

1 **NORTHERN TURNPIKE CONNECTOR**  
2 **TASK FORCE FINAL REPORT**

3 November 15, 2020

4 **INTRODUCTION**

5  
6 Section 338.2278 F.S. created the Multi-use Corridors of Regional Economic Significance  
7 (M-CORES) program. The purpose of the program is to revitalize rural communities, encourage job  
8 creation, and provide regional connectivity while leveraging technology, enhancing the quality of life  
9 and public safety, and protecting the environment and natural resources.

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11 The statute directs the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) to advance the construction of  
12 regional corridors intended to accommodate multiple modes of transportation and multiple types of  
13 infrastructure in three defined study areas:

- 14
- 15 • Suncoast Corridor, extending from Citrus County to Jefferson County;
  - 16 • Northern Turnpike Corridor, extending from the northern terminus of the Florida Turnpike  
17 northwest to the Suncoast Parkway; and
  - 18 • Southwest-Central Florida Corridor, extending from Collier County to Polk County.
- 19

20 These corridors are viewed as part of a broader program to address the complete statutory purpose  
21 of M-CORES, creating strategic opportunities to revitalize rural communities and enhance economic  
22 development. The statute also provides FDOT the direction and tools to help advance other regional  
23 goals related to environmental stewardship and quality of life in parallel with corridor development.

24  
25 With this broad approach, the intended benefits of M-CORES include addressing issues, such as  
26 emergency evacuation and response; congestion mitigation; trade and logistics; broadband, water,  
27 and sewer connectivity; energy distribution; autonomous, connected, electric, and shared vehicle  
28 technology; multimodal options, including shared-use non-motorized trails, freight and passenger rail,  
29 and public transit; mobility as a service; availability of a trained workforce skilled in traditional and  
30 emerging technologies; protection or enhancement of wildlife corridors or environmentally sensitive  
31 areas; and protection or enhancement of primary springs protection zones and farmland preservation  
32 areas.

33  
34 The statute directed FDOT to convene a Task Force for each corridor as an inclusive, consensus-  
35 building mechanism. The FDOT Secretary appointed the members who were representatives from  
36 state agencies, regional planning councils, metropolitan planning organizations, water management  
37 districts, local governments, environmental groups, and the community.

38  
39 The Florida Legislature charged each Task Force with providing recommendations and evaluations in  
40 a final report which will guide the Florida Department of Transportation in its subsequent study  
41 phases through the implementation of high-level needs, guiding principles and instructions. This  
42 report documents the Northern Turnpike Corridor Task Force’s activities and recommendations.

## 43 TASK FORCE OVERVIEW

44  
45 In August 2019, FDOT convened the Northern Turnpike Corridor Task Force with 39 members  
46 representing state agencies, water management districts, local governments, metropolitan planning  
47 organizations, regional planning councils, environmental groups, and community organizations (see  
48 Appendix A for Membership List).

49  
50 The Task Force met 13 times between August 2019 and October 2020 through nine Task Force  
51 meetings and four webinars or virtual meetings. Over the course of 15 months, the Task Force  
52 reviewed data, trends, and issues; discussed key considerations for planning transportation corridors;  
53 received and reviewed public input; and developed high-level needs, guiding principles, and  
54 instructions for project development and beyond. Subject-matter experts joined the Task Force  
55 members to provide information related to specific aspects of the Task Force's charge, including  
56 community planning, economic and workforce development, agriculture, environmental resources,  
57 broadband and utilities, emerging technology, and emergency management.

58  
59 In March 2020, some unique challenges arose resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The Task  
60 Force adapted meeting formats to comply with the Governor's Executive Orders. The later Task  
61 Force meetings were designed with a combination of virtual and in-person ways for both Task Force  
62 members and the public to participate (see Appendix B for Work Plan and Appendix C for Meeting  
63 Locations).

64  
65 FDOT staff developed and maintained a geographic information system (GIS) tool to provide the Task  
66 Force access to a wide variety of data on existing demographic, economic, land use, environmental,  
67 infrastructure, and other resources in the study area. This tool specifically was used to help identify  
68 areas where direct impacts from corridors should be avoided, as well as areas where a connection to  
69 a corridor is desired. FDOT staff conducted one-on-one technical briefings to provide Task Force  
70 members with a tutorial of the GIS tool and to discuss data-related questions. The Task Force used  
71 the GIS tool to help understand the relationship between draft guiding principles and potential corridor  
72 location decisions. The GIS tool was a living tool and was updated based on feedback and  
73 suggestions from the Task Force members. The GIS tool remains publicly accessible at all times on  
74 the project website (Floridamcores.com) and through a mobile-friendly format.

75  
76 During Task Force meetings, a facilitator and staff supported the Task Force in effective discussion  
77 and collaboration. Documentation of the Task Force activities, including meeting agendas, materials,  
78 and summaries, as well as the GIS tool, can be found on the project website.

79  
80 Public engagement was a critical component of the Task Force process. Opportunities for public  
81 engagement were included at each Task Force meeting through a dedicated public comment period,  
82 and comment stations were set up to receive written comments. Meetings were broadcast live and  
83 recordings were posted on the project website for members of the public who could not attend in  
84 person. The public also could attend the webinars and hybrid meetings virtually through the  
85 GoToWebinar platform. Overall, a total of # people attended the in-person meetings and # people  
86 attended the webinars and meetings virtually.

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88 To further public engagement, Community Open Houses were held in Lecanto, Wildwood, Chiefland,  
89 Crystal River, and Bushnell to share information about the process and receive public input. *[Expand*  
90 *to cover future activities]* At the Community Open Houses, members of the public could directly ask  
91 questions of FDOT staff, view informational material, and experience hands-on use of the GIS tool. A  
92 total of # people participated in the five open houses.

93

94 FDOT received communication 24/7 through the project website, FDOT Listens email address,  
95 phone, social media, letters, newsletters, and more. In total, FDOT received # unique and # form  
96 letter comments through these communication methods, which were shared with the Task Force.

97

98 In addition to engaging the public, FDOT conducted active engagement with partners. FDOT gave #  
99 presentations to interested agencies and organizations at their workshops, meetings, and  
100 conferences. FDOT staff also attended metropolitan planning organization, regional planning council,  
101 and local government board meetings to share updates on the Task Force's process and answer  
102 questions. The Task Force also considered resolutions adopted by the Board of County  
103 Commissioners in Citrus County and Levy County, and by the Hernando/Citrus Metropolitan Planning  
104 Organization. *[Staff to add others received before the date of the final Task Force meeting]*

105

106 The Task Force received the compiled and summarized written public comments. FDOT tracked  
107 topics at a high level so that the Task Force could discuss and consider those topics throughout the  
108 process at their meetings. *[Public comment summary to be expanded at Meeting #8]*

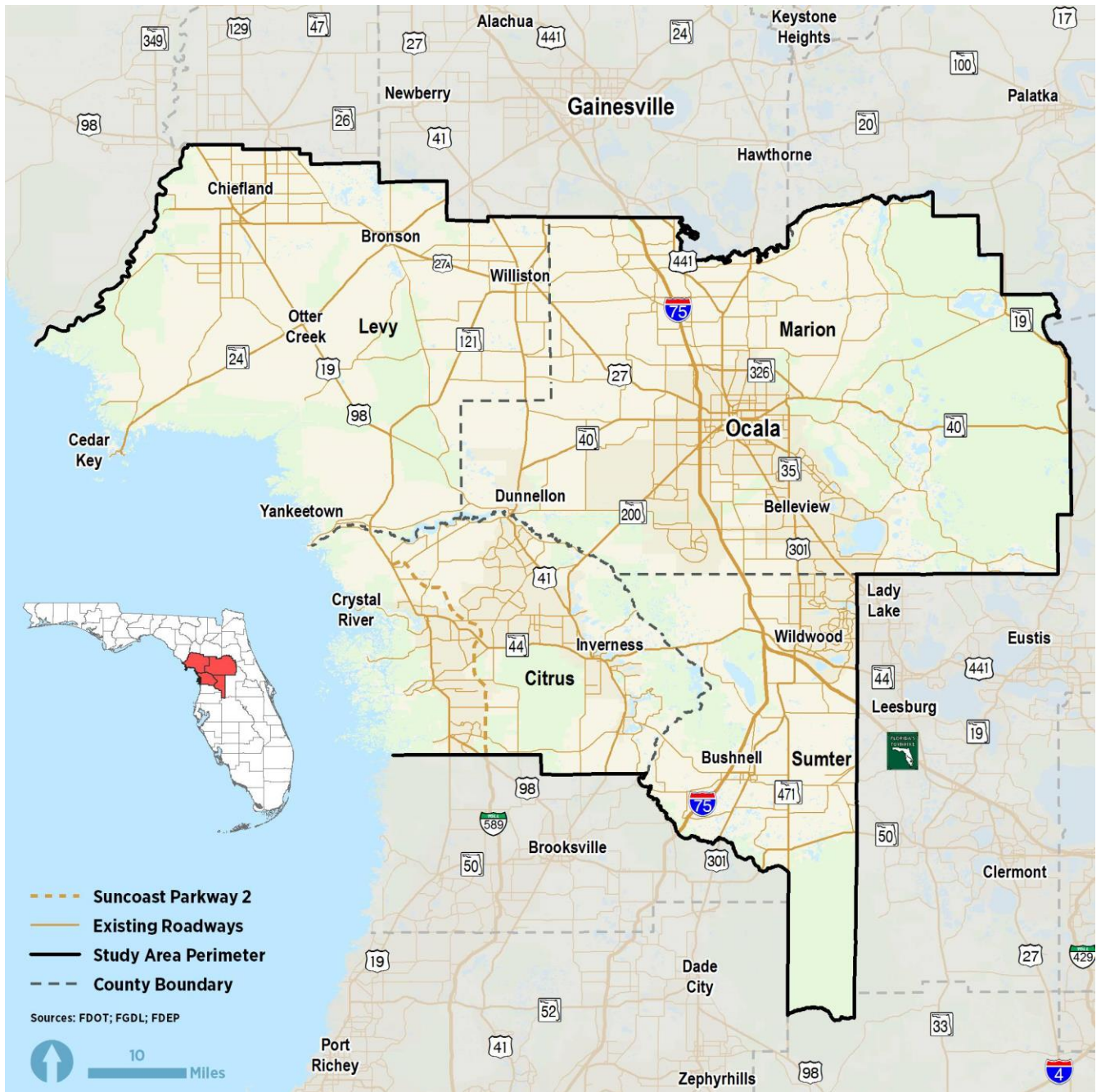
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## STUDY AREA OVERVIEW

The Northern Turnpike Corridor extends from the northern terminus of the Florida's Turnpike in Sumter County northwest to the Suncoast Parkway. The study area covers more than 3,800 square miles encompassing all of Levy, Sumter, Citrus and Marion Counties. Major population centers within the study area include Ocala with over 60,000 residents, followed by Inverness, Wildwood, Crystal River, and Dunnellon. Figure 1 depicts the study area.



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Figure 1. Northern Turnpike Corridor Study Area

122 **ENVIRONMENTAL CHARACTERISTICS**

123 The study area is rich in natural land and water assets that support significant fish, wildlife, and plant  
124 populations, many of which are endemic to Florida.

- 125 • Approximately 40 percent of the study area is held in public and private conservation,  
126 according to data from Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI)<sup>1</sup>. Conservation lands include  
127 Goethe State Forest, Withlacoochee State Forest, Green Swamp Wilderness Preserve, Lower  
128 Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge, Ocala National Forest, Cedar Key Scrub State Reserve,  
129 Waccasassa Bay Preserve State Park, Crystal River Preserve State Park, and Cross Florida  
130 Greenway State Recreation and Conservation Area.
- 131 • Thirty-five percent of the study area has been identified as critical linkages in the Florida  
132 Ecological Greenways Network that connects conservation lands across the state and  
133 provides opportunities to connect existing gaps in the Florida Wildlife Corridor.
- 134 • Agricultural lands in the study area are mainly used for cropland, nursery, greenhouse,  
135 floriculture, pasture, rangeland, and woodland. Apart from agriculture operations, these lands  
136 are important for protection of the ecological functions of various natural resources. Some  
137 agricultural lands are preserved through the acquisition of permanent agricultural land  
138 conservation easements under the Florida Rural and Family Lands Protection Program.
- 139 • Twenty-two percent of the study area is covered by coastal, freshwater, lake and riverine  
140 wetlands. For instance, the Cedar Key area has extensive wetland ecosystems and is part of  
141 the northeast Gulf of Mexico shoreline, which contains about 60 percent of the coastal and  
142 freshwater marshes in the United States.
- 143 • There are four aquatic preserves in the study area, including the Big Bend Seagrasses  
144 Aquatic Preserve, which is the largest aquatic preserve and one of the most pristine places in  
145 Florida.
- 146 • The study area has more than 200 springs that support diverse ecosystems, including Silver  
147 Springs, Rainbow Springs, Kings Springs, Homosassa Springs and Chassahowitzka Springs,  
148 which are classified as first magnitude springs, discharging at least 64 million gallons of water  
149 per day.
- 150 • Parts of the study area serve as primary recharge areas for the Floridan Aquifer. There are  
151 numerous rivers and lake systems, including the Withlacoochee River, which forms the  
152 boundary between Citrus County and the other three counties in the study area.
- 153 • Notable federally and state listed threatened and endangered species within the study area  
154 are the West Indian manatee, eastern black rail, Florida scrub jay, gopher tortoise, eastern  
155 indigo snake, and loggerhead sea turtle.

156 **COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS**

157 Community characteristics reflect the diversity of the population, cultural resources, and land uses in  
158 the study area.

- 159 • The estimated total 2019 population of Levy, Sumter, Citrus and Marion Counties was  
160 approximately 678,128. Projected population growth varies by county through 2045. Sumter  
161 County’s population is projected to grow at more than twice the statewide overall growth rate,  
162 while Citrus, Levy, and Marion Counties are projected to grow below the statewide rate. Table  
163 1 shows 2010, estimated 2019 and projected 2045 population for each county.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.fnai.org/pdf/MAxCounty\\_202003.pdf](https://www.fnai.org/pdf/MAxCounty_202003.pdf)

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**Table 1. Existing and Projected Population**

County	2010 Census	2019 (Estimated)	2045 (Projected)	2019 – 2045 Percentage Change
Citrus	141,236	147,744	177,300	20%
Levy	40,801	41,330	45,500	10%
Marion	331,298	360,421	460,800	28%
Sumter	93,420	128,633	211,500	64%
Florida	18,801,310	21,208,589	27,266,900	29%

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Source: Bureau of Economic and Business Research<sup>2</sup>

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- Per capita personal income levels in Marion, Citrus, and Levy Counties fell below the statewide level of \$50,070 for 2018<sup>3</sup>.

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- Marion, Citrus, and Levy Counties experienced poverty rates<sup>4</sup>above the statewide average of 13.7 percent in 2018, with Levy County having the highest rate. Sumter County’s poverty rate is below the statewide average at 9.3 percent. The study area’s Bachelor’s degree attainment is also below the statewide average of 29 percent; Sumter County is the exception at 31 percent<sup>5</sup>.

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- Within the study area, there are 127 buildings that are listed or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Additionally, there are seven historic bridges and several historic cemeteries and archaeological sites.

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- The predominant land uses within the study area are agriculture, conservation lands, public institution, and residential. These land uses are consistent with the Regional Planning Council’s Strategic Regional Policy Plans, Metropolitan Planning Organizations’ Long Range Transportation Plans, and local government Comprehensive Plans.

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- Future land use elements of the study area’s local government Comprehensive Plans describe future development patterns such as corridor planning zones, economic activity centers, Urban Growth Boundaries, interchange management areas, conservation areas, spring protection zones, and Developments of Regional Impact (DRIs). Areas where growth is desired are near SR 44 and CR 486 in Citrus County; I-75, SR 200, US 301 and SR 35 in Marion County; and The Villages in Sumter County.

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- Marion County has established Farmland Preservation Area in northwest Marion County (outside the Urban Growth Boundary) to manage growth and protect the area’s valuable soils, water, and springsheds.

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## **ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS**

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The economic characteristics of the study area demonstrate opportunities and challenges to enhancing the economic conditions and quality of life of the residents.

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- The predominant industries in terms of employment in Levy, Sumter, Citrus and Marion Counties are trade, transportation and utilities; professional and business services;

<sup>2</sup> [The University of Florida, Bureau of Economic and Business Research, Florida Population Studies, Volume 53, Bulletin 186, January 2020](#)

<sup>3</sup> [US Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis, Regional Economic Measurement Division, Table CAINC1, released November 14, 2019](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates \(SAIPE\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> [US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. American Community Survey, 2014-2018, Table S1501](#)

- 194 construction and mining; education and services; leisure and hospitality; and financial  
195 services<sup>6</sup>.
- 196 • Agriculture, forestry, and fishing are still significant as the study area is rich in timber and  
197 marine fishery resources. These resources also provide opportunities in the state's growing  
198 agritourism and ecotourism industries.
- 199 • The study area has a small but relatively diverse and growing manufacturing industry.  
200 Manufacturing industry firms in the study area include Signature Brands for E-ONE, and  
201 Krausz Industries. Additionally, Auto Zone and FedEx Ground are among logistics and  
202 distribution companies that have facilities in Marion County. Additionally, CSX has designated  
203 the Ocala/Marion County Commerce Park in Ocala as a rail-served, ready-to-build location for  
204 industrial development and expansion.
- 205 • Employment centers are concentrated in urbanized areas because of population density,  
206 presence of a diverse workforce, and access to healthcare, entertainment, education, and  
207 communication services.
- 208 • Levy County is part of the North Central Rural Area of Opportunity, designated by Executive  
209 Order 11-81. Each county in the study area contains at least one economically distressed area  
210 that is designated as Opportunity Zones by the state of Florida<sup>7</sup>.

## 211 INFRASTRUCTURE CHARACTERISTICS

- 212 The condition of infrastructure in the study area not only influences the quality of life for residents and  
213 visitors, it is also is an important component of, and potential catalyst for, economic development.
- 214 • The main type of wastewater treatment in most of the study area is septic systems. The  
215 cumulative impact of septic systems has been linked to impaired waters in springs, rivers, and  
216 estuarine systems.
- 217 • Broadband coverage in the rural parts of the study area is very limited, resulting in many  
218 residents and businesses not having access to high-speed internet. Levy County has the  
219 fewest number of broadband service providers.
- 220 • Duke Energy and SECO Energy are the primary electric distribution companies in the study  
221 area. Sabal Trail and the Florida Gas Transmission Company operate the main gas  
222 transmission lines.
- 223 • Major roadways in the study area are I-75, US 301, US 441, US 41, SR 40, US 27, US 98, US  
224 19, Florida's Turnpike, Suncoast Parkway, SR 44, SR 200, and SR 50. These roads are also  
225 primary evacuation routes serving both local and regional evacuees.
- 226 • There are several county and city roads in the study area that connect to the major roadway  
227 system.
- 228 • I-75 corridor, a major north/south route for moving people and freight into and out of much of  
229 the central and western Florida peninsula, regularly experiences congestion. Additionally,  
230 sections of SR 44 and US 19/98 in Citrus County experience periodic congestion.
- 231 • Construction of the Suncoast Parkway Extension (Suncoast Parkway 2) is underway and  
232 upon completion in 2023 will provide direct access to Tampa from the center of Citrus County.  
233 As part of the M-CORES Program, a separate Task Force is evaluating the extension of the

<sup>6</sup> [Florida Department of Economic Opportunity, Labor Market Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Florida Department of Economic Opportunity, Rural Areas of Opportunity](#)

234 Suncoast Corridor from Citrus County to I-10 in Jefferson and Madison Counties. The M-  
235 CORES statute directs the NTC corridor to end at the Suncoast, which could be along the  
236 Suncoast 2 or a future extension.

- 237 • The CSX Transportation “S” line, which traverses Sumter and Marion Counties, is a major  
238 North-South freight rail line in the state. The western branch line of the Florida Northern  
239 Railroad provides short line service to regional businesses. Passenger rail service was  
240 discontinued in the late 1980s. The Ocala Union Station once used by Amtrak passenger rail  
241 was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1997 and is currently used as a station  
242 for intercity and local bus services.
- 243 • The transportation network supports trade and logistics including air, rail, and truck freight,  
244 and related value-added services. I-75 in the study area is part of a network of highways  
245 identified as the most critical highway portions of the U.S. freight transportation system.
- 246 • There are no commercial airport, seaport, or rail terminals in the study area. People and  
247 freight moving between the study area and other parts of the state, country, or world typically  
248 need to connect to other regions via road or rail service and then connect to another mode.  
249 There are plans by Citrus County to revive establishment of Port Citrus, which would help to  
250 grow the economic vitality and quality of life in the area.
- 251 • There are about 75 miles of existing Shared-Use Nonmotorized Trail (SUN Trail) and about  
252 173 miles of identified SUN Trail gaps which are in various stages of planning, design and  
253 construction in the study area. The Cross Florida Greenway, Van Fleet State Trail,  
254 Withlacoochee State Trail, Dunnellon Trail, Nature Coast State Trail, Florida National Scenic  
255 Trail, and various other recreational trails are part of the Florida Greenways and Trails  
256 System, providing visitors and residents high-quality paved and unpaved multi-use trail  
257 experiences.
- 258 • The transit system consists of a limited number of buses on fixed routes and paratransit,  
259 which provides demand-response rides. Levy and Sumter Counties do not have urban fixed-  
260 route systems.

261 There are opportunities to improve infrastructure and connectivity in the region to enhance economic  
262 prosperity and quality of life.

263



## 264 RECOMMENDATIONS

### 265 FRAMEWORK

266 The Task Force developed recommendations in three areas:

- 267 • **High-Level Needs** - key regional opportunities and challenges corridor investments and  
268 related actions are intended to address. These can be transportation-specific needs and  
269 transportation-supported needs. The high-level needs are be informed by the six purposes  
270 and 13 potential benefits in s. 338.2278 (1), F.S. The high-level needs, along with the  
271 purpose, answer the question “*why?*”.
- 272 • **Guiding Principles** - a set of core values that guides decision making related to a  
273 transportation corridor or other type of project or program throughout the planning,  
274 development, and implementation process. These answer the question “*how?*”.
- 275 • **Instructions for Project Development and Beyond** - direction provided by the Task Force  
276 for future project development and implementation activities to ensure the Task Force’s  
277 guiding principles are applied to subsequent activities as intended. This direction could  
278 address corridor location and design, as well as strategies to be carried forward and refined  
279 during planning, project development, design, and other implementation phases. These  
280 answer the question “*what’s next?*”.

281 The guiding principles and instructions are intended to function as a set of directions to FDOT and  
282 other partners in implementing the Task Force’s recommendations as they carry out future planning,  
283 project development, and implementation activities related to the M-CORES program in s. 338.2278,  
284 F.S. The guiding principles provide a high-level statement of value and direction that is intended to  
285 apply in all decisions; the instructions detail specific commitments and actions. The Task Force  
286 recommendations are intended to supplement the requirements of current FDOT processes during  
287 planning, project development, design, and other implementation phases.

288  
289 Section 338.2278 (3)(c)(6), F.S. states “To the maximum extent feasible, the department shall adhere  
290 to the recommendations of the task force created for each corridor in the design of the multiple  
291 modes of transportation and multiple types of infrastructure associated with the corridor.” The Task  
292 Force views this statement as inclusive of both the guiding principles and the instructions and of the  
293 full range of planning, project development, and implementation activities. The Task Force also  
294 recognizes that as future work continues in the study area, additional information or changing  
295 conditions may provide insight about the feasibility and value of specific implementation steps that  
296 could warrant refinements to specific instructions; in these situations, the guiding principle and intent  
297 of the Task Force will guide any such refinements, in consultation with a corridor advisory group  
298 established following completion of the Task Force process.

299

### 300 HIGH-LEVEL NEEDS

301 High-level needs are key regional opportunities and challenges corridor investments and related  
302 actions are intended to address.

303 Florida Statute charged the Task Force to “evaluate the need for, and the economic and  
304 environmental impacts of, hurricane evacuation impacts of, and land use impacts of” the corridor on  
305 which the Task Force is focusing. Because the Task Force is in a pre-planning phase, high-level

306 needs were identified based on review of partner and public input, existing plans and studies, and  
307 available data and forecasts on trends and conditions in the study area.

308 The Task Force identified the following high-level needs for the Northern Turnpike Corridor study  
309 area, recognizing that additional evaluation will be required to develop more specific, quantifiable  
310 needs as part of future planning and project development:

- 311 • **Improve statewide and regional transportation mobility and connectivity for people and**  
312 **freight.** Trade, transportation, and utilities industry sectors employ approximately one-fifth of  
313 the workforce within the study area<sup>8</sup>. The agriculture, silviculture, manufacturing, distribution,  
314 and tourism and recreation industries in the regional also rely on the interregional multimodal  
315 transportation system that connects various destinations within the study area, provides  
316 mobility options, and enables interregional interactions that support both the local and state  
317 economy. I-75 within the study area experiences periodic congestion caused by increased  
318 demand, crashes and incidents; on average, an incident closes at least one lane or ramp  
319 every 16 hours<sup>9</sup>. Peak hour congestion has also been observed on other major roadways  
320 within population centers. If current trends continue, movement of and connectivity for people,  
321 goods, and services through the study area will be affected. Passenger, visitor, and freight  
322 traffic both in the study area and more broadly throughout central Florida would be served by  
323 connecting the Suncoast Parkway with Florida's Turnpike to form a continuous high speed,  
324 high capacity limited access facility.
- 325 • **Address statewide and regional safety and mobility needs due to the growth in**  
326 **population and visitation.** Population in the study area grew from 280,000 in 1985 to  
327 678,100 in 2019 (142 percent)<sup>10</sup> and is projected to grow by an additional 217,000 (32  
328 percent) by 2045<sup>11</sup>. The number of visitors to Florida has increased from 28.9 million in 1985  
329 to 131 million in 2019 (353 percent)<sup>12</sup>. Review of 2018 traffic crash data showed that 10,327  
330 crashes were reported in the study area which resulted to 165 fatalities and 8131 injuries.<sup>13</sup>  
331 The projected growth in population and visitors could lead to greater transportation demand,  
332 with increased congestion and safety concerns.
- 333 • **Provide a transportation network that revitalizes and enhances communities and**  
334 **industries.** There is a need to provide and maintain reliable and redundant transportation  
335 connectivity to important community resources and services such as healthcare and  
336 education. This is exhibited by the fact that Levy County does not have a hospital facility and  
337 access to this service is reliant on the regional roadway network. Protection of cropland,  
338 pastureland, and silviculture in the study area is also vital to supporting the community's  
339 identity and Florida's economy, as Florida's agricultural exports are ranked third in the United  
340 States.

341 There is also a need to improve facilities to support alternative modes of transportation,  
342 including pedestrian and bicycle modes. Metropolitan planning organization (MPO) long-range

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<sup>8</sup> [Florida Department of Economic Opportunity, Labor Market Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages](#)

<sup>9</sup> [I-75 Relief - Final Recommendations Report](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Population Data Archive, Bureau of Economic and Business Research](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Florida Population Projections, Florida Office of Economic and Demographic Research](#)

<sup>12</sup> [Florida Visitor Estimates, Visit Florida](#)

<sup>13</sup> [Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles, Traffic Crash Report](#)

343 transportation plans in the study area include a list of multi-use trail priorities and future  
344 opportunity trails defined by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP).

345  
346 Study area residents' living within one half-mile of a fixed-route public transportation is at 19  
347 percent in Marion County, and 28 percent in Citrus County. Levy County and Sumter County  
348 do not have fixed-route public transportation<sup>14</sup>. Additionally, local transit agencies have  
349 identified transit service expansions (existing route improvements) and new services in their  
350 Transit Development Plans (TDP). Citrus County has also identified a need for express bus  
351 transit that would provide inter-county connections between major activity centers within the  
352 study area.

353 • **Strengthen emergency mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery to enhance**  
354 **safety.** There are 49 public shelters within study area, six of them are special needs shelter.  
355 Sumter County does not have special needs shelter. Recent evacuation studies indicate the  
356 time residents to safely evacuate to the public shelters are about 17 minutes in Citrus and  
357 Sumter Counties and 13 minutes in Levy and Marion Counties.

358 • In the event of a Category 5 storm, regional evacuation models show that more than one  
359 million vehicles would need to evacuate Tampa Bay and Central Florida regions through the  
360 study area, causing congestion on major roadways in Levy, Marion, Sumter, and Citrus  
361 Counties. Recent evacuation studies indicate the time necessary for people to safely evacuate  
362 out of their respective counties are 24 hours for Levy and Marion Counties, 30 hours for  
363 Sumter County, and 55 hours for Citrus County<sup>15</sup>. Periodic congestion and lack of high-speed,  
364 high-capacity travel options between I-75 on the east and Suncoast Parkway or US 19/98 on  
365 the west of the study area generally limit evacuation and emergency response. Congestion  
366 on inadequate transportation facilities could impede emergency management activities and  
367 increase the time needed for safe evacuation and response.

368 • **Support expansion of existing and new industries through enhanced access to jobs,**  
369 **education, and healthcare.** Three out of four counties in the study area have higher poverty  
370 rates than the statewide average. The average household income is nearly \$10,000 per year  
371 lower than the statewide average<sup>16</sup>, and the unemployment rate is higher than the state  
372 average<sup>17</sup>. Without access to essential services and local, high-skilled, and higher-wage jobs  
373 for residents in rural areas, these communities are likely to continue to lag behind on key  
374 statewide economic indicators.

375 • **Strengthen the local tourism, ecotourism, agritourism, and outdoor recreation**  
376 **economy.** Local economies in the study area depend on tourism, ecotourism, agritourism,  
377 and outdoor recreation activities. Whether kayaking or fishing on the Withlacoochee River,  
378 hiking the Cross Florida Greenway or swimming in Rainbow Springs, there are a wide variety  
379 of nature-based recreation opportunities in the study area. There is a need to explore  
380 innovative ways to develop a transportation system that enhances livability and preserves  
381 attractions, cultural resources, and environmental assets that are essential to the economic  
382 viability of these industries.

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<sup>14</sup> [2019 Florida Transit Information and Performance Handbook](#)  
<sup>15</sup> [Regional Evacuation Studies, Florida Division of Emergency Management](#)  
<sup>16</sup> [Poverty Rate and Household Income by Florida County, Bureau of Economic and Business Research](#)  
<sup>17</sup> [2019 Unemployment Rates by Florida County, Florida Department of Economic Opportunity](#)

383 • **Expand rural utility infrastructure, including broadband, water, and sewer to enhance**  
384 **quality of life.** The vast majority of the population in the four-county study area does not have  
385 access to fixed broadband service<sup>18</sup>. Additionally, some of the surface water bodies in the  
386 study area do not currently meet water quality standards because of their close proximity to  
387 septic systems. Without expanded and upgraded utility infrastructure, rural areas could suffer  
388 from an economic competitiveness and quality of life perspective. While utility infrastructure is  
389 not dependent upon transportation infrastructure, there are opportunities to advance them  
390 together to achieve positive outcomes.

391 • **Protect, restore, enhance, and connect public and private environmentally sensitive**  
392 **areas, conservation lands, threatened and endangered species habitats, key water**  
393 **quality resources, and ecosystems.** The study area is rich in ecological diversity with an  
394 abundance of state parks, state forests, wildlife management areas, and conservation lands.  
395 There is a need to protect and enhance environmentally sensitive resources such as springs,  
396 wetlands, and floodplains to support regional and statewide habitat conservation and water  
397 quality goals. The M-CORES program offers unique opportunities to plan, design, construct,  
398 operate, and maintain transportation infrastructure in a way that protects the environment and  
399 restores past mistakes.

400 As input to project development, FDOT will conduct a robust evaluation of the existing and future  
401 transportation and related needs in the study area, building on the recommendations of the Task  
402 Force. This process should:

- 403 • Evaluate and distinguish between conventional safety, mobility, and connectivity needs, and  
404 broader regional needs or co-benefits related to transportation.
- 405 • Consider and document safety, mobility, and connectivity needs related to moving both people  
406 and freight.
- 407 • Consider and document mobility and connectivity needs related to both local/regional travel  
408 originating and terminating within the study area and statewide/interregional travel through the  
409 study area.
- 410 • Consider and document mobility and connectivity needs related to both routine daily traffic and  
411 special events traffic, such as evacuation and response to major emergencies and disasters.
- 412 • Use population and economic growth projected in local government comprehensive plans and/or  
413 the MPO long-range transportation plans and the Florida Transportation Plan as the basis for  
414 estimating future travel demand in the study area. Consider the potential for additional population  
415 and economic growth that could be generated by proposed land use and economic development  
416 changes in and surrounding the study area.
- 417 • Consider the mobility, economic, and fiscal impacts of potential shifts in economic activity from  
418 existing communities and corridors to the enhanced or new corridors, as well as potential net  
419 economic benefits to the state.
- 420 • Consider potential changes in travel demand related to recovery from COVID-19 and potential  
421 long-term changes in travel behavior, such as greater propensity for working from home,

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<sup>18</sup> [Fixed Broadband Deployment Interactive Map, Federal Communications Commission](#)

- 422 increased home delivery of goods and services, and potential reluctance to use public  
423 transportation or shared mobility options.
- 424 • Consider potential changes in travel demand and transportation system capacity related to  
425 increased use of emerging technologies, such as automated and connected vehicles.
  - 426 • Evaluate the ability of a full range of proposed alternatives for corridor improvements in the study  
427 area to accomplish the high-level needs, including the specific economic, environmental, land  
428 use, and emergency management impacts called for in s. 338.2278, F.S. These alternatives  
429 should consider operational and capacity improvements, existing and new facilities, multiple  
430 transportation modes, and a “no build” option.
  - 431 • Evaluate the economic and financial feasibility of corridor alternatives, including whether they  
432 would meet statutory requirements for designation as part of Florida’s Strategic Intermodal  
433 System and for financing as part of Florida’s Turnpike system.
  - 434 • Be supported by high-quality data and technical analyses; and
  - 435 • Incorporate comprehensive public and agency involvement, including reporting of the results and  
436 how specific alternatives will be advanced into project development.
- 437 The Task Force believes that the formal determination of need and feasibility pursuant to statutory  
438 requirements and consistent with accepted statewide processes is an important milestone in corridor  
439 planning and development. The Task Force has developed a series of guiding principles and  
440 instructions for future planning and development of corridors for which high-level needs have been  
441 identified. While these determinations will be made after the Task Force has completed its  
442 deliberations, the guidance provided by the Task Force will instruct the evaluation process, and an  
443 ongoing corridor advisory group will review and provide feedback on the findings and conclusions of  
444 these analyses.

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