

Program Management Streamlines Project

Costs are reduced and schedules expedited under \$2.25-billion Jacksonville improvements plan.

By Thomas McVey, Lesley Davidson, and Jennifer Stutts

In 2001, the citizens of Jacksonville, FL, voted to implement a \$2.25-billion comprehensive growth management program, known as the Better Jacksonville Plan. The city was tasked with a massive initiative ranging from the construction and renovation of public facilities to a variety of environmental and roadway projects. Over a hundred lane-miles of roadway improvements are by far the largest portion of the plan, totaling over \$1.5 billion of the available funding. An additional

\$200 million is dedicated to utility projects, paid for and managed by JEA, the community-owned electric, water, and sewer utility for the city and Duval County. With so many projects at stake and so many entities involved, Jacksonville turned to program management to help streamline many of these efforts, which ultimately reduced costs and expedited schedules while bringing an improved quality of life to Jacksonville residents.

The use of program management as an effective management tool is anything

but a novel idea. Many local and regional governments across the U.S. use this method in some form or another to implement multiple projects as part of a single program. However, Jacksonville took this idea to the next level by applying it to multiple improvement programs—roadways and utilities—which are often handled separately. To carry out this initiative, the city also hired the consultant team of HDR (www.hdrinc.com) and RS&H (www.rsandh.com) to oversee and manage about one half of the improvements north and west of the St. Johns River.

Traditionally, roadway and utility projects are handled by separate departments or offices within a local government agency, or in coordination with an independent utility company when the utility is not owned by the local government. In either scenario, the projects are often implemented independently by different designers and contractors, which requires extensive coordination and eats up time and money. In most cases, the utility portion is constructed first, some of which becomes throw-away work or has to be re-done once the roadway construction begins, or vice versa.

However, by partnering and bringing the roadway and utility initiatives under one umbrella through program management, both the city and JEA have been able to streamline many of the coordination aspects of their programs, leading to reduced design and construction time and significant cost savings. Under the Better Jacksonville Plan, the city and JEA now jointly procure projects in the same location, meaning that one designer or contractor is responsible for both the roadway and utility elements of a project under a single contract. Any conflicts or issues that arise during design or construction can be immediately addressed, resulting in minimal to no throw-away work and a shortened schedule.

Having a program management consultant in place has also provided the added benefit of a single point of contact between designers and contractors and the city and JEA. For instance, at



Program management enabled the Better Jacksonville Plan to combine roadway and utility projects to streamline design and construction. Photo courtesy of www.aerophoto.com.

one time during its contract with the city, the HDR and RS&H team oversaw and managed 20 designers and 15 contractors. This streamlined the lines of communication for approvals, design changes, and coordination with adjacent projects, greatly facilitating the process for advancing projects from design to construction.

Range of Expertise

Outside program management consultants, like HDR and RS&H, also bring a broad range of expertise in a variety of disciplines (i.e., roadway, water, sewer, electric, etc.), as well as design and construction. Thus, they can provide guidance on all aspects and phases of the projects. During design, consulting engineers have access to HDR and RS&H construction experts, which leads to better, more constructible sets of roadway and utility plans. Likewise, contractors can get immediate answers to design issues that arise in the field by working and coordinating with HDR and RS&H design engineers. Issues with roadway and utility conflicts are often resolved well in advance of a project's construction.

The team has also helped the city and JEA streamline many of the preliminary

phases of projects, including reducing the time required to move projects through the right-of-way and permitting phases, as well as managing public involvement. At the program's onset, right-of-way acquisition would take anywhere from 18 months to two years to complete, with a significant number of parcels acquired through eminent domain. However, by working with the city's real estate and legal staff, the team was able to initiate the legislative and legal processes of acquiring eminent domain much earlier in the project planning. This significantly reduced the time needed to purchase all necessary right-of-way to less than a year. The HDR and RS&H team also has experience with permitting coordination and held preliminary meetings with each permitting agency to identify the requirements for each project. By also reviewing all permit applications prepared by the designers before submission, the team reduced the number of requests for additional information, which greatly accelerated the permitting process. Managing the public involvement aspect of each project also provided the city with a single point of contact for dealing with community issues or concerns, which could be addressed

immediately and efficiently by the program management team.

In addition to streamlining the coordination, design, and construction phases of each project, the HDR and RS&H team has improved overall management of the program as a whole by helping the city and JEA deal with fluctuating construction costs. In recent years, costs rapidly escalated and construction bid prices were coming in well over budget, making it difficult to manage the program within the overall budget. The team helped the city manage this issue by phasing and using alternate materials, which lowered project costs. Likewise, when construction prices later quickly fell, the team helped streamline the design process so that more projects could be awarded at that time, allowing the city to take advantage of the current economic climate.

The process has ultimately improved coordination, expedited schedules, and reduced costs, a value-added service to the citizens of Jacksonville and JEA customers. Simultaneous construction of the roadway and utility projects has also reduced the amount of throw-away work and the associated delays and inconvenience to the public, ultimately improving the public's perception of how the city spends taxpayer money.

Effective program management is a proven tool that can help government agencies manage large infrastructure projects or programs involving multiple disciplines and tasks. When faced with such a large program, local agencies can often appoint an in-house manager to handle the complex coordination involved. However, support of a program management consultant provides the added value of diverse expertise and the ability to effectively manage all program phases from design through construction.



Over a 100 lane-miles of roadway improvements are by far the largest portion of the Better Jacksonville plan, totaling over \$1.5 billion of the available \$2.25-billion comprehensive growth management program. Photo courtesy of www.aerophoto.com.

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