

# NORTHERN TURNPIKE CONNECTOR TASK FORCE FINAL REPORT

November 15, 2020

## INTRODUCTION

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

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

- Suncoast Corridor, extending from Citrus County to Jefferson County;
- Northern Turnpike Corridor, extending from the northern terminus of the Florida Turnpike northwest to the Suncoast Parkway; and
- Southwest-Central Florida Corridor, extending from Collier County to Polk County.

The statute specifies these corridors as part of a broader program to address the complete statutory purpose of M-CORES, including revitalizing rural communities and enhancing economic development. The statute also provides FDOT with direction and tools to help advance other regional goals related to the statutory purpose, including enhancing quality of life and protecting the environment. The breadth of the program's purpose, the scale of the identified corridors, and the additional tools provided to FDOT all point to the need for a thoughtful, collaborative approach to implementing the M-CORES Program, analyzing corridor needs and alternatives, and building consensus around future actions among FDOT and a wide range of partners.

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

The Florida Legislature charged each Task Force with evaluating key issues and creating recommendations in a final report, which will guide FDOT in its subsequent study phases through the implementation of high-level needs, guiding principles, and instructions. This report documents the activities and recommendations of the Northern Turnpike Corridor Task Force.

# 1 TASK FORCE OVERVIEW

## 2 MEMBERSHIP

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

## 7 MEETINGS

8 The Task Force met 13 times between August  
9 2019 and October 2020 through nine Task  
10 Force meetings and four webinars or virtual  
11 meetings. Over the course of 15 months, the  
12 Task Force reviewed data, trends, and issues;  
13 discussed key considerations for planning  
14 transportation corridors, including specific  
15 issues as identified in the Florida Statute (see  
16 box); and received and reviewed public input.  
17 Subject-matter experts joined the Task Force  
18 meetings to provide information related to  
19 specific aspects of the Task Force's charge,  
20 including community planning, economic and  
21 workforce development, agriculture,  
22 environmental resources, broadband and  
23 utilities, emerging technology, and emergency  
24 management. The Task Force developed  
25 specific recommendations related to  
26 identifying and evaluating high-level needs  
27 related to the statutory purpose, as well as  
28 guiding principles and instructions for  
29 advancing corridor development and related  
30 activities to help accomplish these needs, as  
31 documented in subsequent sections of this  
32 report. The report also includes an action plan  
33 for moving forward.

34 In March 2020, some unique challenges arose  
35 resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The  
36 Task Force adapted meeting formats to  
37 comply with the Governor's Executive Order  
38 Number 20-122. The later Task Force  
39 meetings were designed with a combination of  
40 virtual and in-person locations for both Task  
41 Force members and the public to participate  
42 (see **Appendix B** for Work Plan and  
43 **Appendix C** for Meeting Locations).

### **Issues for Consideration by All M-CORES Task Forces**

s. 338.2278 (1), Florida Statute

- Hurricane evacuation.
- Congestion mitigation.
- Trade and logistics.
- Broadband, water, and sewer connectivity
- Energy distribution.
- Autonomous, connected, shared, and electric vehicle technology.
- Other transportation modes, such as shared-use nonmotorized trails, freight and passenger rail, and public transit.
- Mobility as a service.
- Availability of a trained workforce skilled in traditional and emerging technologies.
- Protection or enhancement of wildlife corridors or environmentally sensitive areas.
- Protection or enhancement of primary springs protection zones and farmland preservation areas designated within local comprehensive plans adopted under Chapter 163.

### **Issues for Consideration by the Northern Turnpike Corridor Task Force**

s. 338.2278 (3) (c) 8, Florida Statute

Evaluate design features and the need for acquisition of state conservation lands that mitigate the impact of project construction within the respective corridors on:

- a. The water quality and quantity of springs, rivers, and aquifer recharge areas;
- b. Agricultural land uses; and
- c. Wildlife habitat.

1 A facilitator and staff supported the Task Force meetings to assist with discussion, provide technical  
2 support, and document the Task Force’s deliberations and recommendations. Additional  
3 documentation of the Task Force activities, including meeting agendas, materials, and summaries,  
4 can be found on the project website ([www.FloridaMCORES.com](http://www.FloridaMCORES.com)).

## 5 DATA AND MAPPING TOOLS

6 FDOT staff developed and maintained a Geographic Information System (GIS) tool to provide the  
7 Task Force access to a wide variety of data on existing demographic, economic, land use,  
8 environmental, infrastructure, and other resources in the study area. This tool was specifically used to  
9 help identify areas where direct impacts from corridors should be avoided, as well as areas where a  
10 connection to a corridor may be appropriate for future evaluation. FDOT staff conducted one-on-one  
11 technical briefings to provide Task Force members with a tutorial of the GIS tool and to discuss data-  
12 related questions. The Task Force used the GIS tool to help understand the relationship between  
13 draft guiding principles, draft instructions, and potential corridor location decisions. Task Force  
14 members suggested that other data sources related to conservation lands, water resources, and  
15 wildlife habitat be included in the tool as GIS layers for Task Force discussion to support development  
16 of guiding principles and instructions.

17 The GIS tool served as a living instrument and was updated based on feedback and suggestions  
18 from the Task Force members. The GIS tool remains publicly accessible at all times on the project  
19 website ([www.FloridaMCORES.com](http://www.FloridaMCORES.com)) and through a mobile-friendly format.

## 20 PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

21 Public engagement was a critical component of the Task Force process. Opportunities for public  
22 engagement were included at each Task Force meeting through a dedicated public comment period,  
23 and comment stations were set up to receive written comments. In person Task Force meetings were  
24 held in Tampa (Hillsborough County), Lecanto (Citrus County), Ocala (Marion County) and Fanning  
25 Springs (Levy County). All of the Task Force meetings and webinars were broadcast live on The  
26 Florida Channel, and recordings were posted on the project website for members of the public who  
27 could not attend in person. The public could also attend the webinars and hybrid meetings virtually  
28 through the GoToWebinar platform. Overall, a total of # people attended the in-person meetings and  
29 # people attended the webinars and meetings virtually.

30 To further public engagement, seven Community Open Houses were held in Lecanto (Citrus County),  
31 Wildwood (Sumter County), Chiefland (Levy County), Crystal River (Citrus County), and Bushnell  
32 (Sumter County) to share information about the process and receive public input. Due to the COVID-  
33 19 pandemic, the last three Community Open Houses were held in a combination of in-person and  
34 virtual meetings. At the Community Open Houses, members of the public could directly ask questions  
35 of FDOT staff, view informational material, and experience hands-on use of the GIS tool. A total of #  
36 people participated in the seven open houses.

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

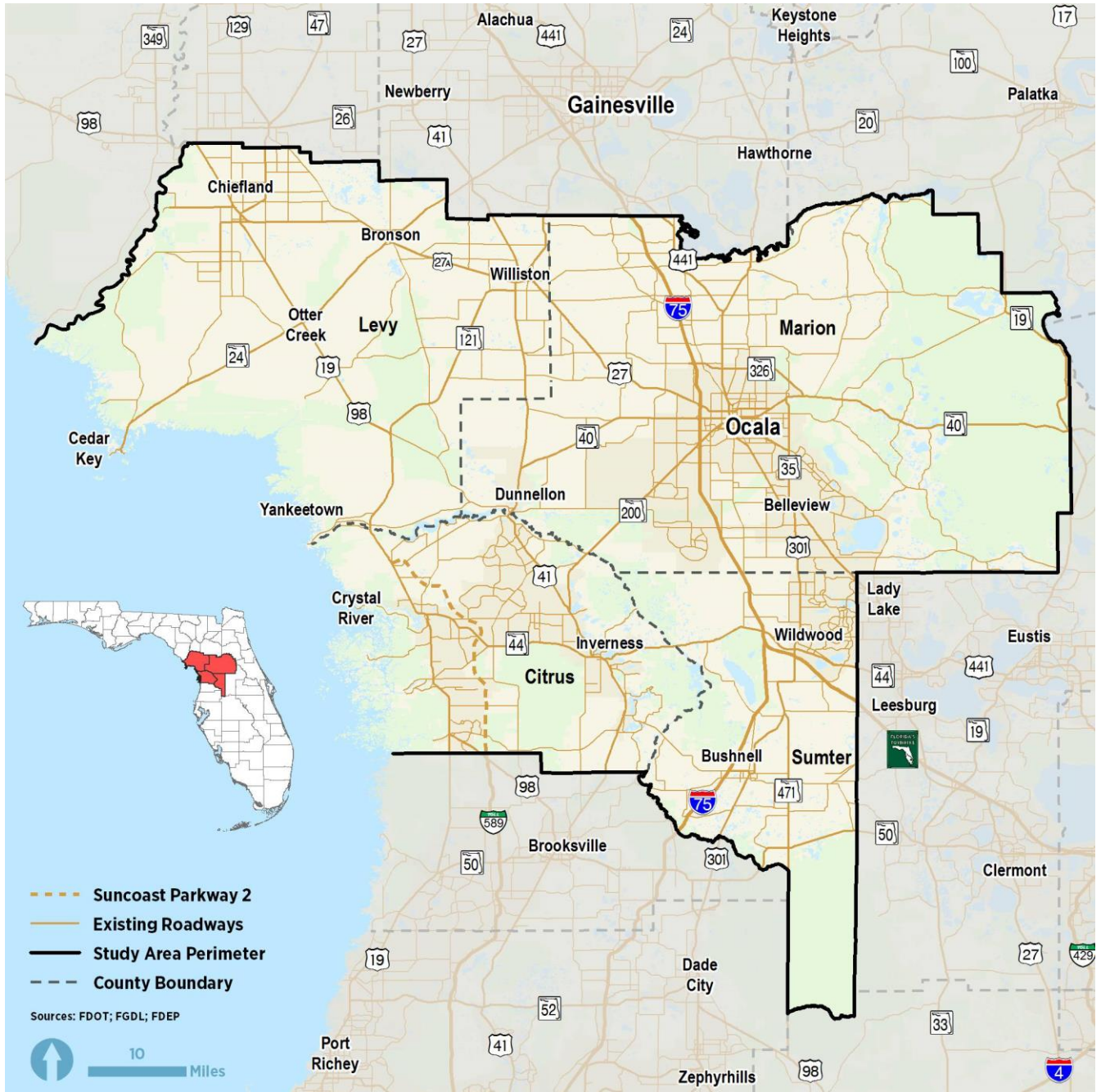
40 In addition to engaging the public, FDOT conducted active engagement with partners. FDOT gave #  
41 presentations to interested agencies and organizations at their workshops, meetings, and  
42 conferences. FDOT staff also attended metropolitan planning organization, regional planning council,  
43 and local government board meetings to share updates on the Task Force’s process and answer

1 questions. The Task Force also considered board resolutions and letters from Citrus County Board of  
2 County Commissioners, Levy County Board of County Commissioners, Hernando/Citrus Metropolitan  
3 Planning Organization, City of Cedar Key, City of Dunnellon, Town of Yankeetown, City of Williston,  
4 Town of Bronson, and City of Chiefland. [*Staff to add others received before the date of the final Task*  
5 *Force meeting*] The Task Force received the compiled and summarized written public comments.  
6 FDOT tracked topics at a high level so that the Task Force could discuss and consider those topics  
7 throughout the process at their meetings. [*Public comment summary to be expanded at Meeting #8*]

DRAFT

1 **STUDY AREA OVERVIEW**

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



7 **Figure 1. Northern Turnpike Corridor Study Area**

## ENVIRONMENTAL CHARACTERISTICS

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

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

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

# 1 COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS

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

- 4 • The estimated total 2019 population of Levy, Sumter, Citrus and Marion Counties was  
5 678,128. Projected population growth varies by county through 2045. Sumter County's  
6 population is projected to grow at more than twice the statewide overall growth rate, while  
7 Citrus, Levy, and Marion Counties are projected to grow below the statewide rate. **Table 1**  
8 shows actual 2010, estimated 2019, projected 2020, and projected 2045 population for each  
9 county.

10 **Table 1. Existing and Projected Population**

County	Census 2010	Estimates 2019	Projections		Projected Growth 2019 - 2045
			2020	2045	
Citrus	141,236	147,744	149,400	177,300	20%
Levy	40,801	41,330	41,600	45,500	10%
Marion	331,298	360,421	365,900	460,800	28%
Sumter	93,420	128,633	132,300	211,500	64%
Florida	18,801,310	21,208,589	21,556,000	27,266,900	28%

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

- 12 • Per capita personal income levels in Marion, Citrus, and Levy Counties fell below the  
13 statewide level of \$50,070 for 2018.<sup>3</sup> Sumter County per capita personal income was above  
14 the statewide level.
- 15 • Marion, Citrus, and Levy Counties experienced poverty rates above the statewide average of  
16 13.7 percent in 2018, with Levy County having the highest rate in the study area. Sumter  
17 County's poverty rate is below the statewide average at 9.3 percent.<sup>4</sup>
- 18 • The study area's Bachelor's degree attainment is also below the statewide average of 29  
19 percent; Sumter County is the exception at 31 percent.<sup>5</sup>
- 20 • There are two public colleges in the study area. The College of Central Florida has campuses  
21 in Citrus County, Levy County, and Marion County. Lake-Sumter State College has a campus  
22 in Sumter County.
- 23 • Within the study area, there are 127 buildings that are listed or eligible for listing in the  
24 National Register of Historic Places. Additionally, there are seven historic bridges and several  
25 historic cemeteries and archaeological sites.
- 26 • The predominant land uses within the study area are agriculture, conservation lands, public  
27 institution, and residential. These land uses are consistent with regional planning councils'

<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](#)

1 strategic regional policy plans, MPOs' long range transportation plans, and local government  
2 comprehensive plans.

- 3 • Future land use elements of the study area's local government comprehensive plans describe  
4 future development patterns such as corridor planning zones, economic activity centers, urban  
5 growth boundaries, interchange management areas, conservation areas, spring protection  
6 zones, and Developments of Regional Impact (DRIs). Areas where growth is desired are near  
7 SR 44 and CR 486 in Citrus County; I-75, SR 200, US 301, and SR 35 in Marion County; and  
8 The Villages in Sumter County.
- 9 • Marion County has established a Farmland Preservation Area in northwest Marion County  
10 (outside the Urban Growth Boundary) to manage growth and protect the area's valuable soils,  
11 water, and springsheds.

## 12 **ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS**

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

- 15 • The predominant industries in terms of employment in Levy, Sumter, Citrus, and Marion  
16 Counties are trade, transportation, and utilities; professional and business services;  
17 construction and mining; education and services; leisure and hospitality; and financial  
18 services.<sup>6</sup>
- 19 • Agriculture, forestry, and fishing are significant as the study area is rich in timber and marine  
20 fishery resources. These resources also provide opportunities in the state's growing  
21 agritourism and ecotourism industries.
- 22 • Trade, transportation, and utilities industry sectors employ approximately one-fifth of the  
23 workforce within the study area.<sup>7</sup> The agriculture, silviculture, manufacturing, distribution, and  
24 tourism and recreation industries in the region also rely on the interregional multimodal  
25 transportation system that connects various destinations within the study area, provides  
26 mobility options, and enables interregional interactions that support both the local and state  
27 economy.
- 28 • The study area has a small but relatively diverse and growing manufacturing industry.  
29 Manufacturing industry firms in the study area include Signature Brands for E-ONE and  
30 Krausz Industries. AutoZone and FedEx Ground are among logistics and distribution  
31 companies that have facilities in Marion County. Additionally, CSX has designated the  
32 Ocala/Marion County Commerce Park in Ocala as a rail-served, ready-to-build location for  
33 industrial development and expansion.
- 34 • Employment centers are concentrated in urbanized areas because of population density;  
35 presence of a diverse workforce; and access to healthcare, entertainment, education, and  
36 communication services.

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<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, Labor Market Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages](#)



- 1 • Levy County is part of the North Central Rural Area of Opportunity, designated by Executive  
2 Order 11-81. Each county in the study area contains at least one economically distressed  
3 area designated as an Opportunity Zone by the State of Florida.<sup>8</sup>
- 4 • Sumter County and Citrus County have a concentration of economic development activity  
5 along SR 44 extending from The Villages and Wildwood on the east through Inverness to  
6 Crystal River at US 19. There is also an Opportunity Zone and an extensive area of industrial  
7 and commercial zoned land located off of US 41, SR 200 and CR 491 west of Holder in Citrus  
8 County.
- 9 • Local economies in the study area depend on tourism, ecotourism, agritourism, and outdoor  
10 recreation activities. Whether kayaking or fishing on the Withlacoochee River, hiking the Cross  
11 Florida Greenway, or swimming in Rainbow Springs, there is a wide variety of nature-based  
12 recreation opportunities in the study area.

## 13 **INFRASTRUCTURE CHARACTERISTICS**

14 The condition of infrastructure in the study area influences the quality of life for residents and visitors,  
15 and is an important component of, and potential catalyst for, economic development.

- 16 • The main type of wastewater treatment in most of the study area is septic systems. The  
17 cumulative impact of septic systems has been linked to impaired waters in springs, rivers, and  
18 estuarine systems.
- 19 • Broadband coverage in the rural parts of the study area is limited, resulting in many residents  
20 and businesses not having access to high-speed internet.<sup>9</sup> Federal Communications  
21 Commission data published in December 2018 show an estimated 66.5 percent of Levy  
22 County's urban area residents and 85.8 percent of Levy County's rural area residents lack  
23 access to high-speed internet.<sup>10</sup>
- 24 • Duke Energy and SECO Energy are the primary electric distribution companies in the study  
25 area. Sabal Trail and the Florida Gas Transmission Company operate the main gas  
26 transmission lines.
- 27 • Major roadways in the study area are I-75, US 301, US 441, US 41, SR 40, US 27, US 98,  
28 US 19, Florida's Turnpike, Suncoast Parkway, SR 44, SR 200, and SR 50. These roads are  
29 also primary evacuation routes serving both local and regional evacuees.
- 30 • There are several county and city roads in the study area that connect to the major roadway  
31 system.
- 32 • The I-75 corridor, a major north/south route for moving people and freight into and out of much  
33 of the central and western Florida peninsula, regularly experiences congestion caused by  
34 increased demand, crashes and incidents; on average, an incident closes at least one lane or  
35 ramp every 16 hours.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, peak-hour congestion has been observed on other major  
36 roadways within population centers—particularly sections of SR 44 and US 19/98 in Citrus  
37 County.

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<sup>8</sup> [Florida Department of Economic Opportunity, Rural Areas of Opportunity](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Fixed Broadband Deployment Interactive Map, Federal Communications Commission](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Broadband Availability in Different Areas](#)

<sup>11</sup> [I-75 Relief Task Force - Final Recommendations Report](#)

- 1 • Periodic congestion and lack of high-speed, high-capacity travel options between I-75 on the  
2 east and Suncoast Parkway or US 19/98 on the west of the study area generally limit  
3 evacuation and emergency response.
- 4 • Construction of the Suncoast Parkway Extension (Suncoast Parkway, Phase 1), terminating at  
5 SR 44 is underway and construction is estimated to be complete in 2022. An additional  
6 section of Suncoast Parkway, Phase 2, is being designed for an extension between SR 44  
7 and CR 486. That section is expected to let for construction in late 2022. This will provide  
8 direct access to Tampa from the center of Citrus County. As part of the M-CORES Program, a  
9 separate Task Force is evaluating the extension of the Suncoast Corridor from Citrus County  
10 to I-10 in Jefferson County. The M-CORES statute directs the Northern Turnpike Corridor to  
11 end at the Suncoast Parkway, which could be along the existing Suncoast Parkway, Suncoast  
12 Parkway, Phase 1, Suncoast Parkway Phase 2, or a future extension as part of the M-CORES  
13 Program.
- 14 • The CSX Transportation “S” line, which traverses Sumter and Marion Counties, is a major  
15 north-south freight rail line in the state. The western branch line of the Florida Northern  
16 Railroad provides short line service to regional businesses. Passenger rail service was  
17 discontinued in the late 1980s. The Ocala Union Station once used by Amtrak passenger rail  
18 was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1997 and is currently used as a station  
19 for intercity and local bus services.
- 20 • The transportation network supports trade and logistics, including air, rail, and truck freight,  
21 and related value-added services. I-75 in the study area is part of a network of highways  
22 identified as the most critical highway portions of the U.S. freight transportation system.
- 23 • There are no commercial airport, seaport, or rail terminals in the study area. People and  
24 freight moving between the study area and other parts of the state, country, or world typically  
25 need to connect to other regions via road or rail service and then connect to another mode.  
26 There are plans by Citrus County to revive establishment of Port Citrus.
- 27 • There are about 75 miles of existing Shared-Use Nonmotorized Trail (SUN Trail) and about  
28 173 miles of identified SUN Trail segments in the study area, which are in various stages of  
29 planning, design, and construction. The Cross Florida Greenway, Van Fleet State Trail,  
30 Withlacoochee State Trail, Dunnellon Trail, Nature Coast State Trail, Florida National Scenic  
31 Trail, and various other recreational trails are part of the Florida Greenways and Trails  
32 System, providing visitors and residents high-quality paved and unpaved multi-use trail  
33 experiences.
- 34 • The transit system consists of a limited number of buses on fixed routes and paratransit,  
35 which provides demand-response rides. Study area residents living within one-half mile of a  
36 fixed-route public transportation service is at 19 percent in Marion County, and 28 percent in  
37 Citrus County. Levy County and Sumter County do not have fixed-route public transportation  
38 service.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, local transit agencies have identified transit service expansions  
39 (existing route improvements) and new services in their Transit Development Plans (TDP).  
40 Citrus County has identified a need for express bus transit that would provide inter-county  
41 connections between major activity centers within the study area.

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<sup>12</sup> [2019 Florida Transit Information and Performance Handbook](#)

# 1 RECOMMENDATIONS

## 2 APPROACH AND FRAMEWORK

3 The Task Force recognized the scope of the M-CORES purpose and program, as well as the scale of  
4 the corridors authorized in statute, called for thoughtful decision making supported by the best  
5 available data, analysis, and subject matter expertise and extensive public input. The Task Force  
6 recognized decisions about where these corridors should be located and how they should be  
7 developed, particularly in relation to environmental resources and existing communities, could have  
8 transformational impacts not only on the study area but also on the state as a whole.

9 Since the Task Force process was designed to occur prior to the corridor planning process, the Task  
10 Force was not able to review data on nor discuss every potential impact of the corridor in detail. The  
11 Task Force focused on developing recommendations for how FDOT and other agencies should  
12 implement the M-CORES Program in this study area in three areas:

- 13 • **High-Level Needs** – The Task Force identified key regional opportunities and challenges  
14 related to the six statutory purposes for M-CORES that should be priorities for the M-CORES  
15 Program in the study area. The Task Force also developed guidance for how FDOT should  
16 work with partners to evaluate these potential needs and form more specific purpose and  
17 need statements for corridor improvements moving forward. The high-level needs, along with  
18 the purpose, answer the question “*why?*”.
- 19 • **Guiding Principles** – The Task Force recommended a set of core values to guide decision-  
20 making related to the M-CORES Program in the study area throughout the planning,  
21 development, and implementation process. These answer the question “*how?*”.
- 22 • **Instructions for Project Development and Beyond** – The Task Force recommended  
23 specific directions for future project development and implementation activities to ensure the  
24 Task Force’s guiding principles are applied to subsequent activities as intended. These  
25 answer the question “*what’s next?*”.

26 In completing this report, the Task Force’s intent is to provide these consensus recommendations for  
27 how FDOT can effectively carry out the M-CORES Program as specified in s. 338.2278, F.S.  
28 Consensus on the report does not constitute agreement by all Task Force members that at this phase  
29 in program delivery, project specific needs or environmental and financial feasibility are fully  
30 developed; but rather, the report is intended to provide consensus recommendations for how needs  
31 should be evaluated and how corridor development and related activities should move forward to  
32 implement the statute and support the environment, quality of life, and prosperity of the study area  
33 and the state.

34 Section 338.2278 (3)(c) 6, F.S. states “To the maximum extent feasible, the department shall adhere  
35 to the recommendations of the task force created for each corridor in the design of the multiple  
36 modes of transportation and multiple types of infrastructure associated with the corridor.” The Task  
37 Force viewed this statement as inclusive of both the guiding principles and the instructions and of the  
38 full range of planning, project development, and implementation activities. The Task Force also  
39 recognized that as future work continues in the study area, additional information or changing  
40 conditions may provide insight about the feasibility and value of specific implementation steps that  
41 could warrant refinements to specific instructions; in these situations, the guiding principle and intent  
42 of the Task Force will guide any such refinements.

## 1 HIGH-LEVEL NEEDS

2 High-level needs are key regional opportunities and challenges the M-CORES Program, including  
3 corridor investments and related actions, are intended to address. The high-level needs build on the  
4 six purposes and 13 potential benefits in s. 338.2278 (1), F.S. The potential high-level needs include  
5 conventional transportation needs such as safety, mobility, and connectivity, as well as broader  
6 regional needs that could be supported through a transportation corridor, such as economic  
7 development and quality of life.

8 Section 338.2278 (3) (c) 4, F.S., charged the Task Force to “evaluate the need for, and the economic  
9 and environmental impacts of, hurricane evacuation impacts of, and land use impacts of” the corridor  
10 on which the Task Force is focusing. Because the Task Force is in a pre-planning phase of the  
11 corridor planning process, its activities focused on review of partner and public input, existing plans  
12 and studies, and available data and forecasts on trends and conditions in the study area. FDOT  
13 provided preliminary baseline forecasts for future population, employment, and traffic, but the amount  
14 and precision of the information provided was not sufficient to define specific corridor needs at a level  
15 of detail necessary to initiate project development.

16 In general, the Task Force found significant needs in the study area related to the six statutory  
17 purposes, including revitalizing rural communities, supporting economic development, enhancing  
18 quality of life, and protecting the environment. The Task Force also recognized general needs to  
19 enhance transportation safety, mobility, and connectivity in the study area. The Task Force identified  
20 a series of potential high-level needs for future evaluation by FDOT and developed recommendations  
21 for how FDOT should assess the need for a corridor of the scale specified in statute:

- 22 • **Address statewide and regional safety and mobility needs due to growth in population  
23 and visitation.** Population in the study area grew from 345,850 in 1990 to 508,165 in 2019  
24 (47 percent) and is projected to grow by an additional 386,935 (76 percent) by 2045 assuming  
25 mid-range growth.<sup>13,14</sup> The number of visitors to Florida has increased from 28.9 million in  
26 1985 to 131 million in 2019 (353 percent).<sup>15</sup> Some of these visitors tour or pass through the  
27 study area en route to their final destinations. The number of visitors declined in 2020 due to  
28 the COVID-19 pandemic but is expected to rebound post pandemic.

29 I-75 and some portions of SR 44 and US 301 are currently operating at capacity. The review  
30 of 2018 traffic crash data showed that 10,327 crashes were reported in the study area, which  
31 resulted in 165 fatalities and 8,131 total injuries.<sup>16</sup>

32 FDOT conducted a preliminary analysis of future traffic in the study area based on population  
33 and employment growth projections from local government comprehensive plans. The  
34 analysis showed the study area traffic volumes are projected to increase by 83 percent from  
35 2018 to 2050. Based on improvements currently in the FDOT Work Program and existing  
36 cost-feasible plans for the Strategic Intermodal System and MPO Long Range Transportation  
37 Plans in the study area, this traffic growth could produce significant congestion along the  
38 entire section of I-75 in the study area, and portions of SR 50, SR 471, US 301, SR 44, US 41,

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<sup>13</sup> [Population Data Archive, Bureau of Economic and Business Research](#)

<sup>14</sup> [The University of Florida, Bureau of Economic and Business Research, Florida Population Studies, Volume 53, Bulletin 186, January 2020](#)

<sup>15</sup> [Florida Visitor Estimates, Visit Florida](#)

<sup>16</sup> [Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles, Traffic Crash Report](#)

1 SR 200, US 27, SR 40, and SR 121 by the year 2050. I-75 within the study area is projected  
2 to have Level of Service F by 2050 even with a 10-lane widening. The Task Force  
3 recommended further refinement of these traffic projections, including evaluation of whether  
4 the extension of the Northern Turnpike Corridor would relieve future traffic on I-75. The Task  
5 Force also recommended that future analyses consider how the development of the Suncoast  
6 Corridor could impact traffic on the Northern Turnpike Corridor.

7 The Task Force recommended that the traffic analysis consider future demand for moving  
8 both people and freight, as well as both local/regional travel originating and terminating within  
9 the study area and statewide/interregional travel to, from, and through the study area. The  
10 traffic analysis should also consider potential changes in travel demand related to the state's  
11 recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and potential long-term changes in travel behavior,  
12 such as greater propensity for working from home and increased home delivery of goods and  
13 services. The analysis should consider potential changes in travel demand and transportation  
14 system capacity related to increased use of emerging technologies, such as automated and  
15 connected vehicles. Finally, the analysis should consider potential shifts in economic activity  
16 that could be related to a significant industry expansion or recession in the study area during  
17 the analysis period.

- 18 • **Improve statewide and regional transportation mobility and connectivity for people and**  
19 **freight.** The Task Force discussed statewide and regional mobility and connectivity  
20 challenges and opportunities facing the study area. The Task Force recommended that the  
21 needs evaluation consider the potential statewide and regional impact of the Northern  
22 Turnpike Corridor in terms of providing relief to the recurring congestion on I-75 corridor and  
23 alternatives for moving people and freight including during evacuation and emergency  
24 response.
- 25 • **Provide a transportation network that revitalizes and enhances communities and**  
26 **industries.** The Task Force discussed various ways highway and other alternative modes of  
27 transportation could revitalize and enhance communities and local industries. The Task Force  
28 recommended FDOT evaluate how corridor improvements could impact local communities,  
29 businesses, and industries including agriculture by looking at consistency with existing plans  
30 and community character.
- 31 • **Strengthen emergency mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery to enhance**  
32 **safety.** The Task Force reviewed data and discussed emergency needs and considerations in  
33 the study area. The Task Force also discussed how congestion on various inadequate  
34 transportation facilities impedes emergency management activities and increases the time  
35 needed for safe evacuation and response. The Task Force recommended FDOT use  
36 statewide regional evacuation studies being updated by the regional planning councils to  
37 understand evacuees' behavior, the factors that influence their choices during emergencies,  
38 sheltering capacity, and evacuation traffic capacity needs in the region and state. The Task  
39 Force recommended guiding principles and instructions for how the M-CORES Program could  
40 support emergency mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery.
- 41 • **Support expansion of existing and new industries through enhanced access to jobs,**  
42 **education, and healthcare.** The Task Force discussed economic and workforce  
43 development opportunities in the study area and the need for better access and connectivity  
44 to help attract industry and workers to the region. The Task Force advised FDOT to consider

1 mobility, economic, and fiscal impacts of potential shifts in economic activity from existing  
2 communities and corridors to enhanced or new corridors, as well as potential net economic  
3 benefits to the region and the state.

- 4 • **Strengthen the local tourism, ecotourism, agritourism, and outdoor recreation**  
5 **economy.** The Task Force discussed the contribution of various types of tourism in the local  
6 economies in the study area. The Task Force advised FDOT to consider tourism and  
7 recreation travel needs in the planning and design of corridor improvements by identifying  
8 potential areas of growth in visitation, improving connections or access to existing tourism  
9 sites, and preserving valued historic, cultural, and environmental assets.
- 10 • **Expand rural utility infrastructure, including broadband, water, and sewer, to enhance**  
11 **quality of life.** Large portions of the study area lack broadband or water/sewer service. The  
12 Task Force reviewed data and discussed challenges in the study area and opportunities to  
13 advance broadband, water, and sewer with transportation infrastructure to enhance quality of  
14 life. The Task Force asked FDOT to coordinate with local government and utility service  
15 providers when evaluating how corridor improvements could help expand utility infrastructure  
16 connectivity.
- 17 • **Protect, restore, enhance, and connect public and private environmentally sensitive**  
18 **areas, conservation lands, threatened and endangered species habitats, key water**  
19 **quality resources, and ecosystems.** The Task Force reviewed data and discussed the  
20 unique characteristics of the study area’s environmental resources, including springs, rivers,  
21 aquifer recharge areas, agricultural land uses, and wildlife habitat. The Task Force also  
22 discussed a need to protect and enhance environmentally sensitive resources, such as  
23 springs, wetlands, and floodplains, to support regional and statewide habitat conservation and  
24 water quality goals. The Task Force recommended guiding principles and instructions for how  
25 the M-CORES Program could help achieve environmental goals, including proactive  
26 opportunities to restore, connect, and enhance environmental resources, in addition to the  
27 standard Project Development and Environment (PD&E) process.

## 28 **NEEDS EVALUATION PROCESS**

29 As input to project development, FDOT will conduct a robust evaluation of the potential high-level  
30 needs in the study area, building on the recommendations of the Task Force. This process should  
31 evaluate and distinguish between conventional safety, mobility, and connectivity needs, and broader  
32 regional needs related to transportation that also are included in the statutory purpose in s. 338.2278,  
33 F.S. Additional details on the needs evaluation process as well as the steps involved in identifying  
34 and evaluating alternatives are specified in the Action Plan on page 24 of this report.

35 The Task Force believes that the formal determination of need pursuant to statutory requirements  
36 and consistent with accepted statewide processes is an important milestone in corridor planning and  
37 development. The Task Force has developed a series of guiding principles and instructions for future  
38 planning and development of corridors for which high-level needs have been identified. While these  
39 determinations will be made after the Task Force has completed its deliberations, the guidance  
40 provided by the Task Force will instruct the evaluation process, and FDOT will create ongoing  
41 opportunities for partners and the public to be engaged during the process.

# 1 GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND INSTRUCTIONS

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

9 The Task Force developed 16 guiding principles and associated instructions. The text below lists the  
10 specific guiding principles and instructions. The guiding principles function as an integrated set and  
11 are not presented in a specific priority order.

## 12 CONSISTENCY WITH STATEWIDE, REGIONAL, AND LOCAL PLANS

13 The Task Force recognized that there are plans specifically called out in statute, where consistency is  
14 the standard by law or policy; these include the local government comprehensive plans, metropolitan  
15 long-range transportation plans, strategic regional policy plans, and the statewide Florida  
16 Transportation Plan (FTP). The Task Force developed the following guiding principle and instructions  
17 to address the consistency issue. *This is a cross-cutting guiding principle with associated instructions*  
18 *to serve all high-level needs and support all other guiding principles in this report.*

19 **Guiding Principle #1:** Be consistent with statutorily required statewide, regional, and local plans.

### 20 **Instructions:**

- 21 • Be consistent with the goals, objectives, policies, and resources identified in local government  
22 comprehensive plans (s. 163.3177, F.S. and s. 163.3178, F.S.), metropolitan long-range  
23 transportation plans (s. 339.175, F.S.), and strategic regional policy plans (s. 186.507, F.S.),  
24 placing emphasis on future land use maps and growth projections, as well as regional and  
25 community visions as adopted into strategic regional policy plans and/or local government  
26 comprehensive plans.
- 27 • Be consistent with the vision, goals, and strategies of the Florida Transportation Plan  
28 (s. 339.155, F.S.).
- 29 • Coordinate among agencies to address differences among statutorily required state, regional,  
30 and local plans related to transportation corridors and future growth and development  
31 projections, including differences related to the timing and horizon years of plan updates as  
32 well as the geographical areas covered by regional plans.
- 33 • Identify needs to update statutorily required plans to address Task Force recommendations,  
34 such as designation and management of transportation corridors (s. 337.273, F.S.) and  
35 consideration of whether areas around potential interchange locations contain appropriate  
36 land use and environmental resource protections (s. 338.2278, F.S.), including resources  
37 identified as significant in other guiding principles and instructions; coordinate among local  
38 governments, regional planning councils, metropolitan planning organizations, and FDOT on  
39 plan updates.
- 40 • Support local governments in developing interchange management plans including  
41 appropriate land use and environmental resource protections for areas around proposed  
42 interchange locations.

1 **MAXIMIZING USE OF EXISTING FACILITIES**

2 The Task Force emphasized the importance of examining the potential to upgrade or use existing  
3 transportation facilities or corridors to meet the purpose and need of the project before planning a  
4 new location corridor in order to minimize project impacts. The Task Force developed following  
5 guiding principle and instructions to address the use of existing facilities. *This is a cross-cutting*  
6 *guiding principle with associated instructions to serve all high-level needs and support all other*  
7 *guiding principles in this report.*

8 **Guiding Principle #2:** Develop potential alternatives for addressing statewide and interregional  
9 mobility and connectivity needs in this priority order:

- 10 i. Safety and operational improvements to existing transportation facilities;
- 11 ii. Then additional capacity in existing transportation and utility facilities or right of way in or near  
12 the study area including co-location of facilities within existing right of way and other  
13 approaches to transforming existing facilities and right of way to accommodate additional  
14 modes, uses, and functions;
- 15 iii. In circumstances where purpose and need and/or guiding principles cannot be addressed by  
16 operational or existing facility/right of way improvements, then evaluate new facilities.

17 **Instructions:**

- 18 • Identify and advance safety and operational improvements to existing transportation facilities.
- 19 • Evaluate potential capacity improvements to existing transportation facilities in or near the  
20 study area, including their impact on the surrounding environment, land uses, and  
21 communities.
- 22 • Evaluate opportunities for co-location within or adjacent to existing transportation or utility right  
23 of way in or near the study area, including their impact on the surrounding environment, land  
24 uses, and communities.
- 25 • Assess connectivity gaps between existing transportation facilities and areas identified as  
26 priorities for attraction, and potential opportunities for closing those gaps.
- 27 • Evaluate opportunities to advance specific improvements, including those identified through  
28 planning studies, PD&E studies, and long range transportation plans, that support a system  
29 meeting the long-term needs of statewide and interregional movements of people and freight  
30 during future phases of project development.
- 31 • Collaborate with local governments on operational improvements, existing facility  
32 enhancements, and, if needed, interchange locations to ensure consistency with local  
33 government comprehensive plans.

34 **TECHNOLOGY**

35 The Task Force encouraged FDOT to explore ways for new and emerging technology to meet the  
36 needs of the corridor and potentially reduce impacts to the natural and human environment. The Task  
37 Force developed following guiding principles and instructions to address technology. *This is a cross-*  
38 *cutting guiding principle with associated instructions to serve all high-level needs and support all*  
39 *other guiding principles in this report.*



1 **Guiding Principle #3:** Incorporate technology into corridor planning, design, construction, operations  
2 (including toll collection), and maintenance.

3 **Guiding Principle #4:** Accommodate emerging vehicle and information technologies such as  
4 autonomous, connected, electric, and shared vehicles (ACES) and mobility as a service (MaaS).

5 **Instructions:**

- 6 • Coordinate and partner with agencies and the private sector to leverage resources,  
7 applications, and infrastructure.
- 8 • Plan and design corridors to accommodate technologies and applications, considering their  
9 ability to evolve over time.
- 10 • Design, construct, and maintain corridors using state-of-the-art, resilient, and energy efficient  
11 materials and methods of construction.
- 12 • Plan for and provide infrastructure for electric vehicle charging stations.
- 13 • Evaluate technology to limit impacts to wildlife including road kills and notifications of other  
14 hazards such as smoke from prescribed and wild-fires.

15 **COMMUNITY CHARACTER**

16 The Task Force recognizes the social and cultural identity for each community is unique and should  
17 be protected. The Task Force emphasizes the importance of public participation and coordination  
18 with local governments as they have the largest stake in rural planning when developing the  
19 corridors. The following guiding principle and instructions were developed by the Task Force to  
20 address the need to preserve and improve the rural character and quality of communities in the study  
21 area.

22 **Guiding Principle #5:** Avoid or minimize impacts to communities and reinforce the unique character  
23 of each community.

24 **Instructions:**

- 25 • Avoid and do not impact known cemeteries and historic markers, known cultural sites, and  
26 sites currently listed in the National Register of Historic Places.
- 27 • Avoid and do not impact Native American Tribal lands. Coordination will be undertaken if  
28 historic properties of religious or cultural significance to the Native American Tribes are  
29 discovered during project development.
- 30 • Plan, design, construct, operate, and maintain corridors that recognize and incorporate the  
31 surrounding community character while accommodating potential growth and development.  
32 Balance the need to move vehicles safely and efficiently while preserving scenic, aesthetic,  
33 historic, and environmental resources.
- 34 • Explore opportunities to view, understand, and access the environmental uniqueness of the  
35 Big Bend Ecosystem.

36 **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

37 Economic development was another major focus area for the Task Force as it serves several  
38 purposes including revitalization of rural communities, job creation, and enhancing the quality of life.

1 The following guiding principles and instructions were developed by the Task Force to address the  
2 need to enhance economic and workforce development, access to education, and job creation in the  
3 study area.

4 **Guiding Principle #6:** Develop infrastructure that avoids and minimizes adverse economic impacts  
5 to existing local businesses and enhances economic development and employment opportunities.

6 **Guiding Principle #7:** Avoid impacts to natural assets important to tourism, agritourism, ecotourism,  
7 and outdoor recreation.

8 **Instructions:**

- 9 • Be consistent with economic development elements of local government comprehensive plans  
10 (s. 163.3177, F.S. and s. 163.3178, F.S.), and comprehensive economic development  
11 strategies developed by regional planning councils in their capacity as federal economic  
12 development districts.
- 13 • Enhance economic development opportunities related to regional assets such as airports,  
14 educational facilities, and healthcare facilities by improving access while avoiding direct  
15 impacts.
- 16 • Provide support to local governments and economic development organizations to maximize  
17 long-term economic benefits from corridor investments in the study area.
- 18 • Engage with agriculture, silviculture, manufacturing, logistics, and other industry stakeholders  
19 to understand and incorporate their infrastructure needs.
- 20 • Plan for and design truck parking and rest area needs.
- 21 • Support the local tourism and recreation economy by providing opportunities for access and  
22 connections to outdoor recreation areas such as recreational greenways, trails, and hunting  
23 and fishing areas.
- 24 • Plan for and design infrastructure to protect access to existing businesses in rural  
25 communities.

26 **NATURAL ENVIRONMENT**

27 Among the six statutory purposes for M-CORES, protecting the environment and natural resources  
28 was the focus of the greatest portion of the Task Force's discussion time. The Task Force  
29 acknowledged its statutory direction to evaluate design features and the need for acquisition of state  
30 conservation lands that mitigate the impact of project construction on the water quality and quantity of  
31 springs, rivers, and aquifer recharge areas and on wildlife habitat. The Task Force also recognized  
32 the potential impacts of corridor development on significant environmental resources in the study  
33 area from both direct impacts from corridor development as well as indirect impacts from future  
34 population and economic growth and land development that could occur in areas with greater  
35 transportation connectivity, particularly around interchanges.

36 The Task Force developed a series of three interrelated guiding principles to address environmental  
37 resources including conservation lands, wildlife and plant habitat, and water resources. Each of these  
38 three principles reflect a common priority order of first, avoiding negative impacts to resources;  
39 second, restoring, connecting, and enhancing resources; and third, minimizing and mitigating  
40 negative impacts. This order reflects the Task Force's consensus that the optimal approach should be

1 to avoid negative impacts to environmental resources, but that if an impact cannot be avoided,  
2 proactive efforts should be taken to provide net positive benefits to the resource.

3 To help implement this principle, FDOT identified and committed to specific environmental resources  
4 that will not be impacted by a corridor or where no new corridor will be placed through the resource,  
5 such as existing conservation lands or habitat already fragmented by existing transportation facilities.  
6 In these cases, the existing facilities or right of way could be improved, but steps should be taken to  
7 restore or enhance the environmental resource at the same time. In addition, the Task Force  
8 identified other important resources where avoidance is not explicitly defined at this time, but where  
9 great care should be taken to evaluate potential corridors and their impacts moving forward. FDOT  
10 preserved the ability to traverse the Cross Florida Greenway with potential enhancement  
11 opportunities.

12 In addition, the Task Force recognized the opportunities to contribute toward broader regional and  
13 statewide environmental goals though the decisions made about corridor development as well as the  
14 abilities the statute provides to FDOT regarding right of way acquisition and other mitigation activities.  
15 The Task Force advised FDOT to use proactive right of way acquisition to acquire mitigation lands  
16 prior to or in parallel with corridor construction. The Task Force recommended that FDOT commit to  
17 working closely with other local, regional, state, and federal agencies and nongovernmental  
18 organizations to advance key priorities such as high priority land conservation, habitat and water  
19 resource protection, and ecosystem connectivity initiatives developed by other partners.

## 20 **CONSERVATION LANDS**

21 The Task Force developed the following guiding principle and instructions focus on how to avoid,  
22 minimize and offset environmental impacts to conservation lands.

23 **Guiding Principle #8:** Apply the following priority order for existing conservation lands:

- 24 i. Avoid negative impacts to, and fragmentation of these lands.
- 25 ii. Restore, connect, and enhance these lands while continuing to avoid negative impacts.
- 26 iii. Minimize and mitigate negative impacts to these lands.

### 27 **Instructions:**

- 28 • Do not place new corridors through: state parks, state forests, mitigation banks, existing  
29 managed conservation lands (including conservation easements), wildlife refuges, or Florida  
30 Forever acquired lands.
- 31 • Coordinate with agencies and partners early in the project development process to identify  
32 land acquisition plans and identify opportunities to advance acquisition priorities [including s.  
33 338.2278 (3)(c)6 & 8, F.S.]. Coordinate with the Florida Department of Environmental  
34 Protection and other agencies for Florida Forever Program projects that are in the highest  
35 priority for acquisition, potential Water Management District lands, and lands within the  
36 optimal boundaries of the adopted management plan for regional, state and national parks,  
37 forests, refuges, and water management areas.
- 38 • Coordinate with Regional Planning Councils to support Natural Resources of Regional  
39 Significance outlined in their Strategic Regional Policy Plans.

- 1 • Coordinate with the Florida Forest Service to identify lands managed with prescribed or  
2 controlled burns and their associated smokesheds and minimize impacts associated with  
3 corridor location and operations.
- 4 • Use established procedures and analysis tools during project development to avoid, restore  
5 and enhance, and minimize and mitigate impacts to wetland mitigation banks and regulatory  
6 easements, swallets, Florida Communities Trust projects, Wildlife Management Areas, and  
7 Rare Species Habitat Conservation Priorities.
- 8 • Reference the most current Critical Lands and Waters Identification Project (CLIP) version  
9 priorities model during project development.

## 10 **WILDLIFE HABITATS AND CONNECTIVITY**

11 This guiding principle and instructions focus on how to protect, restore and enhance wildlife habitat  
12 connectivity. The Task Force recognized there are gaps in the Florida wildlife corridors that needs to  
13 be filled to improve connectivity of wildlife communities.

14 **Guiding Principle #9:** Apply the following priority order for existing wildlife habitats:

- 15 i. Avoid negative impacts to, and fragmentation of these lands.
- 16 ii. Restore, connect, and enhance these lands while continuing to avoid negative impacts.
- 17 iii. Minimize and mitigate negative impacts to these lands.

### 18 **Instructions:**

- 19 • Coordinate with agencies and partners early in the project development process to identify  
20 land acquisition plans and identify opportunities to advance acquisition priorities to support the  
21 completion of wildlife connectivity gaps (including s. 338.2278 (3)(c)6 & 8, F.S.). Coordinate  
22 with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to enhance wildlife corridor  
23 connectivity including lands identified as priority 1 and 2 in the Florida Ecological Greenways  
24 Network. Place an emphasis on connectivity gaps and bottlenecks.
- 25 • Support a regional approach to enhanced wildlife connectivity, including restoration of fish and  
26 wildlife habitat corridors.
- 27 • Coordinate with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to maximize  
28 effectiveness of wildlife crossing design elements based upon the best available data  
29 concerning wildlife movement patterns.
- 30 • Minimize impacts of transportation lighting on nearby agricultural, environmental, and  
31 conservation lands.
- 32 • Consult with state and federal agencies to identify and protect threatened and endangered  
33 species (wildlife and plants) and their habitats.

## 34 **WATER RESOURCES**

35 This guiding principle and instructions focus on how to protect, restore and enhance water resources  
36 which include lakes, rivers, streams, springs, floodplains, estuaries, wetlands, aquifers, and  
37 groundwater.

38 **Guiding Principle #10:** Apply the following priority order for existing water resources:

- 1 i. Avoid negative impacts to water resources.
- 2 ii. Restore, connect, and enhance water resources while continuing to avoid negative impacts.
- 3 iii. Minimize and mitigate negative impacts to water resources.

4 **Instructions:**

- 5 • Avoid and do not impact springheads and lakes.
- 6 • Do not place new corridors through aquatic preserves.
- 7 • Coordinate with agencies and partners early in the project development process to identify  
8 water supply and quality goals and identify opportunities to advance water resource  
9 enhancements that will improve regional water quality (including s. 338.2278 (3)(c)6 & 8,  
10 F.S.). Coordinate with Water Management Districts and the Florida Department of  
11 Environmental Protection for projects in Basin Management Action Plans (BMAPs) for springs  
12 and other surface water bodies and protection and enhancement of aquifer and groundwater  
13 recharge areas, Outstanding Florida Waters, wetlands, floodplains, and other surface waters.
- 14 • Address both local and regional flooding problems by integrating stormwater and floodplain  
15 management strategies where feasible.
- 16 • Support a regional approach to stormwater system design with the goal of meeting and  
17 exceeding Environmental Resource Permit requirements.
- 18 • Avoid placing transportation corridors and stormwater ponds in sinkholes and high density  
19 karst areas.
- 20 • Use established procedures and analysis tools during project development to avoid, minimize,  
21 and mitigate impacts to Water Management District surface, groundwater, proposed well, and  
22 atmospheric sites.

23 **AGRICULTURE**

24 The Task Force acknowledged its statutory direction to evaluate design features and the need for  
25 acquisition of state conservation lands that mitigate the impact of project construction on agricultural  
26 land uses. The Task Force emphasized the importance of protecting and enhancing the abundance  
27 of productive agricultural lands (including silviculture) in the study area as they serve both  
28 environmental and economic purposes and contribute to revitalization of rural communities through  
29 job creation and protection of the environment.

30 **Guiding Principle #11:** Avoid impacts to and fragmentation (of both tracts and operations) of  
31 farmlands, silviculture, equine industry, nurseries, aquaculture, and cattle ranches.

32 **Instructions:**

- 33 • Avoid and do not impact Farmland Preservation Areas identified in local government  
34 comprehensive plans.
- 35 • Recognize existing preservation areas of the Florida Rural and Family Lands Protection  
36 Program as well as those lands formally designated for future protection within this program.

- 1 • Plan, design, construct, operate, and maintain corridors that protect the region’s agricultural  
2 lands (including Century Pioneer Family Farms), avoid fragmentation of these lands, and  
3 facilitate connectivity to and between these lands.
- 4 • Work with owners/operators of farmlands, silviculture, equine industry, nurseries, aquaculture,  
5 and cattle ranches to understand their needs and plans.

## 6 **EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE**

7 The Task Force emphasized the importance of ensuring the corridor supports existing emergency  
8 management plans. The Task Force developed following guiding principle and instructions to address  
9 the need to enhance emergency management at the local, regional, and state levels.

10 **Guiding Principle #12:** Plan, design, construct, operate and maintain resilient corridors that support  
11 state, regional, and local plans for emergency mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery.

### 12 **Instructions:**

- 13 • When developing, and evaluating corridors, place a high priority on the ability of existing, co-  
14 located or new infrastructure to withstand and recover from risks such as storm surge (tropical  
15 storm through category 5), inland flooding, extreme weather events, and climate trends. .
- 16 • Avoid and do not impact high risk coastal areas consistent with local government  
17 comprehensive plans.
- 18 • Coordinate with state, regional, and local emergency response plans and priorities, including  
19 evacuation and sheltering.
- 20 • Provide opportunities for staging areas for emergencies (SAFE) as outlined in s. 338.236, F.S.
- 21 • Give high priority to native, storm resistant landscaping.

## 22 **INFRASTRUCTURE OPPORTUNITIES**

23 The Task Force emphasized the importance of ensuring the project supports the need to expand  
24 broadband, water, sewer, electric, gas services to the study area for the purposes of revitalizing rural  
25 communities, encouraging job creation, and leveraging technology. The Task Force developed the  
26 following guiding principles and instructions to address the need to expand rural broadband  
27 infrastructure and access to broadband and other utility services in the study area.

28 **Guiding Principle #13:** Plan and design enhanced or new corridors to enable co-location of  
29 broadband and other utility infrastructure.

30 **Guiding Principle # 14:** Coordinate utility investment with future land use, economic development,  
31 transportation, and water quality plans.

### 32 **Instructions:**

- 33 • Do not place new corridors through public or private wastewater facilities, public water supply  
34 facilities, and certified power plants.
- 35 • Support local governments and utility providers regarding existing and planned utility projects,  
36 including identifying opportunities within the study area to co-locate and/or extend utilities  
37 within and adjacent to transportation corridors.

- 1 • Collaborate with broadband providers, local governments, and the Florida Department of  
2 Economic Opportunity, leveraging funding allocations (s. 339.0801 F.S.) and guided by the  
3 broadband strategic plan (s. 364.0135 F.S.) to integrate broadband into transportation  
4 corridors.
- 5 • Ensure broadband provider access to FDOT right of way is non-discriminatory, competitively  
6 neutral, and technology neutral. Coordinate spatial needs with each utility provider.
- 7 • Explore opportunities to coordinate with local governments and utilities for septic to sewer  
8 conversions to improve quality of life and water quality, with an emphasis on higher density  
9 communities and areas targeted in BMAPs.

## 10 **TRANSPORTATION NETWORK CONNECTIVITY**

11 The Task Force emphasized the importance of examining opportunities to include other  
12 transportation modes such as shared-use trails, freight and passenger rail, and public transit in the  
13 corridor. They encouraged FDOT to think beyond personal automobile travel to meet a variety of  
14 mobility needs and travel options. The Task Force developed the following guiding principles and  
15 instructions to address statewide and regional transportation mobility and connectivity for people and  
16 freight needs.

17 **Guiding Principle #15:** Enhance interregional connectivity by providing direct connections between  
18 major statewide corridors.

19 **Guiding Principle #16:** Plan interregional corridors to support the function of regional and local  
20 networks.

### 21 **Instructions:**

- 22 • Plan corridor access and termini consistent with local and regional goals for targeted growth  
23 or preservation areas and in coordination with local governments.
- 24 • Seek opportunities to further trail improvements and access to existing and planned non-  
25 motorized trail networks.
- 26 • Prioritize gaps on high priority segments on the Florida Greenways and Trails System Plan.
- 27 • Coordinate with MPOs and transit providers on transit needs and opportunities.

# 1 ACTION PLAN

2 In addition to the high-level needs, guiding principles, and instructions, FDOT will commit to the  
3 following actions to move forward with implementation of the recommendations of the Task Force's  
4 report in developing the M-CORES Program in this study area, consistent with s. 338.2278, F.S.:

5 1. **Evaluate needs.** FDOT will conduct a robust evaluation of corridor needs, building on the  
6 Task Force's recommendations on high-level needs. This process will evaluate and  
7 distinguish between conventional safety, mobility, and connectivity needs, and broader  
8 regional needs or co-benefits related to transportation, such as economic development  
9 benefits. The needs evaluation will include a detailed technical analysis of current and future  
10 traffic conditions in the study area building on the guidance provided by the Task Force in this  
11 report. This needs analysis will support development of a Purpose and Need statement for  
12 potential corridor improvements.

13 2. **Identify and evaluate alternatives.** FDOT will conduct additional corridor planning activities,  
14 including the Alternative Corridor Evaluation process, and initiate the Project Development  
15 and Environment (PD&E) process to identify and evaluate a range of potential alternatives for  
16 corridor improvements in the study area that could accomplish the Purpose and Need.

17 These alternatives will consider operational and capacity improvements, existing and new  
18 facilities including co-location options, and a "no build" option. Consideration will be given to  
19 multiple transportation modes and to application of emerging technologies. The alternatives  
20 will be consistent with the guiding principles and instructions developed by the Task Force.

21 The alternatives evaluation will include the specific economic, environmental, land use, and  
22 emergency management impacts called for in s. 338.2278(3)(c)4, F.S. and the standard  
23 processes outlined in FDOT's PD&E manual. The evaluation will be consistent with the  
24 guiding principles and instructions recommended by the Task Force.

25 The planning process also will include initial, high-level consideration of potential costs and  
26 funding approaches based on reasonable assumptions at this early stage. It is not likely that  
27 any alternatives would be sufficiently defined at this stage to conduct detailed analysis of  
28 economic feasibility, but early identification of the order of magnitude of potential costs and  
29 funding sources can be used to support decision making on the range of alternatives.

30 The planning and PD&E processes combined will narrow the range of alternatives and identify  
31 opportunities to segment corridor development into multiple projects.

32 3. **Support consistency review and update of local and regional plans.** FDOT will coordinate  
33 early and often with local governments, MPOs, and regional planning councils to ensure  
34 consistency with applicable local and regional plans throughout all activities. As required by s.  
35 338.2278(3)(c)10, F.S., FDOT will provide affected local governments with a copy of the Task  
36 Force report and project alignments identified through the PD&E process so each local  
37 government with one or more planned interchanges within its jurisdiction can meet the  
38 statutory requirement to review the Task Force report and local government comprehensive  
39 plan no later than December 31, 2023. Each local government will consider whether the area  
40 in and around the interchange contains appropriate land uses and environmental protections  
41 and whether its comprehensive plan should be amended to provide appropriate uses and  
42 protections. FDOT will coordinate with the local governments, RPCs, and Florida Department



1 of Economic Opportunity (DEO) to assist with plan updates, including consideration of  
2 technical and financial support needs.

- 3 4. **Assess economic feasibility and identify potential funding sources.** Following PD&E,  
4 FDOT will evaluate the economic feasibility of the corridor at the 30 percent design phase,  
5 when sufficient information is available to assess the ability to meet statutory requirements for  
6 projects as part of Florida's Turnpike system consistent with s. 338.223, F.S. The economic  
7 feasibility will account for required costs to develop and implement the corridor, such as  
8 engineering, right of way, construction, mitigation, enhancement, and utility costs. This  
9 economic feasibility test will focus on specific corridor projects; additional analyses may be  
10 needed to examine the cost and funding of all M-CORES Program initiatives.

11 FDOT also will identify potential funding sources for preferred corridor alternatives identified  
12 during PD&E, including a combination of the specific sources allocated to the M-CORES  
13 Program in s. 338.2278, F.S.; toll revenues and associated revenue bonds; and other  
14 applicable state, local, and private revenue sources. FDOT has committed that projects  
15 currently in its Five Year Work Program for Fiscal Years 2021-2025 will not be impacted by  
16 M-CORES funding needs. M-CORES Program costs that are not covered through the  
17 dedicated funding sources identified in statute or through toll revenues and associated  
18 revenue bonds would need to be prioritized along with other needs for future Five Year Work  
19 Programs, working through the standard process including the applicable MPO transportation  
20 improvement programs (TIP) and rural transportation planning processes. All M-CORES  
21 projects, regardless of funding source, will be included in applicable MPO TIPs and long-  
22 range transportation plans, consistent with federal guidance about projects of regional  
23 significance.

- 24 5. **Advance innovative land acquisition concepts.** As provided by s. 338.2278(3)(c) 6, FDOT,  
25 in consultation with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and Florida Fish and  
26 Wildlife Conservation Commission, will address the Task Force's recommendations for  
27 combining right of way acquisition with the acquisition of lands or easements to facilitate  
28 environmental mitigation or ecosystem, wildlife habitat, or water quality protection or  
29 restoration. A key focus will be on how M-CORES Program decisions can support broader  
30 regional or statewide conservation and environmental stewardship goals. This process will  
31 identify opportunities to advance specific land acquisition and related recommendations prior  
32 to or in parallel with corridor construction.

- 33 6. **Advance multi-use opportunities.** FDOT will coordinate with local governments, RPCs,  
34 other state agencies, and industry organizations to help advance multi-use opportunities for  
35 the corridor as provided for in statute. An early emphasis will be on broadband and other utility  
36 co-location opportunities, including coordination with DEO on the development of the  
37 statewide broadband strategic plan.

- 38 7. **Continue robust partner and public engagement.** FDOT will continue robust coordination  
39 with local, regional, state, and federal agencies and environmental, community, economic  
40 development, and other interest groups, with an intent of exceeding the requirements of the  
41 PD&E process. FDOT will use the Efficient Transportation Decision Making (ETDM) process  
42 to facilitate early and ongoing coordination with resource agencies. FDOT also will create  
43 ongoing opportunities for the range of organizations involved in the Task Force process to be  
44 informed about and provide input to subsequent planning and project development activities.

1 FDOT also will create multiple ongoing opportunities for members of the public to be aware of  
2 and provide input to this process, with emphasis on direct engagement of the public in local  
3 communities.

4 8. **Commit to transparency and process improvement.** Because of the scale and scope of  
5 the M-CORES Program, FDOT will continue to place public engagement as a priority and will  
6 continue to engage all stakeholders during M-CORES planning, project development, and  
7 implementation, including key decision points. FDOT also will report on how decisions are  
8 made, including a periodic report on the status of the specific guiding principles and  
9 instructions committed to in this document. An annual M-CORES budget update will be made  
10 publicly available as part of FDOT's annual work program presentation to the Legislature and  
11 the Florida Transportation Commission.

12 FDOT also recognizes the need for continued improvements to its planning, project  
13 development, and related processes to fully implement the M-CORES purpose and objective  
14 as identified in statute and the guiding principles and instructions as recommended by the  
15 Task Force.

