual presentation informative and easily understood?</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>66.7% (22)</td>
<td>9.1% (3)</td>
<td>24.2% (8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 13 represents the comparison results from the manager survey and the public survey regarding the public feeling comfortable. According to the manager results, 87 percent of the managers felt that the public felt comfortable making comments and discussing their questions and concerns with FDOT staff, while 87.3 percent of the public responded that they felt comfortable making comments and discussing their questions and concerns with FDOT staff. FDOT’s perceptions of the public were accurate.

**Table 13. Comparison of Frequency Table of Manager Responses versus Public Responses: Comfort**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MANAGER RESULTS</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Yes % (n)</th>
<th>No % (n)</th>
<th>Not Sure % (n)</th>
<th>Sometimes % (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you think the public feels comfortable making comments and discussing their questions/concerns with FDOT staff?</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>87.0% (20)</td>
<td>4.3% (1)</td>
<td>8.7% (2)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PUBLIC RESULTS</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Yes % (n)</th>
<th>No % (n)</th>
<th>Not Sure % (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did you feel comfortable making comments and discussing your questions/concerns with FDOT staff?</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>87.3% (55)</td>
<td>11.1% (7)</td>
<td>1.6% (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 14 represents the comparison results from the manager survey and the public survey regarding whether or not the public feels their comments will make a difference. According to the manager results, 21.7 percent of the managers felt that the public felt their comments would make a difference, while 39.1 percent did not think so. The public results indicated that only 10.5 percent actually thought their comments would make a difference and 49.1 percent did not think their comments would make a difference. Even though the numbers were not exact for the “yes” column, the numbers for both groups who checked “not sure” or “no” in regards to whether or not comments would make a difference were close, therefore the perceptions were fairly accurate.

Table 14. Comparison of Frequency Table of Manager Responses versus Public Responses: Comments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MANAGER RESULTS</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Yes % (n)</th>
<th>No % (n)</th>
<th>Not Sure % (n)</th>
<th>Sometimes % (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you think the public feels their comments will make a difference?</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21.7% (5)</td>
<td>39.1% (9)</td>
<td>34.8% (8)</td>
<td>4.3% (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PUBLIC RESULTS</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Yes % (n)</th>
<th>No % (n)</th>
<th>Not Sure % (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel your comments will make a difference?</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>10.5% (6)</td>
<td>49.1% (28)</td>
<td>40.4% (23)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 15 represents the comparison results from the manager survey and the public survey regarding the FDOT staff and genuine listening. According to the manager results, 69.6 percent of the managers felt the FDOT staff is genuinely interested in listening to comments from citizens, and 39.1 percent thought that the public felt the staff was interested in listening. This is not very close to what the public actually thought with 62.9 percent of the public responding that they thought FDOT staff did listen to their comments. The perceptions were incorrect on the FDOT’s part.

*Table 15. Comparison of Frequency Table of Manager Responses versus Public Responses: Listening*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MANAGER RESULTS</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Yes % (n)</th>
<th>No % (n)</th>
<th>Not Sure % (n)</th>
<th>Sometimes % (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you believe that FDOT staff is genuinely interested in listening to comments from citizens?</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>69.6% (16)</td>
<td>4.3% (1)</td>
<td>26.1% (6)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you believe the public thinks that FDOT staff is genuinely interested in listening to comments from citizens?</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>39.1% (9)</td>
<td>30.4% (7)</td>
<td>26.1% (6)</td>
<td>4.3% (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PUBLIC RESULTS</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Yes % (n)</th>
<th>No % (n)</th>
<th>Not Sure % (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did you believe that the FDOT staff were genuinely interested in listening to comments from citizens?</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>62.9% (39)</td>
<td>16.1% (10)</td>
<td>21% (13)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 16 represents the comparison results from the manager survey and the public survey regarding public satisfaction. According to the manager results, 43.5 percent of the managers felt that the public is satisfied with public meetings as a way of involving them in FDOT project decisions. This is not very close with 61.7 percent of the public responding that they were satisfied with public meetings as a way of involving them in project decisions. However, even though both groups were close in the “no” and “not sure” categories, FDOT’s perceptions of the public were not very accurate.

Table 16. Comparison of Frequency Table of Manager Responses versus Public Responses: Satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MANAGER RESULTS</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Yes % (n)</th>
<th>No %  (n)</th>
<th>Not Sure % (n)</th>
<th>Sometimes % (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you think the public is satisfied with public meetings as a way of involving them in FDOT project decisions?</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>43.5% (10)</td>
<td>26.1% (6)</td>
<td>26.1% (6)</td>
<td>4.3% (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PUBLIC RESULTS</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Yes % (n)</th>
<th>No %  (n)</th>
<th>Not Sure % (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are you satisfied with public meetings as a way of involving you in FDOT project decisions?</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>61.7% (37)</td>
<td>20% (12)</td>
<td>18.3% (11)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 17 represents the comparison results from the manager survey and the public survey regarding meaningful participation. According to the manager results, 56.5 percent of the managers felt that the public thought their participation was meaningful. This was not close to what the public actually thought with 44.3 percent of the public responding that they felt their participation was meaningful. FDOT’s perceptions of the public were not accurate.

Table 17. Comparison of Frequency Table of Manager Responses versus Public Responses: Meaningful participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MANAGER RESULTS</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Yes % (n)</th>
<th>No % (n)</th>
<th>Not Sure % (n)</th>
<th>Sometimes % (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you think the public thinks their participation is meaningful?</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>56.5% (13)</td>
<td>8.7% (2)</td>
<td>34.8% (8)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PUBLIC RESULTS</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Yes % (n)</th>
<th>No % (n)</th>
<th>Not Sure % (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you think your participation is meaningful?</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>44.3% (27)</td>
<td>29.5% (18)</td>
<td>26.2% (16)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 18 represents the comparison results from the manager survey and the public survey regarding whether FDOT cares about public opinion. According to the manager results, 82.6 percent of the managers felt the FDOT does care about the opinions of the public, and 34.8 percent thought that the public felt FDOT cared about their opinions. This was very close to what the public actually thought with 33.9 percent of the public responding that they thought the FDOT cared about their opinions. Both groups also had the same numbers as they did for the “yes” responses for the “no” category. The FDOT perceptions of the public were accurate.

**Table 18. Comparison of Frequency Table of Manager Responses versus Public Responses: Opinion**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MANAGER RESULTS</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Yes % (n)</th>
<th>No % (n)</th>
<th>Not Sure % (n)</th>
<th>Sometimes % (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you think the FDOT really cares about the opinions of the public?</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>82.6% (19)</td>
<td>4.3% (1)</td>
<td>13.0% (3)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think the public feels the FDOT really cares about their opinions?</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>34.8% (8)</td>
<td>34.8% (8)</td>
<td>21.7% (5)</td>
<td>8.7% (2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PUBLIC RESULTS</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Yes % (n)</th>
<th>No % (n)</th>
<th>Not Sure % (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you think the FDOT really cares about your opinion?</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>33.9% (21)</td>
<td>33.9% (21)</td>
<td>32.3% (20)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 19 represents the comparison results from the manager survey and the public survey regarding whether FDOT understand the public needs. According to the manager results, 59.1 percent of the managers felt that the FDOT did understand the needs of the public, and 17.4 percent thought that the public felt FDOT understood their needs. This was not very close to what the public actually thought with 33.3 percent of the public responding that they thought the FDOT understood their needs. Even though both groups were close in the “no” and “not sure” areas, the FDOT perceptions of the public were not very accurate.

Table 19. Comparison of Frequency Table of Manager Responses versus Public Responses: Needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MANAGER RESULTS</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Yes % (n)</th>
<th>No % (n)</th>
<th>Not Sure % (n)</th>
<th>Sometimes % (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you think the FDOT understands the needs of the public?</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>59.1% (13)</td>
<td>18.2% (4)</td>
<td>18.2% (4)</td>
<td>4.5% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think the public feels the FDOT understands their needs?</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>17.4% (4)</td>
<td>39.1% (9)</td>
<td>39.1% (9)</td>
<td>4.3% (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PUBLIC RESULTS</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Yes % (n)</th>
<th>No % (n)</th>
<th>Not Sure % (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you think the FDOT understands the needs of the public?</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>33.3% (20)</td>
<td>33.3% (20)</td>
<td>33.3% (20)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 20 represents the comparison results from the manager survey and the public survey regarding trust. According to the manager results, 30.4 percent of the managers felt that the public trusted the FDOT. This was not very close to what the public actually thought with 50 percent of the public responding that they did trust the FDOT. It is interesting to note that the public actually trusted the FDOT more than the FDOT had thought. FDOT’s perceptions of the public were not accurate.

Table 20. Comparison of Frequency Table of Manager Responses versus Public Responses: Trust

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MANAGER RESULTS</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Yes % (n)</th>
<th>No % (n)</th>
<th>Not Sure % (n)</th>
<th>Sometimes % (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you think the public trusts the Department of Transportation?</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>30.4% (7)</td>
<td>17.4% (4)</td>
<td>52.2% (12)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PUBLIC RESULTS</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Yes % (n)</th>
<th>No % (n)</th>
<th>Not Sure % (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you trust the Department of Transportation?</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>50% (29)</td>
<td>24.1% (14)</td>
<td>25.9% (15)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 21 represents the comparison results from the manager survey and the public survey regarding public expectations. According to the manager results, 26.1 percent of the managers felt that the public had high expectations of public meetings. This was not very close to what the public actually thought with 41.4 percent of the public responding that they had high expectations. Again, it is interesting to note that the public actually had higher expectations than FDOT had realized. FDOT’s perceptions of the public were not accurate.

Table 21. Comparison of Frequency Table of Manager Responses versus Public Responses: Expectations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MANAGER RESULTS</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>High % (n)</th>
<th>Low % (n)</th>
<th>Not Sure % (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you think the public has high or low expectations of public meetings?</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>26.1% (6)</td>
<td>39.1% (9)</td>
<td>34.8% (8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PUBLIC RESULTS</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>High % (n)</th>
<th>Low % (n)</th>
<th>Not Sure % (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did you have high or low expectations of the meeting?</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>41.4% (24)</td>
<td>29.3% (17)</td>
<td>29.3% (17)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 22 represents the comparison results from the manager survey and the public survey regarding the purpose of public meetings. According to the manager results, 65.2 percent of the managers felt that public meetings were used to inform the public about decisions already made while 75 percent of public felt the same way. The results also indicated that the 52.2 percent of the FDOT managers felt that public meetings were used to urge the public to support a decision while the public said 39.1 percent. More than sixty percent of the managers felt that public meetings were used to satisfy legal requirements while 53.1 percent of the public said the same thing. Finally, almost seventy percent of the managers felt that public meetings are used to seek public input, while only 25 percent of the public felt this way. The feelings of FDOT and the public were very different.

Table 22. Comparison of Frequency Table of Manager Responses versus Public Responses: Purpose of public meetings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MANAGER RESULTS</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Checked % (n)</th>
<th>Not Checked % (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public meetings are used to inform the public about decisions already made.</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>65.2% (15)</td>
<td>34.8% (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public meetings are used to urge the public to support a decision.</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>52.2% (12)</td>
<td>47.8% (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public meetings are used to satisfy legal requirements.</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>60.9% (14)</td>
<td>39.1% (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public meetings are used to seek public input.</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>69.6% (16)</td>
<td>30.4% (7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PUBLIC RESULTS</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Checked % (n)</th>
<th>Not Checked % (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public meetings are used to inform the public about decisions already made.</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>75% (48)</td>
<td>25% (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public meetings are used to urge the public to support a decision.</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>39.1% (25)</td>
<td>60.9% (39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public meetings are used to satisfy legal requirements.</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>53.1% (34)</td>
<td>46.9% (30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public meetings are used to seek public input.</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>25% (16)</td>
<td>75% (48)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 23 represents the comparison results from the manager survey and the public survey regarding public feelings after attending a FDOT meeting. According to the manager results, 56.5 percent of the managers felt that the public felt better after attending a FDOT public meeting. This was not very close to what the public actually thought with 38.7 percent of the public responding that they felt better after attending. Most of the public responded that they felt the same after attending a public meeting. FDOT’s perceptions of the public were not very accurate.

Table 23. Comparison of Frequency Table of Manager Responses versus Public Responses: Feelings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MANAGER</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Better % (n)</th>
<th>Worse % (n)</th>
<th>Same % (n)</th>
<th>Not Sure % (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you think the public feels better, worse, or the same after attending a FDOT public meeting?</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>56.5% (13)</td>
<td>4.3% (1)</td>
<td>17.4% (4)</td>
<td>21.7% (5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PUBLIC RESULTS</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Better % (n)</th>
<th>Worse % (n)</th>
<th>Same % (n)</th>
<th>Not Sure % (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel better, worse, or the same after attending the public meeting?</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>38.7% (24)</td>
<td>17.7% (11)</td>
<td>43.5% (27)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5 on the next page represents the themes that were evident from the focus group that was conducted with the FDOT’s District Public Information Officers/Directors at the annual Public Information Officers conference, held July 26-28 2004 in Deerfield Beach, FL. The themes include public meeting format, public trust, and public participation.
Public Meeting Format

- format is good, but the public expects a question and answer session, which is not always the case.
- Public does not like the lack of response to their comments during the formal meetings – they think typical bureaucracy
- Need to hold smaller meetings, more informal – public likes the one-on-one format
- Need to get out to the community and talk at homeowner association meetings
- Some people are uncomfortable at formal public hearings, especially speaking into a microphone
- Most like a blended format of an informal meeting and a formal meeting
- Meetings are very organized and professional
- Need to approach the public first and not socializing with other employees
- Meetings do need to be controlled
- Meetings vary – really depends on the project, the staff, and the public’s prior experience with DOT
- Need to have meetings where can really listen to public and their concerns

Public Trust

- Public slowly beginning to have some trust
- Some requests the public makes are not feasible or cost affordable, then they think DOT does not care or cannot be trusted - we have to think about the community at large
- Distrust still exists – need to continue to work on this issue
- Difficult issue because most public does not trust any government agency
- DOT especially suffers if another state agency makes a mistake that is highly publicized
- Most people still regard the DOT as a threat and a bully – the average citizen does not trust DOT nor think they can affect change
- No matter what, if people are not happy with the proposed project, they do not trust DOT and do not think DOT listens
- Public does not feel there is a true dialogue with DOT at meetings, therefore they do not trust
- Can build trust by demonstrating how public input is taken and changes are implemented – show the public that their comments do make a difference

Public Participation

- Public that is in favor of the project rarely comes to public meetings. Public who is against the project show up and claim the DOT is not listening
- Participants who attend DOT meetings do so because of good past experiences
- Many ways for public to comment and participate at meetings
- Skeptics out there – do not think their comments are being heard
- Need better notification processes – weak area
- Need to try and use other organizations, special events to help get word out about meetings
- Project letter and brochure should give out enough information in case public can’t attend meeting
- Also need to be realistic – people are busy and can’t always attend
- Need more information available on-line
- Need to simplify technical information to help public understand and participate better
- Need to hold meetings at a local venue, a place where the community is familiar and comfortable
- Produce materials in various languages
Chapter Five
Discussion

Research Questions

RQ1: Can the FDOT communicate more effectively with the public? How do accurate perceptions play a role?

FDOT and the public did not exactly have accurate perceptions of each other, but there were some areas where they were close, such as thinking the format of the meetings was helpful and feeling comfortable making comments. A public’s opinions and behavior are determined in part by its perceptions of an issue. The co-orientation theory states that groups that have accurate perceptions of each other interact with each other more and have a truer understanding of each other. They are able to exchange information easily and act proactively. It is also a good way to diagnose the potential for miscommunication because if perceptions are inaccurately evaluated, the parties involved will act on their misperceptions, thus hurting the chance for effective communication (Broom, 1977). This confirms what Broom theorized in that successful communication depends on accurate perceptions. “The most effective communication takes place when both parties agree and when they know they agree, which means they have achieved consensus” (Austin & Pinkleton, 2001, p. 272). Basically, when two groups are on the same page about an issue, even if they do not agree, they at least know where they stand. They are able to have constructive discussions if they know what each other is thinking.
and they are able to choose goals that are valued both by management and the public. Co-orientation theory shows how important it is to take a long-term view of the organization’s relationship with its stakeholders despite the temptation to focus on short term goals (Austin & Pinkleton, 2001, p. 273). This is why the co-orientation theory works so well and is really the best view.

To achieve accurate perceptions of the public, FDOT management must work together with the public more, learning to scan the environment to identify issues that could become hot topics or even a crisis situation if not addressed early. FDOT management is probably not well equipped to deal with crises with the public because they are incorrect in their perceptions of the public, thus they will not communicate as effectively as they could. The situational theory (Grunig, L.A., Grunig, J.E., & Dozier, 2002) is also important to this study because FDOT can benefit by researching their publics to determine who their stakeholders are, if the publics are latent or active, and what the public’s perceptions of the issue are, something that this study set out to do. The FDOT also needs to work on taking a proactive approach to exchanging information and communicating with the public to assist with risk communication. Smaller community meetings might help with this. FDOT needs to go to the public, not make the public come to them.

Relationship management is also key. The FDOT has good intentions in terms of trying to build mutually beneficial relationships with strategic publics, but they are just not able to follow through. In order to build mutually beneficial relationships, each side must understand each other and each other’s perceptions to achieve successful communication. The FDOT and the public are close in some of their ways of thinking,
such as thinking the meetings were organized and thinking the audio visual presentations were helpful and informative, but they are very far off in other aspects, such as expectations of public meetings and trust. The FDOT has some work to do, however the distance between the FDOT and the public is not completely overwhelming. This task would not be that daunting if the FDOT developed an excellent public relations program and plan.

Excellent public relations is a good way to communicate. Austin and Pinkleton (2001) stated that excellent public relations involves identifying active and strategic publics and developing symmetrical communication programs (p. 274). This all ties together with issues and risk communication and learning to scan the environment to identify publics and hot issues. To do this, the excellence theory says a practitioner must build relationships with strategic constituencies. The FDOT has not focused on building relationships. This is the first place they need to start and in the process, they need to identify the misperceptions between themselves and the public so they can communicate more effectively.

The co-orientation model is a good way to diagnose the potential for miscommunication and misperceptions that can ultimately hurt FDOT’s reputation and the relationship between FDOT and the public. Perhaps the FDOT needs to step back and re-evaluate public involvement, especially in the planning and focus of their public meetings.
RQ2: Why do people who participate in public hearings find them valuable, if at all?

The public who participated in public meetings and hearings found them valuable because they walked away with more information and knowledge than what they started with; however, the public also questioned whether or not their comments would even make a difference and if it was too late in the process. Nonetheless, even when people thought they might not be able to make a difference, they still wanted to be heard. They still wanted to represent their community. Maybe they were there to learn more about government and the transportation process or maybe they were there to promote individual leadership. That is unclear. McComas (2003) found some explanations why people attended public hearings including to acquire information, to gather informal information about how other people in the community feel about an issue, to offer support to neighbors or friends, to provide some psychological relief that they are at least doing something, to have some sense of control over a risky situation, and/or to serve as a type of ritualistic purpose for participants (p. 110).

As stated in the literature review, the demand for participation tends to increase when there is a lack of trust by the public (Heberlein, 1976). When people trust the agency to act in their best interest, or if they are happy with the project, they feel there is no need to participate. This probably answers why most people who attend FDOT’s public meetings are against the project. They have a lack of trust or perhaps a lack of knowledge; however, that opinion may change after the meeting. Those members of the public who are in the favor of the project rarely come to the meetings and make comments.
There are also those groups who are highly organized who find public hearings valuable because they hope to put pressure on the government agency and garner media attention. They hope the media will be present at the public hearing so they can witness the public making a loud statement against the project.

Other participants found public hearings valuable because they could talk to FDOT staff one-to-one and get their questions answered by the experts. They could also watch the project videos and study the visuals. The visuals and aerial pictures were a key theme throughout the public comments. Most of the public found these items very helpful. Even if citizens were not thrilled about the road project, they still found the learning process valuable. They wanted to know more and arm themselves with information about what will happen in the future, even if they were against the project or if they thought their comments would not make a difference. Forty nine percent of them thought their participation would not be effective, but they were there anyway, to learn more and to be heard.

The literature review stated that citizen participation did little to affect government decisions, yet people still attended them (McComas, 2003). It was difficult to confirm if the public input made any real difference in FDOT’s decision-making process since this study did not specifically look at that issue. The public did not think their comments made a difference, however FDOT managers said they did want public input, but they needed it early on in the process, before it was too late.

The situational theory could possibly help with increasing attendance levels. When active publics feel an organization is unresponsive to their concerns, they communicate and behave actively, usually in a manner that is not conducive for effective
communication. However, if the public knows their level of involvement, recognizes that there is a potential for a problem, recognizes they can be part of the solution and that they will be listened to by the organization, then why wouldn’t more people start to participate in public meetings? If the public started to see that their input was being taken into consideration and changes were being implemented, then they would find public hearings even more valuable. This might even help with providing some of the psychological relief and control over a risk that McComas’ (2003) study found when people feel they are doing their civic duty.

**RQ3:** *Is there an increased level of trust for people who do participate in public hearings?*

This is a difficult question to answer from the data collected because the same people would almost need to be queried several months after the meetings to determine if trust levels have increased. Measuring trust is not easy and researchers are still working to develop reliable measures that professionals can use in everyday practice. Most evaluations of relationships and trust focus on perceptions that one or both parties have of the relationship. Also related to this is measuring predictions about the relationship that one party has for the other party. Public relations researchers should measure relationships as seen or predicted by both parties. This evaluation would document how organizational decision-makers see the relationship as well as how the publics see the organization (Grunig & Hon, 1999, p. 25).

Although this survey did not specifically measure predictions or increased trust levels, the analysis of the public’s comments on the participatory process did point to an
increased level of trust for the public who participated in public hearings. After the public meetings or hearings, half of the respondents did say they trusted the FDOT. The other half were about split between “no” and “not sure.” The public responded positively about feeling comfortable making comments and discussing their questions and concerns with FDOT staff. The public also felt that FDOT staff was genuinely interested in listening to them, was satisfied with public meetings as a way of involving them in project decisions, and had high expectations of public meetings. These responses lead me to believe that there is an increased level of trust for those members of the public who do participate in public hearings. Chess and Purcell (1999) stated that the public can define successful public participation by the results or by the participatory processes. The public may not have always agreed with or been happy with the outcome, or thought they could make significant changes; however, the responses from the public showed that they did think the process, including the information exchange, was fair. Integrity, which is a large part of trust, is the belief that the organization is fair and just. I believe the public did think the FDOT was fair and from their responses, the public was satisfied with public meetings as a way of involving them in project decisions. Successful participation can lead to increased trust levels.

**RQ4:** *What is the role of trust in the relationship between the public and the FDOT?*

As mentioned previously, trust is linked to public involvement because many people feel the need to participate in government meetings because they do not trust government. They attend public meetings to monitor what is going on, to object to the project, to gather more information, or to make comments. Even though the public might
participate in public meetings because there is a lack of trust, the hope by the FDOT is that the public will leave with an increased level of trust.

Trust involves confidence and empowerment. Trust is the belief that your interests are being taken into account, even if you are not around to monitor the situation. Confidence exists when one group can understand another group’s interests, is competent to pursue changes for those interests, and will keep its word (LaPorte & Metlay, 1996). Empowerment is where people feel energized and feel that their input is valued by others. People do not trust those whom they believe are proceeding with a way not harmonious with what they want (Culbert & McDonough, 1986). That is why many people attend public meetings.

The role of trust is everything to this study. The measure of trust and commitment is also very important in co-orientation theory. Communication is the key to providing effective public involvement to the community, but effective communication must include trust and accurate perceptions, including perceptions of trust. If the perceptions are incorrect by the FDOT about the public trusting them, then that will block effective communication. How will FDOT proceed in trying to better their communication programs when they do not know how the public really feels? They will end up wasting their time trying to figure out why the public does not trust the FDOT and how they can fix the problem, when the energy should be spent in some other way to improve their public involvement program.
RQ5: Is the FDOT management accurate in their perceptions of the public?

No, from the data collected, FDOT management is not accurate in their perceptions of the public. After a thorough review of the comparison tables, there were six instances where the FDOT was fairly accurate in their perceptions of the public, while there were nine instances where the FDOT was not close in their perceptions of the public. The following bullet points break down the accurate perceptions versus the inaccurate perceptions:

**ACCURATE**

- FDOT management felt the public thought that FDOT meetings were organized. The public agreed.
- FDOT management felt the public thought the format of FDOT meetings was helpful. The public agreed.
- FDOT management thought the public felt the audio visual presentations were informative and easily understood. The public agreed.
- FDOT management thought the public felt comfortable making comments and discussing their questions and concerns with FDOT staff. The public agreed.
- FDOT management felt the public thought their comments would not make a difference. The public agreed. They did not feel their comments would make a difference.
- FDOT management did not feel the public thought that FDOT really cared about the opinions of the public. The public agreed.
INACCURATE

- FDOT management did not think the public felt the written materials were informative and easily understood. This was inaccurate as 80 percent of the public responded that they did think the materials were informative and easily understood.

- A very low percentage of FDOT management felt the public thought FDOT staff were genuinely interested in listening to comments from citizens. The public disagreed. They did feel that FDOT staff were genuinely interested in listening to them, therefore FDOT was inaccurate in their perceptions.

- FDOT management was incorrect in their thoughts about whether or not the public was satisfied with public meetings as a way of involving them in project decisions. More than sixty percent of the public responded that they were satisfied with public meetings as a way of involving them in project decisions.

- FDOT management felt the public thought their participation was meaningful. Less than half of the public agreed.

- FDOT management did not think the public felt the FDOT understood their needs. The public was split across the board with their responses to “yes,” “no,” and “not sure.” The FDOT perceptions of the public were not accurate.

- FDOT management thought the public did not trust the FDOT. This is not correct as half the public responded that they do trust the FDOT.

- FDOT management thought the public had low expectations of public meetings. This is not correct as the public said they had high expectations of public meetings.
• Most of FDOT management thought that public meetings are used to seek public input. The public mainly felt that public meetings are used to inform the public about decisions already made. The feelings of FDOT and the public were very different.

• FDOT management thought the public felt better after attending a FDOT public meeting. This is inaccurate as the public said they felt about the same.

Again, the FDOT was not accurate in their perceptions of the public, meaning that they are not going to communicate as effectively with them. Interesting to note, the public actually trusted the DOT more and had higher expectations than the FDOT managers realized. The FDOT managers would be surprised to learn that the public gave them higher marks than they had anticipated. FDOT managers were quite negative and did not give themselves, their staff, or their public involvement methods enough credit.

RQ6: If there is a gap in perception, does it affect trust?

As question number four indicated, there is a gap in perception on the FDOT’s part. Already established is the fact that effective communication must include trust and accurate perceptions. When two groups do not know what the other is thinking and are not in sync with their perceptions, it can affect trust. In this particular study, it was not clear if the FDOT’s inaccurate perceptions of the public’s opinions affected the public’s trust. It did not seem that this was a factor, however only about half of the public said they trusted the FDOT.

Co-orientation theory states that people and organizations relate to one another successfully when they think similarly about ideas (Austin & Pinkleton, 2001). The
perceptions between FDOT and the public is not completely inaccurate. There are some areas that overlap, but FDOT does need to research their stakeholders better. The FDOT management needs to look at the potential for miscommunication because of the different perceptions of the public involvement issue. They also need to work with their stakeholders, in this case, the public, to develop long-term goals. If this is not done, then public trust could erode more seriously. Perhaps more survey research and even focus groups could help the FDOT with this goal.

**RQ7: What is the level of co-orientation?**

The co-orientation states that FDOT and the public seem to exist in are false consensus and false conflict. False consensus exists when one party thinks the other agrees on an issue, but is mistaken. False conflict exists when one party believes the other disagrees, but in actual fact, agrees. The latter is mainly the state where the FDOT and the public exist. The FDOT mostly thought the public had negative opinions about public involvement, but in reality, the public was satisfied with FDOT’s public involvement.

*What does FDOT management think about their own public involvement process?*

Overall, FDOT management feels they have come a long way from years ago and that they are doing a good job at public involvement (see Figure 6). They do realize they need to improve some issues, but are satisfied with their public involvement process as a whole.
What does the public think about the FDOT public involvement process?

The public felt FDOT meetings were organized, felt the format of FDOT meetings was helpful, thought the audio visual presentations and the written materials were informative and easily understood, and felt comfortable making comments and discussing their questions and concerns with FDOT staff. The public also felt that FDOT staff was genuinely interested in listening to them, was satisfied with public meetings as a way of involving them in project decisions, trusted the FDOT, and had high expectations of public meetings.

On the other hand, the public felt about the same after they attended a public meeting. They did not feel their comments would make a difference, felt that public meetings are used to inform them about decisions already made, were unsure about
whether or not the FDOT cared about their opinions, were unsure about whether or not the FDOT understood their needs, and were unsure if their participation was meaningful.

*What does FDOT management think the public thinks about their public involvement?*

FDOT management was mostly negative about what they felt the public thought about their public involvement. The FDOT thought the public felt their comments would not make a difference, that FDOT did not care about the opinions of the public, did not think the public felt the written materials were informative and easily understood, was unsure if the public thought FDOT staff was genuinely interested in listening to comments from citizens, and was also unsure about whether or not the public was satisfied with public meetings as a way of involving them in project decisions. FDOT management did not think the public felt the FDOT understood their needs, did not think the public trusted them, and thought the public had low expectations of public meetings.

On the other hand, FDOT management thought the public felt better after attending a FDOT public meeting, felt the public thought that FDOT meetings were organized, felt that the public thought the format of FDOT meetings was helpful, thought the public felt the audio visual presentations were informative and easily understood, thought the public felt comfortable making comments and discussing their questions and concerns with FDOT staff, and felt that the public thought their participation was meaningful.
What does the public think the FDOT management thinks about public involvement?

Simply put, the public felt FDOT thought that they were doing a good job, that they know best, and that they did not need to improve.
Chapter Six
Conclusions

The FDOT has a unique predicament on its hands. Mostly, the Department seems to want public input because it realizes that early communication with the public results in better projects and less headaches in the long run. However, the FDOT struggles with getting citizen interest in projects and attendance at public meetings, especially projects that are in the planning stage, the stage where the citizens really need to be involved first. Most citizens do not get involved or react until construction is about to begin. Many times, that is too late to make any significant changes.

The FDOT is often accused of not holding meetings when the public can actually make changes; however, that truly is not the case. Many of the citizen comments included that it was too late to make changes, the timing of the meetings was poor, and FDOT needed to hold public meetings sooner, when the public input matters. Again, this presents a no-win situation for the FDOT. The Department does hold public meetings in the planning stages. The Department does hold public meetings when the projects are not even funded yet. The dilemma is that the public knows that the projects are not funded. Why should the public take an hour or two of their evening to attend a public meeting when construction is not expected to be funded for eight to ten years? However, that is exactly when the FDOT needs the input from citizens. Low attendance rates usually means the community is not going to be fully represented, thus the views of those who do attend are not representative of the general community.
I believe the FDOT should continue with their public meetings, as the statutes mandate, but they are not enough by themselves. There must be a variety of participation methods that are fair that currently, the FDOT is not doing. I believe that FDOT should conduct small focus groups, hold round table discussions with the public, and form citizen committees. These types of communication can be more effective and can reach more people. I believe the public would be more receptive to attend these types of small, intimate meetings because they would feel the FDOT is really trying to listen to the public’s thoughts and opinions, and not just trying to satisfy what is mandated legally. Smaller meetings might also help the public trust the FDOT even more.

Many comments that came from the public included these ideas, such as the FDOT holding smaller and less bureaucratic-structured meetings. The public also wanted to see where their input had actually resulted in changes. These smaller meetings would be more conducive to show the public what changes had been incorporated. My hope would be that word would spread quickly and more people would start to attend these smaller meetings, especially when they learn that changes did occur as a result of public comments. Large public workshops do not seem to contribute to the strategic communication process, or even present two-way dialogue; however, smaller focus groups might be the key to delve into issues and potential crisis situations.

It is definitely a learning and educational process, for both the FDOT and the public. The FDOT needs to work on their attitudes toward and about the public. There was an arrogant tone that was evident in the comments made from the FDOT managers, suggesting that the public was not clever enough to grasp the material. The comments also pointed to the FDOT management looking down on participants and having little
tolerance with dissent. In this sense, the public was pretty accurate. The FDOT management needs to communicate at a level the public understands and simplify the complex material. They should even have a secretarial-level position, not an engineer, review the material to see if he or she can understand what is trying to be conveyed. Perhaps the FDOT management needs to have some training in public relations. They literally need to hire a consultant to come in and train the managers on how to better deal and interact with the public. By doing this, the FDOT management will be able to follow an excellent public relations model, and not a public information model. They will be able to have a true dialogue with the public. They will be able to act proactively, and not reactively. This will also assist in decreasing some of the legislative constituent complaints because when the public is not satisfied, they usually contact their local elected officials. All of this will help with the headaches and frustration in the long run.

With that said, I also believe public involvement is a two-way street. The public needs to do their part to bring their comments to the FDOT. Many of the FDOT managers stated that low attendance at their meetings was a constant problem. Again, this goes back to the situation where the FDOT actually does hold meetings early enough where changes can be incorporated, but the public usually is not present to suggest changes. Maybe the public does not show up because they have had bad experiences in the past with not seeing any results, or perhaps they are too busy to attend. The FDOT needs to make better use of their websites and post more information about what they are going to show at the meetings for those who are not able to attend. By doing this, the public could send their comments electronically to the project managers. The FDOT
should also utilize government access television channels more in getting the information out to the public.

I also believe that if the FDOT started holding smaller focus-group type meetings, the attendance levels would increase. Many researchers have stated that public participation levels increase when trust levels decrease. The FDOT needs to plan and strive for the opposite. Their attendance levels will increase based on the public trusting the FDOT more and wanting to participate in the smaller round-table style meetings.

Currently, the FDOT mainly holds public meetings that are mandated by law, and the public knows this. Could the laws of Florida and all the legal requirements actually be contributing to the low trust and low attendance levels? Many of the public comments referenced the fact that FDOT only holds public meetings because they are legally required to and that no changes could be expected. The public thought the FDOT felt the meetings were a “necessary evil” to obtain federal funding and that the FDOT did not care about public input. Again, small focus group meetings that are not legally required might help this situation. The public might actually start to believe the FDOT does care about their opinions because they do not have to hold these meetings in the first place. The small focus group meetings would not be held because of legal requirements or the Sunshine Law, but because FDOT truly wanted to have a two-way dialogue with the public and learn their opinions. Right now, the public involvement methods are not real forums for exchange of information.

The public also made a lot of comments that they wanted a public “question and answer session” at the meetings. FDOT believes this is difficult to do because meetings can easily get out of control if this is allowed to happen. During the formal public
hearings, there is a time where official public comment is taken. This is where the public can make comments “on the record.” I do think that FDOT needs to better explain this portion of the meeting right before it starts. Many citizens are disgusted at the fact that they are only allowed to stand up and make comments and not ask questions, and if they do ask questions, they are not answered. They are told who they can speak with on a one-to-one basis to get their questions answered. Many citizens like to hear what other citizens have to say and they also like to hear the responses from FDOT. Again, I feel that if FDOT did a better job to explain what this portion of the meeting was for, it would help inform the public what to expect. Hopefully the public would understand that the FDOT has found working with the public one-on-one is the best method, rather than trying to moderate shouting matches with large groups.

On the other hand, when is the last time FDOT tried a meeting with an open public question and answer session? There is nothing in the law that prohibits FDOT from conducting a meeting with two-way communication, just that they need to actually hold the meeting and take public comments. This might actually help the public to change their feelings that they are not powerless. Perhaps they could “test” this method to see if the meetings really do get out of control as they stated. Maybe they could use an impartial person in the community, a professional facilitator, or even the Public Information Officer to help facilitate and moderate the meetings or focus groups. The FDOT also needs to anticipate the questions that will be asked of them. This is not something that would be hard to do. The FDOT management could learn from past meetings and past projects and come up with a frequently asked questions list and then brainstorm as to how to address the questions and answers.
Many of the members of the public who do stand up and make comments are very passionate and sometimes very loud. They hope the media will be present so they can witness the public making a loud statement against the project. Many times, this is exactly what the media wants as well, namely a controversy. Then the cycle continues. The public that was not able to make the meeting reads the negative story in the paper and then believes that DOT does not care about the “little people.” This also adds to the lack of trust. The smaller meetings would hopefully alleviate some of this and produce more meaningful communication between the public and FDOT. The media would be more than welcome to attend these meetings and maybe they would write about the positive changes the FDOT is undertaking.

The results also showed that the FDOT management did not think the public trusted them, which can lead to government employees thinking they are undervalued. The combination of these two does not make for an energetic government employee who is willing to go out of their way for the public. If the government employee does not feel empowered and vital, how can they expect the public to feel the same? This is very discouraging to the employee to think that they are not trusted. The government employee might think, “The public does not trust us, they do not show up to our meetings, so why should I bother with them?” These feelings might reflect in body language, vocal tone, and a general bad attitude, which the public will pick up on. A cyclical effect is born again. The public reads this as the FDOT not caring about them or their opinions.

Perhaps all of this is related to the push for reduction in government. Reduction in government stories are always in the media, especially when it involves a negative
story about an over-worked case worker who made a deadly mistake while working for the Department of Children and Families. I believe the reduction in government is actually creating levels of mistrust in the public. The literature review discussed how trust can be lost with reorganizations or restructuring of an agency. The public associates all government together, in one lump sum. They do not differentiate between the various agencies and the good that some of the agencies do. Several of the FDOT managers stated that when one government agency screws up, it hurts and affects all government agencies. This is very true. Another FDOT manager made the comment, “if the public could just realize how much most of us really do care and not lump us together with all government, we could all get along and communicate better. They could slowly start to open up to us and trust us.”

There is no easy solution for this dilemma. The FDOT needs to continue on the path to try and gain more participation from the public and make some positive changes in their public involvement methods. The end result of their public involvement should be a decision that takes the public’s wishes and views into account. Right now, that is not evident. They also need to research the communities with whom they will be interacting with and identify stakeholders that can serve as leaders of citizen committees. Hopefully, this will aid in building trust with the public.

Implications for Public Relations

This research has demonstrated that using the co-orientational theory and model to examine variables that influence a relationship and to examine the levels of agreement in a relationship is an excellent method. Many of the comments and results that came
from analyzing the perceptions of the public and the FDOT management were surprising, especially regarding how the public actually trusted FDOT more than management originally thought. I believe the results from this study can help the FDOT make constructive and positive changes in their quest to improve public involvement.

**Study Limitations**

One limitation to this study was the low response rate from the public. As mentioned earlier, only 66 surveys were returned from the public from the entire State of Florida over a period of approximately six months. Perhaps the low survey response rate was due to the fact that the postage was not paid by the research project. The public had to pay their own postage. Only 25 out of the 66 surveys were mailed back. The other surveys were dropped in comment boxes right at the public meetings.

Another limitation was the fact that it was not feasible to conduct statewide focus groups with the public, therefore it was difficult to gain a deeper understanding of the public’s perception of the management perceptions.

**Future Research**

It is suggested that future studies conduct several small focus groups with the public across the State of Florida to gain their perceptions of the issue and their perceptions of the management perceptions. It is also suggested that additional questions be added to the public survey to query the public on their estimate of the management perception. This public survey really only included one question that asked about that topic. I believe the survey, which included both quantitative and qualitative questions,
was very valuable in that the research provided statistical analysis and also the comments from the public and the FDOT management. The comments really gave meaning to the numbers. If future researchers wanted to save time, then it is suggested that the qualitative questions be removed from the survey and more quantitative questions be added. Then a more in-depth statistical analysis should be conducted with the survey results, along with several focus groups to help with the richness in meaning.

It is also suggested that future research include the use of the co-orientation model as a way to examine the levels of agreement between two parties.


Florida Department of Transportation, District Seven. (November 2001). *Public Involvement Process Guidelines*. Tampa, FL: Prepared by the District Seven office of the Florida Department of Transportation.

Florida Department of Transportation, District Seven. (2003). *Transportation planning and construction process*.

Florida Department of Transportation, District Seven (2004). *Adopted Five-Year Work Program for Fiscal Years July 1, 2004 through June 30, 2009*.


Texas Transportation Institute. (2000). *An Assessment of Public Involvement Strategies.* College Station, TX.


Appendix A: Breakdown of FDOT Districts
Appendix B: FDOT Mission, Vision, and Values

**Site:** The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT)

**Web site:** [http://www.dot.state.fl.us](http://www.dot.state.fl.us)

**Mission:** The department will provide a safe transportation system that ensures the mobility of people and goods, enhances economic prosperity, and preserves the quality of our environment and communities.

**Vision:** The people of DOT…dedicated to making travel in Florida safer and more efficient.

**Values:** The fundamental principles that guide the behavior and actions of our employees and our organization: Integrity, Excellence, Respect, and Teamwork

*Integrity* – We are committed to honesty, loyalty, and a high standard of ethical conduct

*Excellence* – We achieve performance excellence through hard work, innovation, creativity, and prudent risk taking

*Respect* – We value diversity, talent, and ideas. We believe every individual should contribute and have the opportunity to be heard.

*Teamwork* – We accomplish our goals by working together and relying on each other.

**Public Involvement position:** “Since the FDOT uses tax dollars, public comments, ideas, thoughts, concerns, and visions for the future are essential ingredients in Florida’s development of transportation systems. The FDOT pursues and welcomes the public’s involvement, input, and suggestions throughout the transportation improvement process. Public hearings, workshops, and meetings provide opportunities for residents and business owners to express their thoughts, preferences, and alternatives.”
Appendix B (Continued)

Citizens can participate in these meetings, review proposed plans, and talk with District planners, engineers, environmental specialists and other professionals to gain an overall understanding of the projects. These public forums typically result in additional features and changes being incorporated into a project before plans are completed. The ultimate goal is to implement transportation improvements that best serve the interest of the public and construct projects with minimal disruption to motorists, property owners, neighboring communities and the natural environment” (FDOT Transportation planning and construction process).
Appendix C: IRB Approval Letter

July 22, 2004

Kristen Carson
1004 Lake Cooper Drive
Lutz, FL 33548

Dear Ms. Carson:

Your new protocol (IRB #102722) entitled, "A Co-Orientational Analysis of Public Involvement Views in the Transportation Process" including your Adult Informed Consent Form (for focus groups) and your Waiver of Informed Consent (for completion of surveys) has been reviewed under expedited review category numbers six and seven (6,7). Having made any required revisions, the approval period for your protocol including your Adult Informed Consent Form (for focus groups) and your Waiver of Informed Consent (for completion of surveys) is shown on the stamp below. This information shall be presented to the Institutional Review Board-02 at its next convened meeting on August 20, 2004.

You should take special note of the following:

• Approval is for up to a twelve-month period, after date of initial review. A Research Progress Report to request renewed approval must be submitted to this office by the submission deadline in the eleventh month of this approval period. A final report must be submitted if the study was never initiated, or you or the sponsor closed the study.

• Unless the requirement has been waived by the IRB, documentation of informed consent/assent should be obtained on copies of the attached stamped informed consent/assent document. Please note the form is valid only during the period stamped on the informed consent/assent document.

• Waiver of Informed Consent (for completion of surveys) has been approved having met the following four criteria: the research will not involve greater than "minimal risk" to the subject; it is not practicable to conduct research without a waiver; waiving will not adversely affect subject's rights; and if appropriate, information will be provided to subject later.

Based on the new HIPAA Privacy Rule, if the study involves generating, collecting, using, or disclosing 'protected health information' the subject must be given an appropriately approved Authorization form prior to enrolling them into your research study. If the study involves review of medical charts only, please ensure that you have a Waiver of HIPAA Authorization granted by the Privacy Board, prior to commencing the study.

• Research investigators are required to keep all research related materials, including all IRB correspondence for no less than three (3) years. If at the end of 3 years, the data is no longer needed it should be destroyed. However, if data are kept after 3 years of study completion, please report to the IRB how you will keep data confidential.

• Any changes in the above referenced study may not be initiated without IRB approval except in the event of a life-threatening situation where there has not been sufficient time to obtain IRB approval.

• All changes in the protocol must be reported to the IRB.

• If there are any adverse events, the Chairperson of the IRB must be notified immediately in writing.

If you have any questions regarding this matter, please do not hesitate to call Angie Reagan at (813) 974-5741 or myself at (813) 974-9343.

Sincerely,

Paul G. Stiles, J.D., Ph.D.
Chairperson, IRB-02

PGS: amr

pc: Dr. Derina Holtzhausen

Office of Research  •  Division of Research Compliance
Institutional Review Boards, FWA No. 00001669
University of South Florida  •  12901 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., MDC035  •  Tampa, FL 33612-4799
(813) 974-5638  •  FAX (813) 974-5618

176
Appendix D: IRB Modification Request Letter

Kristen E. Carson  
1004 Lake Cooper Drive  
Lutz, FL 33548

Dear Ms. Carson:

Your Modification Request [IRB #102722] for your protocol entitled, “A Co-Orientational Analysis of Public Involvement Views in the Transportation Process”

Included the following:

- Change in the subject population: An additional survey (to the FDOT managers) has been added.
- Change in the number of subjects: Addition of 40 more subjects to the total sample size with an overall total of 1040.
- Change in the informed consent process or informed consent document: A new consent form for managers to complete the survey has been added.
- Approval of the request for waiver of written documentation. Waiver of written documentation has been approved having met the following four criteria: the research will not involve greater than “minimal risk” to the subject; it is not practicable to conduct research without a waiver; waiving will not adversely affect subject’s rights; and if appropriate, information will be provided to subjects later.
- Revisions to the study instruments: Addition of a "Public Involvement Manager Survey," and revisions to the existing "Public Involvement Survey."

The Institutional Review Board under expedited review approved these changes. Unless the requirement has been waived by the IRB, documentation of informed consent/assent should be obtained on copies of the attached stamped informed consent/assent document. Please note the form is valid only during the period stamped on the informed consent/assent document.

Based on the new HIPAA Privacy Rule, if the study involves generating, collecting, using, or disclosing "protected health information" the subject must be given an appropriately approved Authorization form prior to enrolling them into your research study. If the study involves review of medical charts only, please ensure that you have a Waiver of HIPAA Authorization granted by the Privacy Board, prior to commencing the study.

This action will be reported at the next convened IRB-02 meeting on November 19, 2004. If you have any questions or comments please telephone either Angie Reegan at (813) 974-5741 or myself at (813) 974-9343.

Sincerely,

Paul G. Stiles, J.D., Ph.D.
Chairperson, IRB-02
PGS: amr
pc: Dr. Derina R. Holtzhausen

October 14, 2004
Appendix E: Public survey

Public Involvement Survey

This survey is being conducted by the University of South Florida School of Mass Communications. Your comments are important and your participation is voluntary. We will not ask you for your name or any personal information. All individual comments will remain anonymous and confidential. We would like to know what you thought about the Florida Department of Transportation’s (FDOT) Public Involvement Process. Please take a few moments to fill out this survey and drop it in one of the comment boxes. You can also mail the survey when you have completed it. Another option is to e-mail your comments to kcarson2@mail.usf.edu.

The survey results will be published in a master’s thesis. Findings from this study will contribute to how government agencies handle public involvement. Please answer every question, including those that require a short written response. Thank you for your input and time!

I am □ an Area Resident □ Business Owner

Did you get the information tonight that you were looking for? □ Yes □ No □ Not sure
If yes, what kind of information did you find valuable?
________________________________________________________________________

If no or unsure, what kind of information would you have wanted?
________________________________________________________________________

Was the meeting time convenient for you? □ Yes □ No □ Not sure
If no, what time would have been convenient?
________________________________________________________________________

Was the meeting location convenient for you? □ Yes □ No □ Not sure
If no, what would have been a more convenient location?
________________________________________________________________________

Was the meeting organized? □ Yes □ No □ Not sure
If yes, what about the meeting’s organization did you like?
________________________________________________________________________

If no or unsure, what bothered you about the meeting’s organization?
________________________________________________________________________

Was the meeting format helpful to get the information you need? □ Yes □ No □ Not sure
If yes, what did you like most about the meeting format?
________________________________________________________________________

If no, how would you like to receive information about the project?
________________________________________________________________________
Appendix E (Continued)

Did you find the written materials informative and easily understood?
☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure
If yes, what did you find helpful about the written materials?
________________________________________________________________________

If no or unsure, what could be improved about the written materials?
________________________________________________________________________

Did you find the audio visual presentation informative and easily understood? (if applicable)
☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure
If yes, what did you like most about the visual presentation?
________________________________________________________________________

If no or unsure, what kind of visual presentation would you have wanted?
________________________________________________________________________

Did you feel comfortable making comments and discussing your questions/concerns with FDOT staff?
☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure
If yes, what did FDOT staff do to make you feel comfortable?
________________________________________________________________________

If no or unsure, what did FDOT staff do to make you feel uncomfortable?
________________________________________________________________________

Do you feel your comments will make a difference? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure Please explain your answer.

Did you believe that the FDOT staff were genuinely interested in listening to comments from citizens?
☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure Please explain your answer.

Did you have high or low expectations of the meeting?
☐ High ☐ Low ☐ Not sure Please explain your answer.

Are you satisfied with public meetings as a way of involving you in FDOT project decisions?
☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure Please explain your answer.

Do you think your participation is meaningful?
☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure Please explain your answer.

Do you think the FDOT really cares about your opinion?
☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure Please explain your answer.
Appendix E (Continued)

Do you think the FDOT understands the needs of the public?
□ Yes □ No □ Not sure Please explain your answer.

Do you feel better, worse, or the same after attending the public meeting?
□ Better □ Worse □ Same □ Not sure Please explain your answer.

Do you trust the Department of Transportation?
□ Yes □ No □ Not sure Please explain your answer.

What do you think is the purpose of a public meeting or hearing?

Do you think the FDOT uses public meetings to:
□ Inform the public about decisions already made
□ To urge the public to support a decision
□ To satisfy legal requirements
□ Or to seek public input?
Please explain your answer.

What do you think the FDOT thinks about their own public involvement methods?

What suggestions do you have for the FDOT to improve public involvement and participation?
Appendix F: Manager Survey

Public Involvement Manager Survey

This survey is being conducted by the University of South Florida School of Mass Communications. We would like to get your opinion about the Florida Department of Transportation’s (FDOT) Public Involvement Process. Your comments are important and your participation is voluntary. We will not ask you for your name or any personal information. All individual comments will remain anonymous and confidential. Please take a few moments to fill out this survey and return it to Kris Carson, District Seven Public Information, MS 7-110. Another option is to e-mail your comments to kcarson2@mail.usf.edu.

The survey results will be published in a master’s thesis. Findings from this study will contribute to how government agencies handle public involvement. Please answer every question, including those that require a short written response. Thank you for your input and time!

Do you think FDOT meetings are organized?
□ Yes □ No □ Not sure Please explain your answer.

______________________________________________________________________________

Do you think the public feels FDOT meetings are organized?
□ Yes □ No □ Not sure Please explain your answer.

______________________________________________________________________________

Do you think the format of FDOT meetings is helpful to the public to get the information they need?
□ Yes □ No □ Not sure Please explain your answer.

______________________________________________________________________________

Do you think the public feels the format of FDOT meetings is helpful to get the information they need?
□ Yes □ No □ Not sure Please explain your answer.

______________________________________________________________________________

Did you think the public finds the written materials informative and easily understood?
□ Yes □ No □ Not sure Please explain your answer.

______________________________________________________________________________

Did you think the public finds the audio visual presentations informative and easily understood?
□ Yes □ No □ Not sure Please explain your answer.

______________________________________________________________________________

Do you think the public feels comfortable making comments and discussing their questions/concerns with FDOT staff?
□ Yes □ No □ Not sure Please explain your answer.
Appendix F (Continued)

Do you think the public feels their comments will make a difference? □ Yes □ No □ Not sure
Please explain your answer.

Do you believe that FDOT staff is genuinely interested in listening to comments from citizens?
□ Yes □ No □ Not sure Please explain your answer.

Do you believe the public thinks that FDOT staff is genuinely interested in listening to comments from citizens?
□ Yes □ No □ Not sure Please explain your answer.

Do you think the public has high or low expectations of public meetings?
□ High □ Low □ Not sure Please explain your answer.

Do you think the public is satisfied with public meetings as a way of involving them in FDOT project decisions?
□ Yes □ No □ Not sure Please explain your answer.

Do you think the public thinks their participation is meaningful?
□ Yes □ No □ Not sure Please explain your answer.

Do you think the FDOT really cares about the opinions of the public?
□ Yes □ No □ Not sure Please explain your answer.

Do you think the public feels the FDOT really cares about their opinions?
□ Yes □ No □ Not sure Please explain your answer.

Do you think the FDOT understands the needs of the public?
□ Yes □ No □ Not sure Please explain your answer.

Do you think the public feels the FDOT understands their needs?
□ Yes □ No □ Not sure Please explain your answer.

Do you think the public feels better, worse, or the same after attending a FDOT public meeting?
□ Better □ Worse □ Same □ Not sure Please explain your answer.

Do you think the public trusts the Department of Transportation?
□ Yes □ No □ Not sure Please explain your answer.
Appendix F (Continued)

What do you think is the purpose of a public meeting/hearing?
______________________________________________________________________________

Do you think the FDOT uses public meetings to:
□ Inform the public about decisions already made
□ To urge the public to support a decision
□ To satisfy legal requirements
□ Or to seek public input?
Please explain your answer.
______________________________________________________________________________

Do you think public meetings/hearings really accomplish a true “dialogue” with the public?
______________________________________________________________________________

Overall, how do you think the Department is doing at public involvement? What suggestions do you have to improve public involvement and participation?
______________________________________________________________________________
Appendix G: Focus Group Questions

- Is the FDOT reaching their publics?
- Could the public involvement process be improved?
- What does the public think of the FDOT’s public involvement process?
- Do you think the Department uses public meetings to inform the public about decisions already made, to urge the public to support the decision, to satisfy legal requirements, or to seek public input?
- Is the two-way symmetrical process being used?
- Does the public look at the process as two-way symmetrical?
- Does the public feel their participation is meaningful?
- How has the Department improved in the public involvement process over the years?
- How does the Department communicate with groups that speak another language? How do you prepare for this?
- Do you think public meetings/hearings really accomplish a true “dialogue” with the public?
- Do you think that public information materials (mailed ahead of time) should encourage people to seek more information and attend meetings or should really work to provide all the information they need?
- Do you think the mailings (newsletters, letters etc.) are appropriate and are easily understood by the lay person? What about the videos?
- Does the Department use other organization’s publications to announce meetings? What about sending materials home through schools?
- How does the Department attract people that don’t usually attend their meetings?
- Are special events utilized enough to spread the word about meetings and projects?
Appendix G (Continued)

- What do you think the public thinks of the Department’s public involvement methods? (Do you think the public thinks the Department is really involving them or just there to present information?)

- Do you think the public thinks their comments will be heard and will make a difference?

- Do you think the public has high or low expectations of public meetings?

- Do you think the public is satisfied with public meetings as a way of involving them in project decisions?

- Do you think the public trusts the Department?

- Do you think the public is comfortable making comments to staff? What about at a microphone at a public hearing?

- What do you think the public thinks of the Department’s format at public hearings?

- What do you think of the format at public hearings?

- Overall, how do you think the Department is doing at public involvement?