The allure of Southwest-Central Florida’s coastal counties have been a draw for seasonal residents for decades. The University of Florida’s Bureau of Economic and Business Research projects drastic growth in the next 25 years, estimating the following population increases:

Lee County: 46.4%
Collier County: 40.5%
Charlotte County: 28.7%

According to the recent Heartland 2060 planning summit, the seven-county region of DeSoto, Glades, Hardee, Hendry, Highlands, Okeechobee and Polk Counties added 20% to its population from 2000 to 2010. The state must intelligently plan for the growth in the region, with a responsible approach toward improvement and resiliency of Florida’s infrastructure, protection of the natural environment and visioning the transportation needs of area residents.

**M-CORES APPROACH**

The Florida Department of Transportation M-CORES approach is to consider a new multi-use corridor that not only considers vehicular movement, but additional benefits such as opportunities for the expansion of water and sewer, broadband connectivity, energy distribution, freight efficiency, mobility and alternative modes of transportation, while mitigating impacts to and enhancing preservation of the natural environment and wildlife.

**STUDY AREA**

The Southwest-Central Florida Connector study area extends from Collier to Polk counties. This nine-county area is a blend of coastal and inland areas with pockets of rural, urban and suburban communities.
M-CORES goes beyond roads and takes a look at the well-being of Floridians and their access to vital resources. Some of the areas addressed in the Southwest-Central Florida Connector include access to:

- **Fresh Food**: 16.4% of residents regionally and less than 6% in Glades and DeSoto counties have access to fresh food within 0.5 miles, compared to a statewide average of 30.9%

- **Healthcare**: Hendry, Hardee, DeSoto, and Glades counties each have fewer than 20 licensed physicians and 50 hospital beds, requiring many residents to drive to surrounding counties for medical care

- **Internet**: Nearly 40% of DeSoto County residents do not have access to broadband internet

The region’s conservation efforts are among the priorities for M-CORES. Thirty-two percent of the study area is held in conservation. This is three percent more acreage comparatively statewide and much of the study area has been identified as high-priority critical linkages and part of the Florida Ecological Greenways Network.

Public participation is solicited without regard to race, color, national origin, age, sex, religion, disability or family status. Anyone who requires special accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act or translation services (free of charge) should contact Marlon Bizerra by email at Marlon.Bizerra@dot.state.fl.us or by telephone at (863) 519-2250, at least seven days prior to the meeting.