

Project: Southwest-Central Florida Corridor Task Force Meeting #8 (Virtual)

Date: Wednesday, September 23, 2020

Location: **Public Viewing Location #1**
Whaley Hall at Lee County Civic Center
 11831 Bayshore Road
 North Fort Myers, FL 33917

Public Viewing Location #2
UF/IFAS Extension Office Polk County
 1702 Highway 17 South
 Bartow, FL 33830

Attendees

In Attendance

L.K. Nandam, FDOT
Tracy A. Hood, FDOT
Jennifer Carpenter, FDEP
Pam Johnson, FDEO
Robert Richards, FDOE
Stephanie Vick, FDOH
Janet Taylor, FDACS
Tom Graef, FWC
Mark Futrell, FPSC
Eric Anderson, Enterprise Florida
Tim McGrath, FDBPR
Donna Doubleday, CareerSource Florida
Rechell Johnson, Volunteer Florida
Melissa M. Roberts, South Florida WMD
Brian Starford, Southwest Florida WMD
Mike McCabe, Collier MPO
Donald Scott, Lee County MPO
Chris Constance, Charlotte County-Punta Gorda MPO
Colon Lambert, Heartland Regional TPO
Nat Birdsong, Polk TPO –City of Winter Haven
Bill McDaniel, Southwest Florida RPC
Pat Steed, Central Florida RPC
Katie Worthington-Decker, Florida Chamber of Commerce
Dave Rawicz, Florida Trucking Association
Gerald Buhr, Florida Rural Water Association
Bill Ferry, Florida Internet & Television Association
Sherry Ambrose, FEDC
Gary Ritter, Florida Farm Bureau Federation
Dr. Jeff Allbritten, Florida SouthWestern State College (Bob Jones substitute)
Glenn Little, South Florida State College
Dr. Angela M. Garcia Falconetti, Polk State College (Tamara Sakagawa substitute)
Matt Caldwell, Maxwell, Hendry & Simmons LLC
Andrew Dickman, 1000 Friends of Florida
Dr. Paul Gray, Audubon Florida
Elizabeth Fleming, Defenders of Wildlife
Shannon Estenoz, The Everglades Foundation
Jason Lauritsen, Florida Wildlife Corridor
Wendy Mathews, The Nature Conservancy
Penny Taylor, Collier County
Cecil Pendergrass, Lee County
Ken Doherty, Charlotte County
Mitchell Wills, Hendry County
Mike Thompson, Hardee County

Not in Attendance

Elton Langford, DeSoto County

Attendees(cont'd)

In Attendance	Not in Attendance
John Ahern, Glades County	
Ron Handley, Highlands County	
Rick Wilson, Polk County	

Task Force Meeting		
9:00 AM	Welcome	L.K. Nandam, Task Force Chair
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secretary L.K. Nandam introduced himself and thanked the Task Force members for their participation. He expressed his appreciation for their continued contribution and commitment. He took a moment to recognize September as National Workforce Development Month, which is timely because workforce development is one of the charges of the M-CORES program. Workforce development is funded at \$2.5 million per year for three years in the M-CORES legislation. He discussed the way in which M-CORES is intended to support workforce development. He noted that the meeting is streaming online and that there are two public viewing locations. He addressed how to participate in the public comment period, and how the public comment is synthesized and made available to Task Force members. He went over the updated meeting materials and the goals and high-level agenda for this meeting. He reviewed the anticipated schedule that will follow the meeting then handed the meeting off to Karen Kiselewski to review the agenda. 		
9:05 AM	Introductions, Update, and Agenda Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Karen Kiselewski, Facilitator Marlon Bizerra, FDOT Production Lead
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Karen Kiselewski went over the meeting agenda, objectives, and materials and the public comment period process. She then played the video on Florida's Sunshine Law and reminded attendees that John Fricke with the Office of the Attorney General is available to answer any questions. She conducted a roll call then introduced Will Watts, FDOT Chief Engineer, to go over public engagement activities. 		
9:20 AM	Public Engagement Activities	Will Watts, FDOT Chief Engineer
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mr. Will Watts went over the public input received to date including statistics, themes, corridor specific comments, and how these comments will be addressed. He noted that there are more than 12,500 comments received with about 10,000 being form letters and the remaining 2,500 being unique letters. The major themes focus on environmental/land conservation, quality of life/economic opportunity, corridor considerations and other issues. He then reviewed more detailed items within the major themes. He reviewed the Southwest-Central Florida Corridor specific comments and how these are all being addressed. He went over how the public can make comments and gave Task Force members the opportunity to ask questions. Ms. Kiselewski called on Paul Gray for a comment. <i>Dr. Gray said that in the draft report staff mentioned they received a lot of comments. He thought the final draft report included resolutions from local governments and would also like to see a quantity attached to the public comments, such as a form letter indicating a dislike for the corridor had 7,000 or how ever many signatures. He would also like to see it documented as to how many people like or didn't like the corridor. He generally wanted more detail about public comments in the report.</i> Ms. Kiselewski noted his microphone was cutting in and out and summarized that his suggestion was to add more detail in the final report. Dr. Gray said that was correct. Mr. Will Watts said staff focused on actionable items and categorized all these items on the table given to Task Force members. He said it's summarized pretty well with themes that actions can be taken on. He noted that themes are clear in form letters and are available to the Task Force members as well. 		

- Ms. Kiselewski called for other comments or questions and received none and handed back to Mr. Will Watts to continue to the next presentation.

9:50 AM

Moving from Task Force Recommendations to Corridor Planning and Project Development

- Will Watts, FDOT Chief Engineer
- Huiwei Shen, FDOT Chief Planner

- Mr. Will Watts presented about how the Task Force recommendations were used during corridor planning and project development. He referred back to the presentation at the last meeting about how Task Force recommendations will guide planning and project development and stated that the presentation today will focus on maximizing the use of existing facilities. The presentation provides examples that reflect the updated Guiding Principles and recommendations for discussion of co-location opportunities, potential bypasses, enhancements, and interchange locations. Mr. Will Watts described the Alternative Corridor Evaluation (ACE) and Project Development and Environment (PD&E) processes that will continue to define corridor purpose and need, potential corridor alternatives, project segmentation, and environmental considerations. An example of using existing roadway, railroad, and utility right-of-way supporting at least three Guiding Principles was shown. Bypasses are consistent with at least two Guiding Principles and showed two examples where this approach is included in local government comprehensive plans.
- Mr. Will Watts noted enhancement opportunities brought forth by Task Force members and listed in the draft report and stated many of these enhancements can provide improvements to the corridor before or during implementation of a transportation facility, as early phased features. He discussed the interchange evaluation process and the environmental feasibility process. Environmental feasibility is determined during the PD&E phase and focuses on the project's effect on natural, physical, cultural, and social environments. The outcome of a PD&E is a preferred alternative, with a corridor alignment and interchange locations. It evaluates the various alternatives, including the no-build option. He reviewed some of the items included in project costs and explained three steps of the economic feasibility process. These are to estimate net revenue, determine Turnpike funding contribution, and address funding. In closing, Mr. Will Watts noted the amount of information presented and asked the Task Force for any.
- Ms. Kiselewski thanked Mr. Will Watts for the refinements and updates and mentioned that Nat Birdsong, Sherry Ambrose, Paul Gray and Matt Caldwell joined the meeting. She then called on Commissioner Penny Taylor.
- *Ms. Taylor thanked the staff and asked Mr. Will Watts to go back to the last slide on process. She asked for an example of where the process has been used in the construction of any finished Turnpike road.*
- *Mr. Will Watts stated that this is a routine process, but a specific Turnpike example is First Coast in Jacksonville. That is a project that is under construction and the toll revenue could only fund about 50% of total cost. The other project cost is prioritized in the work program like any other project through MPOs and TPOs.*
- *Ms. Taylor asked if she heard correctly that the Turnpike only funded 50% of the cost of the project.*
- *Mr. Will Watts said that Turnpike funding is a combination of elements – the revenue bond from tolling is one component. The Turnpike also has overall bonding capacity based on cash reserves and they have cash reserves as well. Turnpike bonding is one element, and First Coast where local funds helped fund the gap as part of normal FDOT work program planning and planning through the MPOs.*
- *Ms. Taylor asked for more specifics about the 50% figure.*
- *Mr. Will Watts said he believes it was the combination of Turnpike funding which included the revenue and some cash from Turnpike. That is the point we are trying to make here, M-CORES certainly can't upset any other priority, so if there is a funding shortfall based on the revenue then it goes into the mix and is prioritized like any other project.*
- *Ms. Taylor asked if the Legislature can upset that process.*

- *Mr. Will Watts asked for her to explain that.*
- *Ms. Taylor said the Legislature can decide/override MPO process.*
- *Mr. Will Watts said he doesn't know if there is an example of that.*
- *Ms. Taylor said she thinks this M-CORES project is an example of it because FDOT doesn't typically build roads this way. She stated FDOT has done an admirable job of coming forward and doing great work through this long period of time in spite of COVID, but the argument could be made that the Legislature can step in and put other roads aside. They can overrule local MPOs.*
- *Mr. Will Watts said he thinks M-CORES set some very aggressive deadlines, a reappropriation funding source of about \$100 million per year, and the rest will be done through standard programming procedure and Turnpike statutes. M-CORES statutes don't override Turnpike statutory requirements for environment and economic feasibility.*
- *Ms. Taylor thanked staff.*
- *Ms. Kiselewski called on Don Scott.*
- *Mr. Scott said he had a question about 50% of funds. If a road costs \$5 billion, it is done over a number of years. He asked the number of years for M-CORES.*
- *Mr. Will Watts reminded that there are different components of funding. With the Turnpike, if revenue is used with bonding capacity it is a 15-year period to be in the positive. There are statutes that require that payback plan. The 50% is just an example. He was just trying to explain that there are different funding sources. Turnpike has a few more options outside of the transportation trust fund.*
- *Mr. Scott thought there was a certain number of years for a toll project.*
- *Mr. Will Watts said there is, it is 15 years to be in the positive and a term for the bond. Not all Turnpike projects are funded with tolling revenue bond component. The traffic and revenue forecast determines how much bonding capacity can be. The point here is there are a variety of funding sources including the toll revenue bonding capacity.*
- *Mr. Nandam said it is important to point out that the entire segment of this corridor is not going to be built at one time. Different factors and priorities including financial feasibility are involved. He wanted to emphasize that in this conversation.*
- *Mr. Will Watts said the corridor is lengthy, and FDOT has to have a needs evaluation during PD&E. He reiterated that the full length of the project won't be built at one time, it will be prioritized in segments based on need and funding sources and strategies. He said it is unlikely the southern portion will be soon, given I-75 and Alligator Alley traffic conditions. There is still that practical component of needs which is done during the PD&E.*
- *Ms. Kiselewski called on Andrew Dickman then Paul Gray.*
- *Mr. Dickman wanted to be clear about slide 40. Economic feasibility is one of most important parts of this. He asked if the feasibility part includes only construction or other things that are contemplated in this very large piece of legislation, such as broadband, shelters, land acquisition.*
- *Mr. Will Watts responded that the total project cost is one of the components of the economic feasibility and will include all components. This includes any conservation land that would be purchased, and any other partnering, such as for broadband. Any FDOT project has to consider all project costs when determining a strategy on funding sources.*
- *Mr. Dickman asked a follow-up and wanted to understand, where is money going to come from for broadband and all the other things identified in the report, wondering if it is part of the PD&E process.*
- *Mr. Will Watts said there are a couple of components to that question. During COVID, the need for broadband expansion has been realized. He said FDOT wants to be at the table as a partner agency for broadband expansion. The first step is dedicated right-of-way for utility corridors. There is a concept of advancing other features underground. He also mentioned 2023 funding of \$5 million for broadband per year to support that. He said it is part of the program. It doesn't earmark a certain percentage for*

broadband, but it makes us realize the corridor needs attention to broadband. This can be early phases, what can be advanced before full build out. He thought the Department is open to that concept.

- Ms. Kiselewski called on Paul Gray.
- Dr. Gray said he was confused. He said now that the Task Force is getting near to end, he checked the original legislation in Senate Bill 7068 that enabled this Task Force – on page 8 of 28, line 209, item number 4 – “each corridor task force shall evaluate the need for, the economic and environmental impacts of, hurricane evacuation impacts of, and land use impacts of the related corridor.” He noted that the language says the Task Force shall evaluate the proposed corridors, so when staff showed the Task Force a proposed road down west side of Highlands County that’s the first time, he remembered seeing that. **If the Task Force is supposed to evaluate the impact of the corridor, he doesn’t see them having the ability to do what legislation says they are supposed to do**, or whether the corridor is needed. He said the Task Force has Guiding Principles, but there are a lot of times where people think about it and do it anyway. He didn’t feel the need was properly evaluated by the Task Force. He asked about how the Task Force will do this, or if staff interpret the statute differently.
- Mr. Will Watts stated that Dr. Gray read the section verbatim. What he was trying to show with slides is that FDOT is in step with local comprehensive plans; the local comp plan has some thoughts for future planning, and we are showing how that can be incorporated. He said this is in a preplanning stage, so FDOT is going to use the charge from the Task Force to craft priorities as FDOT goes through the corridor evaluation. Mr. Will Watts mentioned there are people on the Task Force that know how long it takes to do corridor evaluation properly, so what FDOT has tried to accomplish with the Task Force is discuss high-level needs in the report as a first step of needs evaluation, not the final step.
- Ms. Kiselewski called on Pat Steed.
- Ms. Steed wanted to make a clarification – some of the examples in the slides are good to use as examples but may not reflect what is currently in plans as they have been amended or will be amended to be consistent with MPO/TPO LRTPs, and those plans are 2040 plans. She said if you look at the plans now, that corridor wouldn’t show up on it. She said that the point is all these things will be taken into consideration in the alignment study and PD&E. By then there will be updates to LRTPs for all MPOs and TPOs by next March. Local plans will be updated to be consistent with those MPO plans. So that will be taken into account as this goes forward.
- Ms. Kiselewski called on Shannon Estenoz.
- Ms. Estenoz underscored and supported the point that Dr. Gray made. She noted that the difficulty is that the Legislature used the word “corridor” in statute. FDOT has tried to parse out the word “need” as the Task Force looks at high-level needs vs. needs. There is no parsing out the word “corridor,” and the Task Force has struggled all year long. When slides go up with lines and shading, that looks like the closest thing we’ve seen that could be called a corridor. Things become clearer. She also wondered how the Task Force fulfills the statute’s use of the word corridor.
- Mr. Will Watts told Ms. Estenoz that she was one of the first to bring up the need’s component early on. Staff wanted to make sure they capture early, in pre-planning, guidance that the Task Force wants to provide. He said before we even start the typical processes, we have rules of engagement. He noted that the Task Force is helping FDOT take early first steps trying to navigate the best way to prepare for next steps.
- Mr. Nandam brought attention to Pat Steed’s comments and examples provided as related to the bypass conversation and what’s reflected in current comprehensive plans. He noted that as FDOT pursues the planning and PD&E process, the Instructions and Guiding Principles will further FDOT’s analysis. Those comprehensive plans and LRTPs need to come into the picture and we need to make sure they are consistent, which is what the Guiding Principles say. Those lines could change as the long-range transportation plans goes forward. He would like to focus on using Guiding Principles and Instructions in performing the planning analysis and identify “where” and “what” the corridor should look like.

- *Ms. Kiselewski mentioned that Huiwei Shen will talk about the Action Plan and the Task Force will discuss detailed sections of the report later today. She then called on Wendy Mathews then Jason Lauritsen.*
- *Ms. Mathews followed up on Dr. Gray's and Ms. Estenoz's comments. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is struggling with meeting statutory language. **Part of the report should indicate that the Task Force does not have enough information to meet its charge.***
- *Mr. Will Watts recognized the point she made and noted that what they are trying to in the Action Plan is to talk about obligations for need evaluation and make it clear there are future steps that need to be done. He said they can also craft additional language if need be.*
- *Ms. Kiselewski thanked Ms. Mathews and called on Jason Lauritsen.*
- *Mr. Lauritsen wanted to capture some of thoughts that others shared about how **hard it is to pin down and evaluate need. He thought that if there were a way to memorialize that difficulty in the report, that would be useful.***
- *Mr. Will Watts responded that they could work on that.*
- *Ms. Kiselewski indicated there are no other questions then introduced Huiwei Shen, FDOT Chief Planner, for her presentation.*
- *Ms. Shen presented revisions and status of the draft final report, the draft Action Plan and discussed what report consensus means. The draft Recommendations section has been revised based on Task Force members' comments. It now includes an Approach/Framework, High-Level Needs, Guiding Principles/Instructions, and the Action Plan. She noted that the draft final report has included all of the Task Force's comments leading to the meeting and will include the discussion from the current meeting. She then discussed how the draft Action Plan is meant to guide FDOT going forward then discussed each individual step of the Action Plan, of which there are eight. The draft Action Plan addresses discussions about several topics, including evaluating need and economic feasibility, and reflects recommendations from the Task Force commitments from FDOT for future action. She then reminded everyone of the expectations for today's conversation and the goal of consensus and what that means for the Task Force. She then called for questions.*
- *Ms. Kiselewski called on Shannon Estenoz.*
- *Ms. Estenoz asked about the funding sources for land acquisition when it comes to financial feasibility. Does M-CORES bring new or different money to land acquisition?*
- *Ms. Shen said that M-CORES gives FDOT authority to purchase right-of-way in addition to what is needed for construction. She said this is a broader opportunity to purchase conservation land before or during construction. This is broader than what FDOT was allowed to do in the past.*
- *Ms. Estenoz said her question is about funding. She understood that M-CORES gives the authority to pursue more acquisition for broader purposes but asked if those costs will be included in the financial feasibility process.*
- *Ms. Shen replied yes, conservation costs will be figured into the total cost for these projects. She noted that right now they don't have enough information, but as they get further in process when specific alternatives are identified they will be able to have more information on the total cost. She recalled as Mr. Will Watts talked about this earlier, mitigation/enhancement will be part of cost as well.*
- *Ms. Estenoz asked if she would have an opportunity to talk more about this later today.*
- *Ms. Shen responded that yes, the Task Force will go over the Action Plan in detail because this is the first time the Action Plan has been pulled together in this format and we want to spend time to thoroughly discuss it.*
- *Ms. Kiselewski called for more question. Seeing no hands raised, she handed off to Mr. Nandam for the break.*

10:45 AM	Break	
11:00 AM	Review and Refine Draft Final Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marlon Bizerra, FDOT Production Lead • Beth Kigel, Task Force Support Team • Chris Dailey, Task Force Support Team • Brent Setchell, FDOT District Drainage • Karen Kiselewski, Facilitator • Task Force Members
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Nandam welcomed the Task Force members back and introduced the discussion for the draft final report, starting with the new Florida Panther Guiding Principle and Instructions and handed to Ms. Kiselewski and Beth Kigel. • Ms. Kiselewski introduced Brent Setchell, Chris Dailey, Mark Easley, and the other members of the production team, including Jason Watts, Marlon Bizerra, and Chris Piazza, who are available for questions. She introduced the presentation for the Florida Panther Guiding Principle. • Mr. Dailey began the presentation on the Florida panther focused on statute requirements, namely avoid/minimize/mitigate, land acquisition for conservation, and wildlife crossings. He noted that the Task Force’s first priority is to avoid Florida panther habitats and given the large areas, avoidance may be challenging. Mr. Dailey addressed land acquisition as conservation or as mitigation, using priorities of acquisition from various groups, and the correlation with Florida Forever. He provided a three-step approach to help prioritize acquisition lands, relying heavily on coordination. • Mr. Setchell presented on wildlife crossing locations and design, such as hotspot mapping and recent projects. He then turned the conversation to Beth Kigel. • Ms. Kigel passed the conversation to Mr. Nandam first. • Mr. Nandam noted that there were a lot of conversations about conservation lands and which ones to pursue. The team came up with a process to make sure they got the right people involved and are leveraging the conservation lands out there. The goal was to come up with prioritized lands that fit this criteria. One of the things to talk about in the Guiding Principles discussion are suggestions to reflect in the Guiding Principle of the report. Second, regarding Ms. Estenoz’s question about funding conservation lands, he hoped the presentation addressed that. The program gives some funds towards acquisition of land, but the key is partnerships. Several funding sources have been discussed throughout Task Force meetings, so bringing the right people to the table and bringing the resources that M-CORES program can bring is important to maximize the resources that all entities have. • Mr. Will Watts reinforced that M-CORES does fund conservation. The enhancement component is unique to M-CORES and they want to explore how to use this in corridor evaluation. Total project cost will include mitigation and enhancement, so FDOT wants to know how to prioritize purchases. He asked to see if there is a way to incorporate that into the Guiding Principle, so we have a way forward to purchase conservation land and promote Florida panther habitat. • Ms. Kigel asked Mark Easley to participate in questions if needed and presented the new Florida Panther Guiding Principle with Instructions. She asked for questions and dialogue. • Ms. Kiselewski asked for wildlife groups to comment. She called on Elizabeth Fleming and Jason Lauritsen if they wanted to add any comments about the presentation or Guiding Principle based on their expertise. • <i>Ms. Fleming said she was very pleased to see full Florida panther Guiding Principle. She knows that seemed missing and it’s good that it’s here and we have something to comment on and add to. She noted that this focuses exclusively on south of the Caloosahatchee River in the presentation, not necessarily wording. As she mentioned, the Florida panther breeding population is located primarily</i> 		

south of the river, but in order for panthers to continue to expand range they need to be able to move northward as they have begun to do. The M-CORES project can play a major role in whether or not that is successful. **She said they have to take into account north of the river impacts in the project area.**

- Ms. Kigel said when you look at Guiding Principle bullet 1 there is a reason for expanding it to say Fish and Wildlife Service to capture the entire panther focus area, which includes the north area. That was used to encapsulate comments from the Task Force. She then asked Mr. Dailey and Mr. Setchell to comment.
- Mr. Dailey noted that the priority list developed now is subject to change. He said they have expanded it to include the Fish-Eating Creek ecosystem which is north of the Caloosahatchee. That happens to be the Florida Forever priority rank #1. He said FDOT anticipates looking further north as well.
- Mr. Setchell asked to go back a couple slides (Slide 61) to show that north of the Caloosahatchee River, the pink is the north focus area and will need to be addressed by US Fish and Wildlife Service. He added that the evaluation is going to be a data driven scientific approach. Looking north of the Caloosahatchee River, there aren't as many collision spots to help identify crossings. There may not be a large number of panthers today, but we want to plan for what may be in the future. Wildlife cameras, least cost pathways, and help establish crossings.
- Ms. Kigel added that the Instructions and coordination with the Panther Recovery Implementation Team (PRIT) doesn't end here. According to Instructions, as Mr. Dailey showed, a process for prioritization will include coordination with the Florida PRIT and others to make sure areas north of the Caloosahatchee are included as well.
- Ms. Kiselewski said to Ms. Fleming's other question, we are taking mostly major comments today and minor ones can be sent to her or Marlon Bizerra.
- Ms. Fleming wanted to follow up with a few examples and will also follow up with written comments. **She had been suggesting that the Task Force mention "Florida panther focus area" because that's what US Fish and Wildlife uses when it consults on specific projects, but it's not all the important habitat.** She called attention to two new sources of information. Since it's such a long-range plan, projects will take place over many years. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) just released a new report of Florida panther distribution north of the river, just sent to PRIT and will forward it. Besides panther focus area, being used at this time, US Fish and Wildlife are undertaking a panther species status assessment which should have the most up to date data on the panther and should be available by January 2021. **She hoped that that is taken into account.** She wanted to **suggest some wording that says there is additional important habitat. The new information should be included.**
- Mr. Jason Watts chimed in saying they went back and forth internally about calling out specific things or make it general/broad and said, "scientifically proven habitat." He is looking forward to seeing information but reminded her it may go back to a general statement to try to include all of habitat that may be impacted by the project.
- Ms. Kiselewski called Jason Lauritsen then Wendy Mathews.
- Mr. Lauritsen thanked the staff for taking the detail and attention to this issue. He appreciated including some acquisition lands on the list. He suggested that Ms. Fleming share the document more broadly that she referenced as the FWC report to the panther team, he would like to look at it. He also suggested we look at the primary dispersal zone in pink. There are some pathways that were identified by a cooperative group project in 2013 that indicate some wildlife corridors with panther implications in the pink area further to the west. He would like to make sure that those remain on the radar for any road pathways when looking at acquisition to make sure we are looking at acquisition from the framework of how we can ensure subsequent development with intersections might impact connectivity and habitat. If we can secure vulnerable portions of corridors, that would be helpful to identify additional lands.
- Ms. Kiselewski called Wendy Mathews then Paul Gray.

- Ms. Mathews noted that we touched on earlier this morning the topic of statute language as it relates to the charge of the Task Force, and one of them is to address impacts of construction of project within the panther corridor and evaluate crossing features. She appreciated conversations we've had in previous meetings where we touched on purchasing lands and wildlife crossings and fencing; and greatly appreciated that you heard us and that we have a Guiding Principle related entirely to panther, but TNC feels evaluation of panther habitat/population on future development and potential new toll road is missing. TNC feels the need to fill this gap so they hired retired FWC employee Randy Kautz, part of PRIT to evaluate known data sets that pertain to Florida panther and wildlife and prepared a report that lays out impacts of the M-CORES project on Florida panther in the Southwest-Central Florida Corridor project area. It is available on The Nature Conservancy's website (nature.org) in the newsroom section. She highlighted a couple of things the report indicates. Human population growth and sea level rise will impact lands used by panther. One of the comments of analysis that the data forecast that over one million acres of Florida panther habitat in the panther focus area will be lost in the coming decades. Not only is habitat going to be lost but these linkages as well. The report discussed the female panther movement and the indirect and direct impacts of roads with loss of habitat. The potential co-location roads that Mr. Will Watts showed on the paths and courses maps with US-27, SR-29, US-17 and SR-31 and any new roads are all in the heart of panther habitat. These routes have not been sufficiently addressed; we don't know how this will impact the panther. We have seen great work that the FDOT District One has done with wildlife crossings in Southwest Florida, and there's confidence that the **Florida panther will be accommodated by FDOT, but FDOT doesn't control future development. The sprawl with interchanges and development is a problem. She suggested that Instructions include direction for FDOT to review the five-year status update on the Florida panther during the planning process/PD&E. The report should be available, sometime in the coming months and FWC are working on that by 2021.** Haven't really discussed interchanges and that's going to be the problem area. She **suggested some sort of Instructions on "no interchanges within panther focus area lands."** She was just trying to impress that we have one chance to do this with a federally endangered species, and we need to do it right.
- Ms. Kiselewski said her materials were received and will be sent out the next time Task Force member materials are distributed. She suggested that if any of local governments want to weigh in about roads/sprawl moving forward, Commissioner Ahern might be one of the ones impacted by this. She called on Paul Gray.
- Dr. Gray stated that he **wondered if it would be worth it in the first paragraph to mention wildlife crossings can be used by a variety of wildlife**, and also improves highway safety by avoiding wildlife collisions. Panther is an umbrella species in this regard.
- Ms. Kigel noted that she knows it can be confusing, but they still have the Guiding Principles on wildlife and plant habitats, and there are Instructions there that address wildlife crossings as well. She understood his comment that any panther discussions should keep other wildlife in mind.
- Ms. Kiselewski called Gary Ritter.
- Mr. Ritter noted that staff might consider coordination with agricultural operations. US FWC coordinates with operations, many of them along the corridor will have prime panther habitat and roaming habitat. Some cow/calf operations then become a bit vulnerable. **Though FWC had a program where they work with farmers, it may be something that should be considered to be added here.**
- Ms. Kigel noted that they added language under conservation lands for coordination with agriculture owners, but it may be considered here. All overlap to a certain degree.
- Ms. Estenoz said that she would defer and rely heavily on fellow Task Force members who have expertise and are involved intimately with panther conservation in regard to lands, what words to use, etc. She had two broader comments. To Ms. Mathew's point, the Tampa Bay Times article talking about the work The Nature Conservancy has done. By taking a similar approach to panthers as we've taken to

other natural areas (avoid, restore, minimize, and mitigate), we are falling short because in the case of panthers, we are already so close to the brink of losing this species, and absent any new transportation planning, already the remaining area for panther is threatened. **She expressed being uncomfortable with the priority approach.** If there is anything that is going to make us say we can't do this specific corridor, it's going to be the Florida panther. The second comment she wanted to make was related to what was asked to Ms. Shen earlier – land acquisition – she is still concerned and confused. If land acquisition is a necessary part of the corridor, FDOT may be able to raise money and will look at other sources. Ms. Estenoz was not sure about how this results in a net positive if existing (non-transportation) funding is used. She then asked if FDOT will be using eminent domain or willing sellers to acquire land.

- Mr. Nandam had a two-part answer. Following the presentation by Mr. Dailey, direct impacts by the corridor are going to be mitigation and enhancements addressing impacts of the corridor. Any conservation land acquisitions FDOT can take care of as part of its prime responsibility to address impacts. Going beyond that, the statute allows for innovative acquisition techniques for conservation lands and the focus is on the most impactful. At this point, we can't tell if it will be fully or partially funded, it depends on a willing seller. He said we could use eminent domain if it is part of the corridor. He called on Mr. Jason Watts to clarify.
- Mr. Jason Watts noted Mr. Nandam answered the second part of the question well but for the first part it is important to note that there is a lot of current issues with current transportation facilities out there and how traffic impacts panthers. He said they are looking at M-CORES, especially co-location, to have great opportunity to fix issues that currently exist through co-location. He noted they look to a future being safer for panthers and us in a better position than today, as FDOT goes through and builds new portions of M-CORES, FDOT will retrofit old portions of co-located facilities to make safer for panthers.
- **Ms. Estenoz**
- **would like to see this put more explicitly into the Guiding Principles, that panther will be better off than it is today.** She went back to Ms. Mathews' comment to support it and express anxiety about it. She suggested that in detailed Instructions we **need to add something about induced development.** It's hard for FDOT, but the notion that in the PD&E it's not just impacts of road but impact of reasonably foreseeable induced development that the road would contribute to. That has to be part of feasibility. All of the growth management rules and laws that prevent urban sprawl, the calculation of urban sprawl changes once there's a road on the ground. Once you put in road, perhaps it's not urban sprawl anymore. She believes this Guiding Principle demands a very thorough approach. She hadn't looked at the report but thinks that they have touched an important point here that requires a little additional work.
- Ms. Kiselewski noted that we'll touch on that with interchanges and connectivity this afternoon.
- Mr. Nandam wanted to bring focus to the Guiding Principle that addresses consistency with comprehensive plans and pointed out that there is language in the statute that brings the attention to updates to the comprehensive plans and attention to protecting environment and how it relates to land development around interchanges. He noted that the Task Force may want to think about Instructions to focus this particular portion of instruction related to the statute around interchanges. Tolloed facilities/Turnpike are limited access so focus on interchanges.
- Ms. Kigel added to what Ms. Kiselewski and Mr. Nandam said. She noted there are specific Instructions relative to interchanges and coordination with local/regional governments, and also noted environmental considerations there. This is a logical place to start that to make sure everyone knows we have more specific Instructions related to this later on.
- Ms. Kiselewski called on Ms. Estenoz.
- Ms. Estenoz appreciated this and that we have an opportunity to do this right in the Guiding Principle regarding to interchanges. She said it is not the burden of local governments to protect a species like the panther, it is a state and federal responsibility. **She felt strongly that something about interchanges**

and induced development should be in this Guiding Principle otherwise we are transferring the burden to local governments, and they have a role in it, but it's not their burden.

- Ms. Kiselewski called on Commissioner John Ahern.
- Mr. Ahern noted that Glades County is two-thirds in the new zone on the north side of the river, Glades is committed to working with everyone, to look at the comp plan and try to adjust as we need to take everything into consideration. He was just mentioning that Glades County is on board with working with everyone on that.
- Ms. Kiselewski called on Ms. Fleming.
- Ms. Fleming wanted to underscore these points. She said she made them too. This may be an area with conflicting goals in terms of promoting economic development within communities or connecting them versus limiting access on a toll road, which was one of major reasons the closest project we have a comparison with is when SR-84 through Collier County was upgraded to I-75 through public lands. There was continuous fencing, 13 bridges modified for hydrological flow and wildlife flow, 24 underpasses for panther, and no more interchanges. There weren't supposed to be any interchanges, but the only exception was SR-29 and few problems with I-75. I-75 improved the situation for the panther. Wildlife underpasses and fencing, also limited access, allowed panthers to avoid being able to get on the road. There were a few problems; it was completed in 1993; it had a 100% success rate until later on. The place where panther access the road is around SR-29. SR-29 is one of the most dangerous roads in Florida for the panther. **We need to talk about avoiding sprawl and inducing growth in this area.**
- Ms. Kiselewski called on Wendy Mathews.
- Ms. Mathews thanked everyone for the conversation on sprawl/interchanges issues. **The Nature Conservancy would like to see specific interchange Instructions language added to the Guiding Principle and how interchanges become a problem for the panther.**
- Mr. Jason Watts backed up to a conversation a while back about I-75 being a good project for the panther. Part of that is because I-75 is a completely limited access facility which is easier to manage for FDOT. Everything during PD&E and impacts to species/people/community is a balancing act. The Task Force has expressed interest in co-locating facilities. Co-location also removes the idea that it can be completely limited access, so there needs to be a creative approach. He heard a comment, that **needs to be an instruction at the very least, that we need to place high priority on not including interchanges in panther habitat or focus area.** He isn't sure that is possible but should be the last resort. Based on this conversation they will look at adding an instruction that addresses that at least as an aspirational goal. He also pointed out that this Guiding Principle is in addition to what we normally do. For a new facility we deal with FWC a lot and have to go through formal consultation. There are lots of steps that aren't included, this is the icing on the cake for us to do more. This gives us good guidance, but we will add a broad Instruction to capture what was said today.
- Ms. Kiselewski notes that one more person has raised their hand, Matt Caldwell.
- Mr. Caldwell wanted to reiterate what Mr. Jason Watts said, which is having a vision to only have interchanges at other state highway facilities. That commitment, which is what happened with I-75, solves so many rough edges that we have already talked about. It drives the project to existing facilities, drives the process to that if you limit interchanges to other state facilities. It doesn't put onus on local governments, but forces the project to always be a stem to stern priority for the state to really have that regional view and think about, as FDOT designs and operates the corridor, not just initial design/construction but any potential future changes, if FDOT commits to limited access with state facilities, all other issues will get addressed.
- Mr. Jason Watts said he thinks it's a wonderful idea. If we were building a completely limited access facility, that would be an easy ask. As we co-locate there will be partially limited access and partially not. We need to look at how to craft that, he doesn't disagree with the principle. We need to see how it relates to co-location.

- Ms. Kigel moved the discussion to other Guiding Principles starting with Conservation Lands.
- Ms. Kiselewski mentioned that for the remainder of the draft report discussion we'll show the report, which will also be discussed in the afternoon.
- Ms. Kigel talked through changes since Task Force Meeting 7 for Guiding Principles 6, 8, and 9: conservation lands (6), wildlife and plant habitats (8), and water resources (9). She then opened the conversation to comments from Task Force members.
- Ms. Kiselewski called on Ms. Fleming.
- *Ms. Fleming had a comment that was identical for Guiding Principles and Instructions 6 and 8. The first instruction seems to have been confusing all along. She believed it used to say "managed" lands which were Florida natural inventory defined lands managed for conservation as these different entities. **She would like to make the first two Instructions consistent and include all those entities. She would like to have these be identical and more comprehensive. She said she would submit in writing if that is helpful.***
- *Ms. Kigel called on Mr. Jason Watts for a response to the managed lands aspect.*
- *Mr. Jason Watts said he is happy to look at what she has. What they were trying to capture in the first bullet was to make sure they weren't left off. These were things we originally said we weren't going to put a new corridor through. If there are other areas, please suggest them and we will look at those. We went back and forth with what "managed" meant, so we wanted to make sure we captured what we meant and the specific explanation. We look forward to what Ms. Fleming has to send.*
- *Ms. Fleming asked why would we put "to avoid" for national wildlife refuges for wildlife habitat but not for conservation lands? She doesn't think anyone envisioned putting a new road through a national wildlife refuge.*
- *Mr. Jason Watts didn't disagree, just remember all of these will be read together. If it's in one, it's for the project. He understood her point, **they could put general statement at the front because they are read together.** We will look at what Ms. Fleming sends.*
- *Ms. Kiselewski called on Gary Ritter.*
- *Mr. Ritter said under Guiding Principle 6 (conservation lands) there is protecting environmental issues for agriculture. You have "coordinate with landowners and...." but if you go up to Guiding Principle 5 with agriculture, you probably can take that kind of wording out of that area because you already have it under conservation easements. We have the environmental and the protect, since you have conservation easement, we might be talking about something different specifically for agriculture. Just a suggestion, in draft **Guiding Principle 5 you can probably take "environmental" and "protect" out and just say enhance and minimize impacts for agriculture lands and other productive lands with economic significance** because environmental is already covered under conservation lands.*
- *Mr. Jason Watts noted that was done intentionally because there was a potential category of agricultural lands that aren't necessarily in conservation easements but do have environmental significance, and we wanted to make sure they were captured. He didn't think its duplicative but will double check.*
- *Mr. Ritter also had that in mind because there are some agricultural lands that aren't in conservation easements but are significant. The other thing under the agricultural lands Guiding Principle is you don't need to get into the weeds with having USDA irrigated crop land, etc. **That all can be scratched out and just say "apply Guiding Principle to prime farmlands, timberlands, Florida rural family lands" and so forth. It's not necessary to get into irrigated and non-irrigated agricultural areas.***
- *Ms. Kigel suggested coming back to this when we go to the agricultural Guiding Principle. Some is by reference only, so we will leave that on screen. She wanted to talk about what Mr. Jason Watts mentioned with agriculture lands and conservation lands that was added. That was a direct result of a couple of Task Force members that wanted to add language there relative to environmental sensitivity. The discussion suggested that those Instructions are more on true land use and economic development*

use. To pull in environmental sensitivity aspect that was very focused on that. We can go back and take a look at that, but she wanted to share where it came from.

- Ms. Kiselewski called on Tom Graef then Shannon Estenoz.
- Mr. Graef echoed Ms. Fleming regarding the refuge, park and wildlife management being scattered seems like an opportunity to combine all that.
- Ms. Kigel apologized for the confusion and noted the overlap within these Guiding Principles.
- Ms. Estenoz appreciated that language in the water resources Guiding Principle regarding CERP (Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan) and the Kissimmee River. She said she tried to capture the longevity of CERP within the language. Projects are in different stages of planning/construction, so she wanted to include “during the life of the M-CORES project.” **She suggested we don’t want FDOT to come in and then preclude options in a future CERP project. It may be implicit, but she would like opportunity to think of a more artful way to say that.** She said she has experienced that in other parts of the system, and this is very true for FDOT/transportation, which tends to move faster than CERP projects do. Transportation gets out ahead and then there is an issue of how to fit restoration project around existing FDOT projects. She also wanted to discuss nutrient management in these basins, which she had given suggestions for but was not sure made it in the draft report. **There needs to be some acknowledgement of nutrient reduction as something that M-CORES could enhance.** That is a huge challenge in the Kissimmee Basin that flows into Okeechobee. We don’t want to make that problem bigger. This is also in the Caloosahatchee and other receiving bodies. This is an environmental enhancement objective that M-CORES could contribute to. Not sure why language didn’t make it in.
- Ms. Kigel noted that there are probably overarching things and that’s why you don’t see specific language. The “restore and enhance water quality and flow...” Those design elements are not limiting; they are to provide an example. Also, two bullets down places a high priority on avoiding adverse impacts. Those would certainly be overarching Instructions to which the nutrient example would be inclusive in that, but she understands it wasn’t jumping out as a specific instruction.
- Ms. Estenoz said she may come back with a comment clause of “including but not limited to.” It’s a big enough issue in the South Florida water world that it might be worth enumerating specifically. With respect to water supply, she asked if there was a discussion about regional water supply plans.
- Ms. Kigel noted this Guiding Principle in the report is split between two pages, we will see it on the first page.
- Ms. Estenoz said this gets to her concern about increased demands on the Caloosahatchee, C-43 canal, or Lake Okeechobee that we want to avoid.
- Mr. Jason Watts offered input on her first point, on CERP, that he agrees completely. The intent of the language is about being consistent with planned projects. We have to look out ahead, and that’s what it means to him and the Department, but if Ms. Estenoz has language that says that please feel free to offer it, but that was our goal.
- Ms. Estenoz responded that she sees included the water quality or hydrologic restoration project. She made a call to other Task Force members to make sure it’s comprehensive enough.
- Ms. Kiselewski called on Jason Lauritsen, Ken Doherty and then Paul Gray.
- Mr. Lauritsen was unsure as to whether his comment would fit best in **Guiding Principle 6 or 8, but the second bullet in both, dealing with land acquisition, it might be helpful to add language along the lines of placing emphasis on connectivity gaps and bottlenecks identified in the Florida Ecological Greenways Network (FEGN) Model.** That is a model that gets updated from time to time so we need to say, “the latest model.” The idea is to get to the reality that the narrow bottlenecks/small bottlenecks between less attractive parcels don’t necessarily rank highly.
- Ms. Kigel asked if the language was “place a high priority on.”

- *Mr. Lauritsen agreed that the language is “place emphasis on” or “priority on.” He didn’t want to suggest that these pieces be purchased instead of or in lieu of, but that they should still be considered. These gaps and bottlenecks. A starting place to find them would be the FEGN model.*
- *Ms. Kigel responded that they will take look at and see about some language to address the thought here.*
- *Mr. Lauritsen asked about another one related to mitigation and enhancement. The element in Guiding Principle 8 (wildlife and plants), the third bullet down, talking about wildlife crossings and elevated roadways and design elements related to wildlife corridors. He doesn’t know how to place this, it is just a suggestion, **when we determine mitigation values, we need to make sure we include not simply new road alignments but also increased traffic loads on arterials.** Some of the segments we talked about, specifically off of I-75 or SR-82, are connected to areas with high panther mortality on existing roads. He would like to make sure when we look at mitigation and enhancement, just adding another segment nearby will increase impacts on arterial roadways, and somehow figure out a way to mitigate the “with project” impacts and enhance the “historic legacy” impacts. He wanted to flag that as an important consideration when determining how much to elevate or fit a fence. His last request was related to land acquisition. There are a number of riparian conservation holdings along rivers that are within the Florida Wildlife Corridor, or the FEGN priority 3 layer, which are not adequately wide enough to serve as a wildlife corridor. He would **like to have some consideration placed on increasing the width of wildlife corridors**, so they are suitable to serve as wildlife corridors in the mix of acquisitions.*
- *Ms. Kigel asked if that was related to bottleneck discussion.*
- *Mr. Lauritsen responded “yes.” He doesn’t want to overlook that some areas have conservation holdings, but they are not always adequate.*
- *Ms. Kigel thanked him for his comments and said they would look at the language to address that concern.*
- *Ms. Kiselewski called on Commissioner Ken Doherty.*
- *Mr. Doherty wanted to mention that he supports what Mr. Ritter mentioned relative to the first Guiding Principle, and also simplifying the first instruction. Relative to wildlife/plant habitats, he received a request for the Task Force to consider in the next to last bullet concerning Lake Wales Ridge. The concern was it was written a little too broadly, and **suggested it be changed to say, “Place a high priority on avoiding new adverse impacts to remaining high quality habitat in the Lake Wales Ridge.”** That is not a Charlotte County issue, but thought it was important for the Task Force to consider. They feel as though it is already highly impacted, and this language would help tighten it up.*
- *Ms. Kiselewski noted that staff hasn’t been asking about consensus from other Task Force members weighing in. Please do weigh in if you hear something you are not comfortable with going forward. She called on Paul Gray then Gary Ritter.*
- *Dr. Gray had a wordsmithing question. At the top of page 21, the bullet Ms. Estenoz referred to, change SFWMD to just “water management districts.” Also add Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to this because in the Lake Okeechobee Management Plan, projects on Hwy-70 have water quality improvement projects. So, this would be consistent with DEP plans.*
- *Ms. Kiselewski called on Mr. Ritter.*
- *Mr. Ritter said Dr. Gray must have been reading his mind, he had the exact same two suggestions that he requested. Especially after listening to Ms. Estenoz, the basin management plans are a really important component that we should be consistent with. Dr. Gray is right that there is more than one water management district. He also agreed with Mr. Doherty that he received feedback from stakeholders concerning Lake Wales Ridge.*
- *Ms. Kigel responded that it is nice to hear stakeholders are communicating with Mr. Ritter. She then moved to agricultural land uses Guiding Principle and Instructions (5). She suggested the Task Force come back around to the discussion from earlier starting with Gary Ritter.*

- Mr. Ritter reiterated that he doesn't think it's necessary under the first bullet to have irrigated/non irrigated designation to that. **You can just say "apply the Guiding Principle to prime farmlands and timber lands" and the rest looks good.** He also mentioned that it was suggested to him that we look at "protect and environmental significant" in draft Guiding Principle. He was ambivalent about changing and would like to hear what other Task Force members have to say about that.
- Mr. Doherty said he agrees with Mr. Ritter and **suggested the Guiding Principle change to "enhance and minimize impacts to productive agriculture lands and other productive lands with economic significance."** **Relative to Instructions, the first Instruction he agreed with what the suggestion to change it to "apply the Guiding Principle to prime farmlands, timberlands, Florida rural and family lands, protection program lands and farmlands, and preservation areas designated in local government comprehensive plans."** That just simplifies it.
- Ms. Kiselewski called on Commissioner Penny Taylor.
- Ms. Taylor had a question that she would like to know if it should be left out, **is importance of agriculture not only for food supply but also the importance for water recharge and panthers.** When we talk about major economic drivers and areas of environmental sensitivity, she would like to ask for support to add those to it because that sometimes gets lost when you think about agriculture in a way that doesn't look at the broad use of agriculture lands.
- Ms. Kigel noted as a point of clarification, in the conservation lands area staff added something specific to coordinate with landowners and operators of lands that also serve a conservation purpose. Perhaps that could be in other environmental purposes. That was specifically put there for this to remain focused, maybe other Task Force members want to weigh in.
- Ms. Kiselewski called for comments from Paul Gray then Gary Ritter. Then the Task Force would break for lunch.
- Dr. Gray was not sure about the definition but **looking at prime farmlands and a lot of ranches are not included in "prime farmlands". Mentioning ranchlands may be worthwhile doing.** The second bullet mentions agricultural farms, and in broad terms a ranch is a farm, but we should mention ranches.
- Mr. Ritter said he wouldn't disagree with Dr. Gray on that, "farm and ranchlands" would be fine for clarification. To Ms. Taylor's comment, he senses what the recharge situation is in the purpose to protect environmental resources. It is intuitive that it would involve recharge as well. In the earlier discussion on the panther, we should go back and talk with USFWS and get some verbiage about their panther program and agricultural operations because there was a comment concerning we have conservation lands but a lot of agricultural lands provide good panther habitats that are not under conservation easements. He mentions he is not as familiar as he should be with USFWS and the program they have, but that is something we may want to look into and put under panther part.
- Ms. Kigel thanked Mr. Ritter and called on the final two hands up to close this discussion on agriculture.
- Ms. Taylor said she could write something to staff, but highlighted that it is increasingly important that, as we grow, we understand that nothing is siloed and it's all intertwined, and agriculture is extremely important, but it's also important for the environment. She liked the idea of finding out from US wildlife people what their wording is, but it is critical that we show that connectivity all through this document.
- Mr. Dickman noted that on the **Guiding Principle referring to productive lands and environmental significance, that is associated with habitat as well as groundwater recharge, so he does support that.** Where it could be placed, he's not sure, but he would be supportive of that and unpacking it a little more.
- Ms. Kigel closed by saying she was seeing a bit of difference in environmental sensitivity in or out of this Guiding Principle, and the attempt to accommodate it in the environmental Guiding Principles so it's not lost. There is a lot of overlap, and it's hard to put in one place or another to be satisfactory to everyone. She wants to make sure that it's all captured because it's seen as a package. No Guiding Principle or Instruction has a priority over another.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mr. Nandam recalled that conversation happened at the last Task Force meeting. He thanked the Task Force members for the engaging conversation throughout morning and called for a lunch break until 1:30 PM. 		
12:30 PM	Break for Lunch	
1:30 PM	Review and Refine Draft Final Report (continued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marlon Bizerra, FDOT Production Lead Beth Kigel, Task Force Support Team Karen Kiselewski, Facilitator Task Force Members
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mr. Nandam welcomed everyone back from lunch. Ms. Kiselewski reminded everyone about the public comment period and the process for how to submit or provide comments. Ms. Kigel started the discussion with Guiding Principle 1 (Consistency with Statewide, Regional, and Local Plans) and discussed the changes to the Instructions. Ms. Kiselewski opened the floor for questions and comments. There were none. Ms. Kigel moved onto Guiding Principle 2 (Maximize Use of Existing Facilities) and discussed changes to third Instruction. <i>Dr. Gray recommended modifying Guiding Principle 2 with a qualifier of “develop new facilities if needed” instead of just saying “develop new facilities” to be more careful.</i> <i>Ms. Kigel pointed out that the preamble may or may not meet this need.</i> <i>Dr. Gray expressed that he is uncomfortable with the statement just saying “develop new facilities” without having a qualifier. He would prefer to be conservative.</i> <i>Mr. Jason Watts stated that, when looking at the beginning, it’s a priority order and you only get to two if you can’t do one.</i> <i>Mr. Lauritsen wanted to discuss the second cross cutting principle – third Instruction dealing with the co-location of utility facilities. He assumed this would imply power line right-of-way and things of that nature. From the standpoint of wildlife corridor and habitat connectivity, a power line right-of-way with no road is an invisible feature in the landscape for many species. Co-location with a road is really like a greenfield new build rather than something like a co-location around an existing road. He is not comfortable adding to the co-location priority Instruction. He would like to retain the Instruction that power line utilities may fit somewhere here but hopes the priority could be reduced. He looks at utility facilities as rather neutral when it comes to connectivity issues for habitat.</i> <i>Ms. Kigel stated that “utility” was added based on a comment from the Task Force. She suggested adding some language about “if it’s already a disturbed area” or something of that nature.</i> <i>Mr. Jason Watts stated that he has heard this a few times and perhaps there should be a distinction between co-locating on a new facility versus existing. He suggested that this could be split into two different items with one having a higher priority than the other.</i> <i>Mr. Lauritsen stated that the dominant issue affecting wildlife is traffic. Even pavement associated with servicing utilities would have nominal traffic compared to any facility associated with M-CORES.</i> <i>Mr. Nandam stated that he thought this was a good point and that there should be a focus on the conflict side of it.</i> <i>Ms. Steed understands what the point is when you think about utilities in their entirety. Adding up all the things like electric power lines, water lines, wastewater lines, and broadband has an impact on construction, relocation, and reconstruction which can have a very negative impact on the habitat in many cases. The idea is to “evaluate opportunities.” Evaluate the opportunities and nature of those</i> 		

utilities that could be positive for utilities, cost, future disruption. This doesn't mean all utilities. She doesn't have a problem with this but understands the point.

- Ms. Kigel discussed Guiding Principle 12 (Connectivity to Regional and Local Transportation Network). There were no changes here related to comments, but she wanted to point out that interchanges are addressed here.
- Mr. Ritter asked if “areas with compatible land uses” could incorporate all land uses such as agriculture (Instructions in second bullet).
- Ms. Kiselewski confirmed that this was the case.
- Mr. Nandam prompted the Task Force to focus on this Guiding Principle based on the prior conversation about the Florida panther and interchanges. This Guiding Principle addresses this and he wanted to ensure that the conversation carried forward to this Guiding Principle.
- Commissioner Bill McDaniel wanted to make the suggestion that this topic should be revisited later in the afternoon as well as there may be some Task Force members who have not yet returned from lunch. He did not concur with Mr. Caldwell's suggestion of prioritizing interchange locations at the state highway system. There are some local roads on a regional basis that should and could fit into the interconnection. For the first Instruction, Mr. Caldwell said to limit to state highway connections to limit sprawl and development that happens after a road is brought in. This can be sufficiently covered by matching up with local and regional planning efforts through which this corridor actually goes. Mr. Jason Watts regularly says that these things should be looked at as prioritizations. He **suggested adding in the state highway system as the priority** and that it would fix a lot of things that Ms. Fleming shared about the SR 29 and I-75 interchange and the graphs brought forward with known negative impacts for traffic fatalities of Florida panther. By prioritizing interchange locations first at state roads and then at regional roads if needed, that would draw in local communities once the legislation and FDOT drew the line on a map. Individuals and communities would have the opportunity to weigh in on local roads during the PD&E process but FDOT would come at it from that priority system.
- Ms. Kigel stated that this was an interesting point and that this Guiding Principle was put forward in Virtual Meeting 4. The language in the first bullet was changed to say regional roads awhile back and she would be interested to hear Task Force members weigh in on the prioritization idea.
- Mr. McDaniel had one last point which is why he wanted to bring it up again to hear from other Task Force members. The prioritization should start at state highway system intersections and then regional.
- Ms. Fleming stated that she looked at this ahead of the meeting and it seemed as though there was an attempt to consolidate all of the interchange discussion. With earlier comments in different sections, including conservation lands and wildlife, she doesn't feel as though this gets to the concerns expressed about the panther. There was discussion about revisiting the panther with Instructions and this doesn't get at the questions and concerns raised in the other discussion. She can see that, under the member comments from the last meeting, someone suggested limited access as a tool and not identifying or building interchanges until surrounding areas were placed under conservation easement. She doesn't see that reflected here in the actual Instructions.
- Ms. Kigel stated that part of that is due to interchanges being discussed in two areas. There is discussion about coordination with localities with their comprehensive plans as one piece (Guiding Principle 1). The remainder has made its way into the Guiding Principle discussed here. There was an attempt to focus it here to try and locate it in one place.
- Mr. Lauritsen had a question about existing or precedent interchange management plans. He would like examples that could be shared about when interchange management plans were developed that protected conservation areas. Typically, there are plans to foster growth and economic development so he wondered if there is a past example where they were used for protection that could provide a roadmap.

- Ms. Shen stated that she is trying to pull together a study to look at some of these best practices. Conservation is an element, but she doesn't have the study completed yet.
- Mr. Lauritsen stated that he looked at the pathways shared at the last meeting and made a mental note of certain areas. He could see from local county growth plans the possibility of encouraging more housing/development in those areas and the consequence of the pressure on habitats. He acknowledged that this is a tough balancing act and looks forward to the report.
- Ms. Shen stated that they are working with local governments **to disseminate best practices and provide assistance – to work with them on their local vision as to what they want to see.**
- Ms. Kigel stated that an example which came to mind is Donald Ross Road in Palm Beach County where the locality worked to preserve the environment while keeping the intent of the interchange.
- Mr. Doherty agreed with Ms. Kigel about the first Instruction point that this was brought up in the third or fourth Task Force meeting, specifically regarding CR 74. He thought that limiting to the current state roads might not be appropriate. CR 74 was a former state road in the 1970s and a lot of these were turned over to the counties back in the 70's. He **suggested that anything that was a former state secondary road should be a priority.** This would capture CR 74 and any others. In general, with regard to the regional road concept, there should be a definition of what is meant by regional roads. The current state and former secondary state roads could be the way to go.
- Ms. Mathews expressed her confusion as to whether or not there would be Instructions on interchanges on both the connectivity and Florida panther Guiding Principles.
- Ms. Kigel asked Mr. Jason Watts to confirm but there was some discussion specifically for the panther.
- Mr. Jason Watts stated that this all needs to be read together. Look to see if there is a statement in the Panther Guiding Principle referencing interchanges or beef this one up a bit. Interchanges have a pretty elaborate process and requires a balance with local government control around interchanges and development. You can build interchanges to develop but also try to not negatively impact the habitat.
- Ms. Mathews stated that there **needs to be a clear statement somewhere that the number of interchanges and sprawl in panther focus areas needs to be limited.** She wondered if purchasing lands in the environmental resources section gets at that.
- Mr. Nandam pointed at that all the Guiding Principles are equal and have equal importance. There are several Guiding Principles that make cross cutting statements so they may be interrelated. The Task Force should make an effort not to replicate Instructions between Guiding Principles with the understanding that they all have equal value.
- Ms. Steed understands what we're trying to accomplish here in terms of a hierarchy of roads but stated that all those secondary state roads included everything in this study region from grove/cattle roads that were paved over to major roadways. This can't be used as a default as they vary vastly. All the counties in the study area have an MPO who have plans and work with FDOT on functional classifications which are included in their LRTPs. There may be some things that are slightly different, but there is somewhat of a definition of what would fall within the regional roadway category, which may not be multi-county. MPOs are in a better position to define what constitutes the roadway hierarchy to have interchanges on. This has implications throughout the network, and she thinks that that hierarchy should come from the MPOs. This needs to be in their plan/network and have proper classification. **Avoid putting them in places that are not adequate from a transportation standpoint to have an interchange and sustain it over time in terms of traffic, and where it appropriately fits into a network, whether a local or state road.**
- Ms. Kiselewski wanted to check in with the Task Force about their level of comfort of using "regional roads" if the MPOs define the regional network which would also tie into Guiding Principle 1.
- Mr. Caldwell stated that he would ultimately defer to this group but wanted to reiterate his earlier comments. He has viewed M-CORES as a way to connect big regions for hurricane evacuation and also allow for this to serve as catalyst for growth in existing rural communities. He recognizes the reality that

many people are worried it's going to create a sprawl event a la the 1950's. By restricting interchanges to state facilities – ultimately if the state thinks there needs to be an interchange it becomes part of a public planning process. Leaving it open-ended to have growth in interchanges exponentially will leave people uneasy about what this project will ultimately be.

- *Ms. Kiselewski called on Gerald Buhr.*
- *Mr. Buhr stated that he likes it the way it is now with coordination with local governments. MPOs are fine, sometimes local politics are such that cities don't get as much input. **He expressed interest in municipalities having input on interchanges.***
- *Mr. Kigel suggested including both statewide and regional roads in the first bullet but to also have two other bullets to make sure it's done in accordance with plans put forth by local governments including Instructions here that take into account items that were discussed.*
- *Mr. Caldwell stated that, if no one feels strongly on it, then he won't be the only one to talk on it. From a 1,000-foot view, if the goal is to see this reach consensus and in thinking about all the groups in this virtual table, to have majority, if not unanimous, it should be standard that interchanges be only state facilities. This could lead to solving long standing friction points like CR 74 where local governments struggle to work out maintenance long term. He thinks it's a way to guarantee that this project ends up laser-focused on connecting major urban areas and not creating negative impacts. How the structure is designed and built will define what it ultimately looks like.*
- *Ms. Kigel restated Mr. McDaniel's earlier proposal of a middle ground of prioritizing of state roads with regional roads being second to that. There may be a middle ground. There is still local coordination to help support optimal locations.*
- *Mr. Caldwell stated that he would defer to the group.*
- *Ms. Kiselewski stated that she did not see any hands and took that to mean that the group would allow state roads followed by regional roads.*
- *Mr. Kigel moved onto Guiding Principle 14 (Emergency Evacuation and Response) and summarized the revisions to the Guiding Principle and Instructions.*
- *Mr. McDaniel stated that he did not understand, in regard to the four new bullet points at bottom, the rationale about improving access to emergency shelters. He **would be happy for this to be deleted.** Emergency evacuation shelters are site-specific locations. Evacuation to get people out should be facilitated, not a circuitous route to get to a particular shelter*
- *Ms. Kigel stated that that was to be supportive of those that would want to transport themselves to shelters. That was probably the intent, but it may not achieve the end properly.*
- *Ms. Steed agreed with Mr. McDaniel. This wouldn't be appropriate exactly for the reason that many evacuation facilities are on local roads (i.e. schools in the middle of neighborhoods). The distance these shelters would be from M-CORES is going to vary from every area in the study area. Shelters are also updated all the time based on changes in guidance from FEMA, state, COVID, storm surge, etc. This would be appropriate not to include.*
- *Ms. Kiselewski asked if any Task Force members felt strongly that it should stay. She stated she did not see any responses.*
- *Ms. Kigel noted the request to delete the second to last bullet.*
- *Ms. Kiselewski called on Pam Johnson.*
- *Ms. Pam Johnson expressed angst about bullet six regarding the need to maintain or improve evacuation time. If the goal is to strengthen emergency management plans why is this road only maintaining evacuation time. Florida has some of highest evacuation times.*
- *Ms. Kigel clarified that Ms. Pam Johnson was referring to the third bullet on line 6 and that she was requesting that "maintain" be removed with the focus on "improve."*

- *Ms. Pam Johnson stated that it seems to go against the idea of strengthening if it's just going to be maintained.*
- *Ms. Kiselewski stated that "maintain" may have been kept partially due to population growth.*
- *Ms. Kigel asked if this could refer to any additional growth that might come with regards to the corridor so there is no loss/going backwards.*
- *Ms. Pam Johnson stated that this satisfied her.*
- *Ms. Kigel moved onto Guiding Principles which had less recent discussion starting with 3 – social and community context. She discussed the only change made (in the Instruction) to specifically designate the Avon Park Air Force Range.*
- *Ms. Kiselewski opened it up to the Task Force for comments.*
- *Mr. Dickman had a question about the first bullet and was unclear about its intention.*
- *Ms. Kigel clarified that the first part relates to the high-level needs that the Guiding Principle is to address. That bullet is a high-level need that was agreed upon to be included as a "potential high-level need" in the report. There will be a discussion on the needs section of the report.*
- *Dr. Gray wondered about the bypass roads being proposed in different areas. He lives in Sebring and when the highway was built it sucked the economy out of downtown. Some other towns, like Wauchula, have a good corridor through the town. He would like to avoid bypasses and thinks it's better to run through town and keep the economic activity where it is today. He would like an Instruction added about "avoid bypass corridors when it is feasible to go through town."*
- *Ms. Kigel clarified that he was requesting the corridor go through towns when appropriate.*
- *Dr. Gray stated that going around the town will have an impact on the economic center as well as the environment. This goes back to the principle of "when possible use existing corridors."*
- *Mr. Dickman had the same thought as he drove through the area and looked at maps. Someone mentioned a bypass around Immokalee, but Immokalee is doing a lot of work to become a really good downtown. Would you want the roads to slow down and go through towns, so they reap economic benefits of them or have roads go around the business district? He mentioned Old 41 here and North Collier and southern Lee into Bonita Springs. Some roads like US 27 in some spaces are huge and have no cars on them at all but when you hit towns you have to slow down quite a bit. The towns would benefit from economic activity.*
- *Mr. Nandam stated that this is a great point, and this is where collaboration with local communities is a big part when it comes to bypasses. When it makes sense, it could go through town or have a bypass. Their vision and their plan are going to define if the corridor should go through the community or avoid it. In looking at main streets, LaBelle in particular has a main street on SR 29 and is trying to become a Main Street Community. This is the type of analysis that needs to be done in collaboration with the local communities.*
- *Mr. Dickman appreciates that as his concern is that towns are putting effort/work into holding unique identities. If there's a bypass, then it bypasses the town and doesn't bring economic opportunity. He wants to make sure efforts aren't for nothing.*
- *Ms. Kigel wanted to point out the Instructions starting on Line 24 which doesn't mention bypasses but gets at this discussion. The Instructions describe collaborating with the community and what they need to enhance what they are trying to achieve for their community context as well as their local businesses and character of the community.*
- *Mr. Nandam stated the key is to work with the local community and what is going to maintain the visibility of the community so they can achieve the vision they are looking for. The term bypass probably needs a different term. The objective is for the corridor to become part of the solution to meet vision of the community.*

- *Mr. Buhr wanted to comment on the point that the last two speakers made. He has a hard time understanding how it would help a small town or city have a limited access facility go through downtown. The right-of-way necessary would be large and would take out a huge portion of the city. He thinks it would be better to run nearby with the benefit of water/wastewater facilities for the interchange areas. He acknowledged that he may be missing something but doesn't see how it would benefit a small city.*
- *Mr. McDaniel thinks this is important and has respect for Mr. Dickman's thoughtfulness to try and imagine the roadway's impact. He encouraged people to speak to their commissioners, as each town/community has a local plan. The Immokalee Area Master Plan contemplates the bypass. There is an agreement with FDOT to turn over the existing SR 29 to the county and then do neighborhood/economic enhancements and not have all that commercial traffic blowing through Immokalee and comingling with our downtown area. Sometimes things happen, like with Sebring and 27. He also saw it over in Bonita Springs with New 41 vs Old 41 (old Bonita died). The community has come back around and done enormous improvements. This is incumbent upon the communities that access points are sufficient to allow for traffic to come and visit the towns but not negatively impact by driving straight through the middle. There are amazing things being done in Immokalee right now to improve the community at large. To Dr. Gray's point, Mr. McDaniel would be hesitant to put in any kind of notion of not doing the bypass but supports language more along the lines of, once the line is on the map, allowing local communities to have their own plans to develop to manage that.*
- *Ms. Fleming wanted to add a little more to the Immokalee discussion. She's not sure if there was an actual PD&E or just the pre-PD&E process, but she went to numerous meetings about the bypass project. There must be quite a record of what ended up happening and what Mr. McDaniel is talking about with planning in Immokalee. At the time, SR 29 was dangerous so there was the thought to route it around but then some large landowners were trying to take advantage of it and have it go by the airport and panther habitat. Local citizens figured out that it would take it away from the city. She thought FDOT settled on an alignment to keep it close to downtown to take advantage of economic benefits. She thought FDOT did an analysis showing that it was the least environmentally damaging. This segment has already been looked at and she hopes M-CORES takes advantage of it.*
- *Mr. Nandam reiterated previous comments about working with the community and working on achieving their vision. This was a good example of how a road, not a bypass, could address safety concerns of SR 29 going through the community.*
- *Ms. Steed stated that she understood everyone's point of view thus far and they are all valid. Redevelopment/economic/transportation are all locational and situational. There are examples across the country and Florida, and it can be good or bad. The two bullet points Ms. Kigel mentioned get to that. One size does not fit all.*
- *Dr. Gray agreed that it was a good conversation and that the two bullet points mentioned by Ms. Kigel cover this question. It is more subtle than "don't build a bypass it sucks your town dry." He acknowledged that he wasn't quite reading those close enough but is covered now.*
- *Ms. Kigel moved on to Guiding Principle 4 (Economic Development). She discussed the few changes to the Instructions and opened it up for discussion.*
- *Ms. Kiselewski indicated no hands were raised.*
- *Ms. Kigel then discussed Guiding Principle 10 (Freight Mobility and Safety). She discussed the only change to the Instructions.*
- *Ms. Kiselewski opened it up to comments from the Task Force. There were none.*
- *Ms. Kigel moved on to Guiding Principle 11 (Transportation Modes) and discussed the one change to the Guiding Principle.*
- *Ms. Kiselewski opened it up for comments. There were none.*

- Ms. Kigel moved to Guiding Principle 13 (Resilience) and discussed the changes to the Guiding Principle and Instructions.
- *Ms. Penny Taylor had a question about wordsmithing and if sea level rise would also include storm surge. Since this corridor is more in the interior, storm surge probably doesn't come into the play. It may already be sufficient, or it may not.*
- *Ms. Kigel stated that sea level rise was specifically mentioned, like with ecotourism. The statement is broader and would not be exclusive of that.*
- Ms. Kiselewski asked for any other comments on Resilience. There were none.
- *Ms. Kigel then moved onto Guiding Principle 15 (Broadband and Other Utilities) and discussed the only changes to the Instructions.*
- *Ms. Taylor asked a question about lines 31 and 32. Her understanding is that providers usually do not come into communities unless the rooftops justify the cost of it. She doesn't know what is meant by leverage partnerships with utility partners. She wondered if M-CORES is going to be a matchmaker and put money in the game. With Line 32 – prioritize connections to community anchor institutions – she wondered if M-CORES is going to run the line from the road/highway to these Institutions at the cost of the taxpayer. Will that be part of the M-CORES program?*
- *Mr. Nandam replied that the Department is not in the business of utilities. This is more about providing space and looking for partnerships, so providers have space and resources necessary to accomplish that work. That is part of the M-CORES program goals.*
- *Mr. Will Watts reinforced Mr. Nandam's statement that there is a bigger role in how broadband gets expanded. FDOT is not a utility owner but there is a senate bill earmarking money for broadband in 2023. Ms. Shen is also working with a new department for statewide broadband. M-CORES can play a role to support it.*
- *Ms. Penny Taylor asked if it is the intention to leverage partnerships and to prioritize connections for communities to bring utilities to specific anchor institutions. If not, they should probably change.*
- *Mr. Will Watts stated that the Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) will have a department for a statewide plan. This will help define priorities in the whole state where broadband is needed. This is charting into new areas for FDOT and they need direction from the Task Force. If the charge is to play a bigger role, then that's what will happen.*
- *Mr. Nandam stated that it is not the business of the Department to address utility needs and incorporate them into the design. There is an opportunity to put that in the forefront not only in the communities but the educational institution and businesses. It can follow an existing route or new alignment. The deciding factor is accessibility from a main access point or trunk line.*
- *Ms. Taylor thinks it's a wonderful aspect to M-CORES and will be very important to dig once and this is covered in the top three bullets. Leveraging partnerships indicates an active involvement in persuading utility providers to service a community. Prioritizing connections to community anchor is similar. She wants some consideration of rewording this. The Department is not going to be an active participant in leveraging partnerships with utility providers, which is pretty much what Line 31 says.*
- *Mr. Nandam understands her point. He mentioned that there are other Instructions that reference involving other partners and will take a look at the language.*
- *Ms. Kigel suggested that the second to last bullet make reference to working with DEO and others for that and the last one can be softened to work with community to identify priorities.*
- *Ms. Taylor was in agreement with the suggested change.*
- *Mr. Bill Ferry thinks the Instructions are fine and capture some things he's said in prior meetings. Regarding Lines 31 and 32, neither one really bothers him, they're broad and there are some benefits to that. **For leveraging partnerships, he suggested wordsmithing to "explore."** In his mind, government partnership is that they are giving a heads up where things are built. Partnership could just be communication. For prioritize connections, the way industry works they may have a line going through*

there. Broadband would build last few hundred feet. He **suggested considering “Encourage connections to community anchor institutions”** assuming this means things like hospitals, rural hospitals, or industrial parks. “Encourage connection” working with permitting and streamline. Neither really gives him pause.

- Ms. Kigel clarified that this refers to hospitals, colleges, libraries, and things of that nature.
- Ms. Steed went back to these two bullet points and when there was a panel on broadband. As an example of a rural county, Hardee County has leveraged partnerships with utility and economic development which leveraged a partnership for county wide broadband. If fiber access could occur through a project like this, that would yield greater capabilities. The primary issues are in rural areas. This is an example of partnerships that could be supported/enhanced. That’s good wording for those kinds of situations. **Prioritize could be changed to “support” or “enhance” since prioritize implies pick and choose.**
- Mr. Mark Futrell stated that this was good.
- Ms. Pam Johnson agreed with changing “prioritize” on Line 32 as was discussed.
- Ms. Kiselewski asked if there were any other comments. There were none.
- Ms. Kigel moved to Guiding Principle 16 (Technology) and discussed the only change to the Instructions.
- Ms. Kiselewski asked if there were any comments or concerns. There were none.
- Ms. Kiselewski mentioned that after the break they would discuss High-Level Needs and the Action Plan.
- Mr. Nandam thanked everyone for getting through the Guiding Principles and Instructions and had everyone take a short break.

3:00 PM	Break	
3:15 PM	Review and Refine Draft Final Report (continued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marlon Bizerra, FDOT Production Lead • Beth Kigel, Task Force Support Team • Karen Kiselewski, Facilitator • Task Force Members
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Kigel went over the Recommendations portion of the report, starting with the Approach and Framework and moving into the High-Level Needs. • Ms. Fleming had a comment on the part referring to primary, secondary, and dispersal. That is all true but there is other panther habitat. There is a significant acreage that has been designated that it’s important panther habitat but there is more than that based on what was discussed earlier. • Ms. Kigel recommended looking at the reference to the breadth of panther habitat in the study overview. This was an opportunity to include a statistic as a point of reference. It was not meant to exclude anything but to show the magnitude of the panther habitat. This will be seen in the study area as well. • Dr. Gray wanted to go back to the first bullet on supporting anticipated population growth on page 10 Lines 29-31. These lines suggest that building new corridors could reduce congestion. If Task Force looked at building new corridors inland would reduce congestion on I-4/I-75 (possibly the second paragraph). He sees a lot of identified problems on existing corridors and looking at a new corridor between US 27 and SR 17 wouldn’t really relieve congestion much and wouldn’t really be traveled. The conclusion of the Heartland Parkway is about the same today as it was back then, or it should be. Based on projected growth/demographics/mobility, he can’t see a need for a new significant corridor. He’s open to looking at trouble spots and looking at solutions. As a Task Force member, he’s prepared to say he doesn’t think there is a need for any significant new corridor and will tell FDOT that. If we make that conclusion now, we can narrow down places to look, the more efficient the planning process will be. Line 		

34 referencing new inland corridors makes him nervous, and he would like to revisit that language with the Task Force regarding the need for significant new corridors.

- Ms. Kigel stated that this paragraph and the next is a compilation of requests for analysis and evaluation. This is based on concerns and other Task Force feedback. It's not a commitment but an evaluation.
- Ms. Penny Taylor agreed with Dr. Gray. This treads in an area that she doesn't think will have consensus. Improving existing roadways is an important task to look at but she can't support reviewing to see if new roadways are needed.
- Ms. Kigel reiterated that this is a High-Level Need, not a Guiding Principle or Instruction.
- Mr. Nandam suggested changing the language to "address the needs as identified." The statement says to look at traffic projections and identify needs accordingly. This leads into a few Guiding Principles, such as improve existing corridors and make safety and operational improvements. This can lead into a Guiding Principle on what the level of analysis would be.
- Dr. Gray stated that he couldn't hear much of what was discussed.
- Mr. Nandam repeated his suggestion to revise language that the Task Force recommends further refinement of traffic projections, including evaluations of improvements necessary to address those impacts. This would leave it more generic since the Guiding Principle gives direction on what to do.
- Dr. Gray wants to see the **removal of the reference to new inland corridors as those are the most expensive/controversial**. He does not see the need that's been shown for a substantial new corridor.
- Mr. Nandam stated that the Guiding Principle leads in that direction. The Task Force has said to look at leveraging existing corridors and, if justified, look at a new alignment. The Guiding Principles give very specific directions. The language can be revised to focus on evaluation language.
- Commissioner Cecil Pendergrass said that, looking to the future for Lee County, with the increase in population he definitely sees a need for a new north-south corridor other than I-75 for hurricane evacuation as well as economic development and transportation of goods.
- Ms. Mathews wanted clarification if the statute language requires the Task Force to evaluate needs now.
- Ms. Kigel stated that Ms. Shen went through a presentation on the evaluation of needs. There have been a couple things added relative to that, particularly in the area of the Action Plan. The High-Level Needs can be further evaluated from FDOT but that can be discussed more in the Action Plan.
- Ms. Mathews asked if FDOT is asking the Task Force to delegate a needs analysis to the future.
- Ms. Shen stated that, in working with the Task Force, staff identified regional opportunities and challenges that were identified at a high level but there's a lot more work that needed to be done. The revised Action Plan and needs language identified further evaluation and detailed work that needs to be done following Guiding Principles and Instructions. Based on the process and data available now, a lot of these more detailed analysis are not feasible to do at this point. The Task Force is working on High-Level Needs at this point. There have been discussions that consensus on the report means that project-specific needs and environmental and economic components are not fully developed at this point. Staff can work with Task Force members to revise this language to make sure it reflects the true intentions.
- Ms. Kigel mentioned that that language is in the approach and framework on page 9 lines 27-34. It is explicitly stated and is what Ms. Shen presented on in the morning.
- Ms. Mathews stated that there are a few definitions of the word "need" but that can be worked on outside of the Task Force meeting.
- Ms. Shen stated that there is a difference between High-Level Needs and project-specific needs and welcomed suggestions to help clarify this language.
- Ms. Fleming read this earlier and didn't like it, but she didn't focus on it. This seems to reveal some poor planning that takes place in the state of Florida. It looks like this is being used to fix poor planning and

overdevelopment and bottlenecks that have taken place. The High-Level Need is to relieve congestion and redirect it through these rural, largely undeveloped areas of Florida. There should be an effort to reword this as the way it is now sounds like Florida grows and roads continue to be built to support growth and keep up with it. The Task Force is trying to look at hurricane evacuation and avoiding sensitive areas. Explosive growth shouldn't be followed by more and more roads. These new roads will become congested and then even more highways will be needed in 20 years.

- Ms. Kigel stated that the intention is to take a proactive approach based on what could be happening in the future. The High-Level Need is a multi-use aspect and she understands the concern.
- Commissioner Mike Thompson doesn't believe the solution is inserting or removing language that lets FDOT build new corridors. The data should drive it. He doesn't have a problem with a new corridor in Hardee County and most of the people here agree with him but understand that in some situations it could be a problem. If that's the best way to do it, then FDOT shouldn't be prohibited from looking at that possibility.
- Ms. Kiselewski suggested changing the language as Mr. Nandam recommended to "improvements as necessary."
- Mr. Thompson stated that he is okay with what Mr. Nandam mentioned. It is fine to leave as is or to refine as he indicated.
- Dr. Gray knows that there are future needs and Lee County is growing and going to need more. Looking at 2050 future level of service, Highways 31 and 17 run straight north and both are yellow/green for traffic in 2050. He can get behind doing more to make them all green. There also needs to be an examination of high-level "not needs." If roads are good for another 30 years, and if we do more, they could be good for longer. There are certain things we don't necessarily need in the future which is some big corridor where there's no justification for. Existing roads should be worked on to make sure they live up to capacity/service. Based on the data he has seen; he doesn't see a need for it. If the Task Force is going to reach consensus, he doesn't really agree with the idea of allowing big new corridors.
- Ms. Kiselewski asked if this was independent of the Guiding Principle that talks about maximizing existing facilities first.
- Dr. Gray replied in the affirmative. He thinks that if existing facilities are maximized, that will be adequate, and an extra step isn't needed. He is not convinced that a major new corridor is needed, and the region isn't ready for that type of approach.
- Mr. Nandam stated that the definition and language reflected here is in support of anticipated population growth in coastal communities and urban areas. There is a need for FDOT to conduct further analysis to define impacts of growth and what the solution should be. He is going to request that the team review language in particular to reflect that. FDOT has to further evaluate. Then with the Guiding Principles, the Task Force has already given direction by maximizing use of existing corridors and making operational and safety improvements prior to looking at new corridors. I think we would want to change the language in this particular need. He doesn't want the Task Force to react to a sentence that probably does not belong here. Just remove it.
- Ms. Shen suggested testing some language for Dr. Gray: "Task Force recognized the general need to enhance transportation safety, mobility, and connectivity in the study area but did not identify a specific need for a greenfield corridor across the entire study area based on the information available at the time." If this gets to the issue, staff can work on the language to clarify thinking of the Task Force.
- Dr. Gray thinks that is the right track and an idea needs to be identified if there isn't consensus.
- Mr. Lauritsen thanked Ms. Shen for pointing out the language added on page 9 starting at line 27. He found it to be a really important point to have included in the document and is glad it was done as it frames a lot of what this body is doing. He had a couple of thoughts on the process. He wishes this was done 60 years ago when there were only five million residents here. He greatly appreciates the science and various viewpoints brought through this process and the groups that have brought in these

elements and ecological complexity to the table. Getting on paper the things that must not be done helps clarify the costs of some of those actions. He is sure they will still get things wrong and there may be significant things that need to change. This planning exercise has greatly advanced the thought on planning.

- Mr. Nandam reminded the Task Force members that the Action Plan is a reflection of prior conversations. The section is new, but the contents are not. Comments from before were categorized and it's a reflection of points made in prior meetings.
- Dr. Gray thought it might be useful to have a **definition of what no-build is**. He assumes this would include problem areas that will fix roads that aren't serving the community. If that is what no-build is, that's not viable. If no-build is "not building a new corridor" then that's different. There should be a separation of those two things. He supports no-build of a new corridor, but he would not support no-build anywhere for anything. He would like a definition.
- Ms. Shen stated that, in context of the Action Plan, no-build means no major capacity investments beyond what is already committed in the work program. The existing system in the study area would still be maintained. The team can clarify the language and maybe put that into the glossary as part of an appendix for the report.
- Ms. Kiselewski stated that this is different from "M-CORES program would not go forward," it may just be a no-build in some areas.
- Mr. Nandam stated that part of the presentation had different planning areas. This leads into segmentation of the corridor based on study areas and logical termini. Multi-use corridor and transportation is just one part. No-build alternatives will include other things and it may be a combination of things as it moves forward. It could be just utility or utilities and transportation.
- Mr. McDaniel stated that at their staff meeting it was brought up that it is imperative that the segregation of no-build is brought forth and fortified. The interpretation of the statute and definition of need has different definitions. No-build means don't build anything. He thinks largely a lot of folks understand that the enhancements of the current corridors that we already have impacted can have amazing benefits to the community and meet all the Guiding Principles that have been established here. He seconded Dr. Gray's comment.
- Ms. Fleming thirded their comments. She thought she understood what no-build meant and now she is confused. Clarification would be very helpful. She has participated in many PD&Es and usually there is a need for a road identified and then the planning goes forward with the alternatives and one is a no-build option which means that project doesn't move forward. The fact that this could move forward and part of it or certain modes. Some of it is moving forward. There are PD&Es on potential alignments. The Task Force doesn't know what will be selected or what could be selected so there is confusion on her part.
- Ms. Kiselewski stated that Ms. Fleming has the understanding down, but because of segmentation there is a difference.
- Mr. Michael McCabe chimed in as a fourth. At the last Task Force meeting, there was mention of no-build and he thinks no-build should have had a large portion of conversation. Finally, at Task Force Meeting 8 it is finally happening. The concept of no-build should have been as extensive as other discussions. There should be a Guiding Principle for no-build. There should be direction for concepts that now people are saying "I'm not sure what it means." No-build can take on many functions. In conversations with staff members, that has been his concern all along. There is extreme no-build as in nothing and then concepts of no-build interspersed through the different modes. The Task Force is now having the conversation at the 11th hour. A great deal of time should have been devoted to this and it would have changed some Guiding Principles and needs.
- Ms. Shen stated that the Department hears them loud and clear and thanked Ms. Fleming for her spot-on definition of no-build. Staff will clarify what no-build is in the report and in the glossary.

- *Commissioner Chris Constance has been listening and stated that the other side is, while you can look at environmental and local community push back, segmentation of the roadway and periodic no-builds comes down to financial ability to build the entire roadway. There's a real stopper and a real need to consider no-build. He has had conversations with staff, about trying to get this done in 10 years, optimism about there being enough funding. Just not going to have enough dollars to build out all three of these roadways by 2030, going to have to prioritize segments. Financial/economic feasibility is a real stopper and is way up high on no-build criteria. None of us want these roads cutting into our work program unless we see it as a priority.*
- *Ms. Kigel noted that, within this item, lines 31-35 talk about cost and funding approach as well as an analysis of economic feasibility. Item 4 also talks in detail about assessing economic feasibility.*
- *Ms. Penny Taylor agrees with Dr. Constance totally and felt as though he is echoing her thoughts. There are work programs, local work programs, as communities have needs locally. This is the priority as lawmakers. They cannot go along with a road that is not economically feasible and usurp those needs. She is not sure how it will be done but the Task Force **needs to address that the priorities of MPOs take precedent over this road.***
- *Ms. Kigel moved on to other items in the draft Action Plan.*
- *Mr. Doherty wanted to comment on the economic feasibility and potential funding sources related to High-Level Need. He thanked the Department for putting together this item per the last meeting and stated that it is important for a lot of members. In regard to economic feasibility, Line 10 – evaluation of economic feasibility at 30% design phase, he would appreciate, for the public's benefit, some kind of **basic reference when that would be on the calendar.** He thought that this is supposed to be done by December 2022. This way the public has a framework of expectation of when 30% would be complete. Moving to funding components, he agrees with Dr. Constance and Ms. Penny Taylor relative to MPOs decisions on priorities - at the beginning of this process he had a feeling that the five-year work program wouldn't be touched. Now he sees that it's 2021-2025 that would not be impacted. That's not acceptable to him. Heavy lifting on construction dollars for M-CORES would hit about that time and it jeopardizes local priorities. He is uncomfortable with that. There needs to be **more clarification on what FDOT/state is going to do if the MPO is not going to put it as a priority.** How will that be worked out. He wants to support other commissioners on this and would appreciate more specific dates for transparency for the public.*
- *Ms. Shen stated that there are a few process charts and staff can develop information on when it will happen to make it clear. The second point is that, as Mr. Will Watts explained in the morning, if toll revenue is not going to cover all the costs of M-CORES, anything related to M-CORES must go through the MPO process like anything else. It will go through the process and the rural consultative planning process with county commissioners where there isn't an MPO. This isn't going to jeopardize local priorities.*
- *Mr. Doherty understands and appreciates that. He wondered what would happen though if it does not enter into the top priorities. The report needs to provide that as a possibility/scenario. Does the project just stop? This doesn't give him a pathway for understanding from a financial standpoint how M-CORES continues. What happens? He thinks this would be **important for the next Task Force meeting.***
- *Ms. Shen stated that this might be a segmentation issue depending on the location specific information. She agreed to add language to provide a clear pathway for projects and MPO prioritization.*
- *Ms. Kigel described the fifth Action Plan item on advancing innovation land acquisition concepts.*
- *Dr. Gray wanted to **add the Department of Forestry** to this as they have some land management responsibility/opportunities.*
- *Ms. Mathews agreed with Dr. Gray and stated that the forest service is under the Department of Agriculture. Looking at Line 33, there is talk about acquisition ROW/lands/easements. **This should say conservation easements.***

- *Ms. Kigel believes that this is right.*
- *Mr. Dickman stated that that was the point he was going to touch upon. He is also curious, based on the experience with the Wekiva project, how did FDOT identify lands and did they acquire lands/easements ahead of time. He wanted staff to weigh in on this. It is important to get that done before construction.*
- *Ms. Shen stated that FDOT committed to acquisition in early phases or in parallel with construction or with alternatives analysis.*
- *Mr. Dickman said that it's not just right-of-way acquisition but also sensitive lands.*
- *Ms. Shen stated that this is correct.*
- *Ms. Kigel suggested they look back at the Instructions for the environmental Guiding Principle, it explicitly states those types of acquisitions they just mentioned.*
- *Ms. Fleming was reminded of the conversation with USFWS regarding acquisitions of land for panthers. Naturally if that conversation is happening with the FWC, that would bring in the USFWS, to be consistent for the panther and other federally listed species.*
- *Ms. Kigel then moved on to the advance multi-use opportunities item and there was no Task Force discussion. She continued with action item 7 on continuing robust partner and public engagement. There were no comments from the Task Force. Ms. Kigel then moved to the final item on committing to transparency and process improvement.*
- *Ms. Fleming wasn't sure if this is the right place but wondered when the Task Force would no longer be under the Sunshine Law. She wanted to know how long members are bound by that rule.*
- *Ms. Kiselewski stated she would try to get the answer for Ms. Fleming.*
- *Mr. McCabe had a couple of thoughts now that the document review was finished. He thanked the committee, organizers, and facilitators for the difficulty of conducting this type of event. It's a monumental task in pulling it through. He is extremely impressed by members of the Task Force, their participation and level of knowledge, which helped in his own understanding and the public's understanding. He thinks they need to look at what they were tasked with and what the end goal is. It states that the Task Force is focused on recommendations on how FDOT and other agencies should implement the program, and this was gone through extensively. High-level needs – answer why, Guiding Principles is answer of how. Instructions and project development answers what's next. The Task Force will be asked for a consensus recommendation. Consensus does not constitute an agreement, but the report is intended to provide a consensus recommendation. Someone said it earlier, at least on the topic of no-build, the Florida statute does say and charge the Task Force to evaluate the need for and, going back to high-level need, the need for and the purpose of should lead us to the why. He doesn't think enough time has been spent on this. He thinks the Task Force has done a really good job but wonders why M-CORES is being already assumed and accepted and is necessary. There was a great deal of time spent as if the need was established and justified including wordsmithing line items. The time devoted to the build scenario puts the cart in front of the horse. Those who have looked at the Cornell study and looked at whether build or no-build is the answer. Whether it's right or wrong, there should be the ability to address the underlying question and feasibility. Dr. Gray mentioned inland versus coastal. Those are things that Mr. McCabe feels as though the Task Force should have spent more time on. Instead they avoided the question and minimized the concerns of that topic. There was no mitigation of any overriding area. He knows, at this point, the draft will be finalized, and the Task Force will be asked to give consensus. Consensus is to align from varying degrees all the way down to agree not to oppose. He has great difficulty with that. Even the slightest level of agree not to oppose is to give it tacit approval. If we had spent more time on build or no-build, he could have had no problem agreeing to a level of one of the gradations. Given where the Task Force is at this moment, we are really not quantifying that build/no-build or setting up Guiding Principles to move forward and getting to financial feasibility which the Cornell study touched on. He has difficulties to state this report is truly*

representation of the total picture. He has waited and been hoping for this so he was glad to hear the conversation, but it hasn't been addressed to the level it should have been.

- Mr. Jason Watts thanked Mr. McCabe for his conversation. It is well said and appreciated. It is important to discuss the difference between what the Task Force was asked to do with High-Level Needs and what happens with the PD&E and no-build. Ms. Shen and Ms. Fleming gave correct versions. For the process going forward, this corridor as a program will develop project specific purposes and needs before going through alternatives. What the Task Force has done is important. Guiding principles and needs will get rolled into project specific purposes and needs. If the satisfaction of needs is too great of a cost and detailed analysis leads to no-build, then the Department can go back to drawing board and make sure that the analysis is conducted properly. There may be project specific no-builds. As a corridor/program, the program includes many different facets/enhancements/acquisitions which make a difference in whether the program advances or whether a project will have a no-build determination. **Some better definitions of how future phases are approached will clarify issues.**
- Ms. Shen thanked everyone for the consensus discussion as it helps work towards resolving issues since this process puts them all on the table. Staff will work to clarify and amend language so that members can at least agree not to oppose to the recommendations as a package.
- Mr. Dickman was going to comment on Guiding Principles seven and eight but then this discussion prompted other things. He appreciates transparency and continued availability of funding for M-CORES budget and update. It's important, as a member of 1000 Friends of Florida, is the feasibility issue which is unpacked during the PD&E process. **He would like to know if the Cornell Consulting report has been looked at. As the experts, he would like to know staff's thoughts/comments on whether it's valid or not.** There are some conclusions which are concerning to him. Many members of the public have spoken, and many believe that no-build is an option that will be addressed in this report and won't be put off down the road or on only certain sections. He would like to see it more defined both for himself and for members of the public. There are quite a few people that think there is an option of no-build. He sees the "need for" language in this stage means, the Task Force is supposed to talk about no-build and not just put it aside. He would appreciate an understanding of the Cornell study. It is helpful to see the Task Force's draft report like this and see where it's going and knowing where it's going. He appreciates the hard work and this report representation makes it a lot easier to see where this is heading. He acknowledged that not everyone is going to agree with everything.
- Mr. Pendergrass thanked staff and stated that this was a great experience and he has extreme confidence and feels comfortable with the draft. He thanked staff for all the work and looks forward to the future program.

4:40 PM

Next Steps

- Huiwei Shen, FDOT Chief Planner
- Marlon Bizerra, FDOT Production Lead
- L.K. Nandam, Task Force Chair
- Karen Kiselewski, Facilitator

- Ms. Kiselewski went over next steps and passed the conversation to Ms. Shen.
- Ms. Shen went over the instructions for Task Force members to propose amendments to the Draft Final Task Force report and reviewed the public comment period.
- Ms. Fleming asked if there was an opportunity to provide follow up comments from this meeting the next day and give some specific language or if she should wait for it to be incorporated into the public comment version.
- Ms. Shen stated that tomorrow would be the last day to incorporate comments into the draft report that is posted for public comment, as the goal is to post it by next Tuesday, September 29th.
- Mr. Nandam addressed the Task Force members and thanked them for the day's conversation. He also went over the timeframe for the next Task Force meetings before moving into the public comment period.

5:00 PM	Public Comment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • L.K. Nandam, Task Force Chair • Karen Kiselewski, Facilitator
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Kiselewski reviewed the public comment section procedure and announced the commenters. • Amy Datz from Tallahassee said she is a professional environmental scientist and activist, not a lobbyist or a consultant. She believed everyone should have broadband, not just community facilities. School children, those working from home, agriculture and freight need access over the whole area. Access not just for schools and libraries does not meet this need. The suggestion of shelter in place doesn't work for tourists. Southwest Florida is one of the most difficult areas to evacuate. Ninety percent (90%) of the corridor population lives on the coast. Where will these people go? They go towards central and northern Florida where this road will go. This corridor has the highest population growth statewide in both the past decade and for predicted growth over the next 25 years. Some office buildings in New York are 90% empty. In this pandemic, people are starting to work from home and move to Florida. Big Cypress is home to the Florida panther and fracking oil exploration. The Task Force must ask how fracking will impact usage of the road and transport of dangerous materials by truck. The natural gas industry will be obsolete in 20-30 years. The project should avoid supporting natural gas. FDOT has over a million acres of grass on right-of-way which can be used for biofuels and solar power as we move away from fossil fuels. • Michael McGrath from Fort Myers said he is an organizer for Sierra Club. He called on Task Force members, saying the Task Force process has focused on nebulous ideas instead of drilling down into specifics. FDOT should have evaluated if this was financially feasible. He noted that Cornell Consulting evaluated financial feasibility. He thanked Mr. McCabe and Mr. Dickman and encouraged their review. It used FDOT public datasets to estimate construction costs and potential funding opportunities. In 500 simulations none of the scenarios suggest roads would be financially feasible. The project is not financially feasible and would warrant a no-build which FDOT does not want to do, but that isn't their call. He called on Task Force members to contemplate a no-build. Now is the time to make a push for no-build. You don't need consensus for something you oppose. Five-year planning process evaluates need. Based on the data driven process by Cornell, the only feasible option to avoid stressing taxpayers and budget is no-build. • Herman Younger from Gainesville addressed the Task Force members and noted that this is the penultimate meeting. Everything done from today will set the future of the state. He said FDOT is trying to have you leave the no-build determination during the PD&E, but we cannot leave it to the state to yield to the will of the people. He said if the Task Force believes there is no evidence that there is a need then the no-build recommendation is appropriate. This has a multi-billion price tag. The Cornell consultant refuted the need and feasibility. Your stamp of approval will forever be written in this project, and he urged the Task Force to listen to the many different people that will be impacted and not to sign onto any consensus agreement. • Kristen Rubin represented Our Santa Fe River. She noted that a Task Force member stated that there are millions of people moving to Florida yearly. She says that is not true and to make sure the facts are correct, which is 950 – 1,000 yearly. She is requesting the Task Force to say no-build to a toll road. She thinks this is a waste of time and money. If the roads are not built, broadband can be expanded at a fraction of the cost and at a faster timeline. More focused time and money can be used to improve the environment. Farms and communities can stay intact, not divided or ruined by sprawl. Over \$3.4 billion has been lost in revenues in Florida due to Covid-19 and will not be further impacted if the Task Force says no-build. These tolls roads should not be built because they are not a necessity. • Jessica Bibza from St. Petersburg with the National Wildlife Federation said she appreciated the conversation today. She appreciates the Guiding Principle and Instructions on the Florida panther. Also appreciated the discussion about adding a section on panthers because they are so important, they deserve to be elevated. Regarding the Guiding Principle talk about avoiding negative impacts to FWC 		

panther focus area. While the habitat is key, she asked that the Task Force also consider explicitly stating “avoid impacts to the Florida panther population.” Avoiding impacts to habitat should help, but more than just habitat – let’s talk about the critters themselves. She was encouraged by the discussion about build and no-build. It’s about time that the conversation happened, including financial feasibility and the local communities. That needs to be considered and should have been considered early, but better late than never.

- Christina Scarnage from Miami for Animal Defenders International urged a more thorough consideration for the no-build alternative. She appreciated the Guiding Principle and discussions that amplify concerns about the panther, but feels the project has the effect of bulldozing sensitive critical habitat. She insisted that we must act honestly and responsibly before it is too late. The Cornell analysis concluded that across all the study areas M-CORES will fail to meet its goals and consume a lot of money. The state’s budget shortfalls in the coming years demand strict data driven feasibility analysis early. Only 150 panthers remain squeezed into 5% of their historic range through thoughtless sprawling development. The Florida panther recovery implementation team described their remaining area as critical to survival. Other studies suggested it should receive the highest priority because any further loss risks extinction. She suggested that human encroachment is detrimental and that humans are causing the sixth mass extinction. There are detrimental consequences if we continue along our current path, so this demands significant shift from business as usual projects. Seventy-five percent voted to mandate that the state spend millions towards conservation. It doesn’t take massive roadway to fulfill that mandate.
- Matthew Schwartz from Fort Lauderdale with the South Florida Wildlands Association. Hard to squeeze 15 years of panther protection into three minutes...First, because there is less panther habitat remaining, we recommend that all breeding area should be maintained and should be expanded into Central Florida. Primary and secondary zones are prime land for protection of the vulnerable panther population; essentially “what we got we should keep.” The last big cat in eastern US. New research shows that a little more than 100 panthers so there is room for more development, but that is a silly conclusion. The leading cause of death is roadkill and the second is interspecific aggression (panthers fighting over habitat). Primary zone doesn’t separate forest, agriculture, etc. It is a single mosaic that has a number of different habitats. All of it, including the secondary zone, should be enhanced and that is the science. Picture a female panther having a few kittens...the female kittens can stay near while the males have to disperse and find their own territory. Usually young males are killed because the older males have the established habitat. Encouraging Task Force, especially the environmental members, to not get caught up in the “High-Level Needs and Guiding Principles” language. This is a land scheme, like the Heartland Parkway. Vote the no-build.
- Randy Kautz from Tallahassee said he is a wildlife ecologist. He noted a press release yesterday “potential impacts of the Southwest Central Connector on the panther and its habitat” with the goal to summarize the potential impacts of the toll road on panthers. He reviewed his credentials as a retired but part time consultant with over 27 years in environmental office of FWC. He also helped panther biologists to draft a panther species status assessment. For the report he asked what future development could we expect in study area? He used the GeoPlan 2070 study and sea level rise of one meter. Results suggest a loss of 26-34% of prime habitat in Southwest Florida, as well as some north of the river. This would suggest a reduction by ¼ to 1/3 of the population. This corridor would accelerate the import of humans into South Florida and the rate of development. Human population is expected to double in the next 50 years in South Florida. There are also issues with fragmentation and the analysis showed dispersal allowing panthers to get into Central Florida would be completely severed.
- Gladius Delgadillo from Naples said she is deeply concerned that the proposed connector will do irreparable damage to wildlife and water. The draft report just has niceties and refuses to acknowledge public comments. Even with extensive planning, it’s hard to meet. Take the no wetland loss rule. Enhancement may be theoretically possible but there’s no indication the project will achieve this. We can’t just protect existing lands; we must also protect other lands to meet the state’s environmental goals. No new roadway should be allowed on lands prioritized as 1 or 2 on the Florida Ecological Greenways network. With regards to greenways enhancements it should be noted that Instructions include no strict requirements for acquiring minimum acreage before construction and no guarantees

that any M-CORES funding will be made available for land acquisition. We don't necessarily know the damages the Southwest Central Connector will create, but if we learn from history we will learn that the connector is likely to go on to encroach on habitat making it difficult for the panther and black bear to survive future generations. We know that pollution from the road will plague waterways. Fundamental mandate to move forward with this project is flawed. A private business would not move forward with a project in this manner. She suggested that this money can be better spent elsewhere, like with broadband without the road. The only option is no-build.

- Vivian Young from Tallahassee is the communications director for 1000 Friends of Florida. She said that over the course of this Task Force 1000 Friends has submitted numerous recommendations. She urges the Task Force to review these and put them in the final report to protect the lands and waters, limit development, and protect quality of life in region. She highlighted two underlying concepts. The first related to transportation need and financial feasibility – if this project had gone through FDOT's normal corridor planning process a preliminary analysis would have evaluated the transportation need and financial feasibility before PD&E. Hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars are being spent before determining if there is a fundamental need. This is financially bad particularly when Florida is experiencing the financial impacts from Covid-19. Her first recommendation is that the Task Force include a Guiding Principle requiring a preliminary determination of transportation need and financial feasibility prior to conducting the PD&E. The second concept is protecting natural resources and rural character as legally mandated. She remained concerned about impacts of placements of interchanges on resources and rural economic vitality. Interchanges can promote development, sprawl, and a proliferation of businesses that draw money away from downtown areas. Her second recommendation was for the Task Force to include a Guiding Principle requiring acquisition of lands needed for conservation and sprawl prevention prior to commencement of road project, as was done with the Wekiva Parkway project.
- Kimberley Heise from Delray Beach said she was excited to hear about the Florida panther discussion today. These toll roads, even if you were to have no interchanges, you are still building a road through panther habitat. It would still be isolating populations. If you build this road to have the minimal amount of damage, then why are you building the road at all? It's basically not useful to anyone. She would prefer that over a road that would invite urban sprawl though. Any kind of development in that area is going to make the panther go extinct. There is a loading capacity in that area. Slowly this area is getting chipped away by more development. There is nothing you can do about the development, but you can elect to not build a road that doesn't seem to be needed for anything. I know it's your job to build a road, but there has to be an option to not build this road. People don't need it and panthers might go extinct. We might be expediting the extinction of the Florida panther. Children decided that the panther would be the state animal and children are the ones you are going to have to answer to. The road is morally wrong, and if you want a clear conscience, this road needs to not happen. This would be the best scenario. There needs to be a way to protect panther.
- Shirley McCullough said she is 100% no-build. Leave it green and beautiful. This study area is not where she lives, she is from Central Florida. Roads from the south impact the north just as water flowing south impacts...what we do impacts you. These reports are not discussing where these issues come into play. They are segmented public discussions showing where and how this happens. My feeling is no one is letting it come out about how much land will be needed for interchanges and how wide this road will be. Providing this information does not lock FDOT into a specific area but does let local citizens know what could be coming their way. This should be published in all printed material, not just on FDOT website. No matter which area, where one county wants an interchange, it does affect where road goes (all roads lead somewhere). Moving forward means destroying rural towns and areas. Some people, and I'm sorry to say Hardee County, say "hey, come on through" and that is selfish to people to the north and south of the county. Conservation lands have been used to release wildlife expecting that

they would be safe, reducing interactions with human (including cars). Panthers are here and this road will help wipe them out here. Utility ROW needs more land use and therefore more area is knocked down.

- Stephen Martin from Tallahassee has been watching these meetings and hasn't been able to talk. He has a lot to say. This corridor of the three is going to have the most impact on the panther population that's left. Their territory used to go far beyond Florida, and they've been relegated to a sliver of area and they were here long before we got here. Since we got here, they have lost almost all of their habitat. I get amused when he hears humans talk about protecting wildlife. We cannot begin to undo the damages that we have already inflicted. Shame on all of us, myself included. How is this consistent with what DeSantis said at his inauguration? Florida's environment has been exploited for a long time...In his case for political gain, in most instances for financial gain. As has been said before, this process has been a sham from the outset. Government created citizens committees always seem to be composed of people who will support it. No-build is the morally correct decision. Bullying he believes so everyone should agree - there is something immoral about it, and if there is one species that is a bully, we're it.
- Julianne Thomas from Naples represented the Conservancy of Southwest Florida. The M-CORES is fundamentally flawed, and the best recommendation that can be made is to take funding away and put it towards needed transportation projects that are already underway. One of things we have learned is that rural Florida has needs, a toll road is not one of them. Rural Florida needs broadband and clean water. That can revolutionize the economic impact of the area and doesn't impact the panther in a negative way. M-CORES may have been conceived as a positive thing, but it's not. The best thing to do is get M-CORES out of the statute and ask that the money be reallocated to the projects in the five-year plans. SR-29 is being improved and expanded, what if the funds for M-CORES went instead to providing broadband for Immokalee and Hendry County along SR-29. A tolled facility is not the right choice. This is not what rural policy asks for and what rural people need. Its 20th century technology for 21st century issues. The population is expanding, but they will move where there is a place for them to go. If we incentivize infill and public transportation that is where the population will go. Please go into the document and make sure the references to the PD&E are accurate because it's not in the future it's happening now.
- Sara Hendricks from Hillsborough County thanked the Task Force for their hard work. She would like to see representation of other modes, particularly from Transit agencies, rail, and intercity bus companies. Her hope is that this process will actively engage transit agencies. She liked Guiding Principle number two, maximizing use of existing facilities, and she suggested that Guiding Principle it also should call attention to transportation demand management strategies. She would like it not just to include new facilities but also include new services such as parking management, telework, etc. Regarding the Action Plan #2 she urges FDOT to leave no stone unturned related to the no-build option. She would like to see a focus on existing highway facilities and strengthening the modes on them. That would include the full FDOT toolbox including congestion pricing, HOV, autonomous vehicles on existing facilities before considering new corridors.
- Alison Date from Tampa requested that the Task Force halt M-CORES development because this toll road system has already been proven to not be financially feasible and will have negative returns even before COVID happened. It's an irresponsible use of state resources. That money can be used for other purposes including improve existing roads, bolster the state budget and preserving last rural green spaces in Florida. A lot of money has already been spent on the preplanning stage which was done before the feasibility and before investigating sustainable alternatives like mass transit, which no one will ever talk about in the state. People want it and its never discussed. Florida does the same old thing with cars and roads and it's time to change that. Other countries and cities are changing it, and it would be really be great to have a transit system above the ground so it won't bother any of the greenspaces

underneath. There seems to be a rush to push project through to eliminate green space for human development that only benefits a few developers. Once the environment is gone there is no bringing it back. You have an opportunity to make a decision from the point of view that we are all interconnected in the web of life. Please don't build these roads.

- Carol Pratt from Naples spoke for all of Florida though she is addressing the Southwest Corridor. Hurricane evacuation has been a primary concern, even when it comes to M-CORES, but it will always be a problem. The consensus is that shelter in place is best option other than those on the coast who should evacuate early or go to a shelter. For the millions that the research for this project will cost the state could build several large state of the art shelters, improve public awareness and strengthen the statewide approach. M-CORES is the definition of urban sprawl. It will without a doubt encourage new development in pristine environmental areas and harm protected species. Urban sprawl is why developers are donating land for the project. Will Watts said deadline is aggressive. For 330 miles of asphalt from the north to the south ends of our state she wondered why this is so hurried. There are too many variables and no binding contracts to protect fish and wildlife. She is in support of protection of panthers, but has M-CORES identified hot spots of other species? Bears are often killed by vehicles. Available habitat is crucial, and this project will drive black bears back to threatened species status. M-CORES will mean less habitat for this Florida species. She grew up in Collier County, which is growing so rapidly the County's planning department can't keep up with it. Promises are made then broken; lines are drawn then redrawn. There are no assurances that any promises will be forever. If M-CORES is advanced there is no doubt that the first funding cuts will be from conservation lands and wildlife underpasses. Only today you are recognizing that there is no no-build plan. This will irreparably change Florida and makes no sense.
- The Lee County Civic Center had no members of the public requesting to speak.
- The Bartow UF/IFAS Extension Office had one speaker.
- Sharon Garrett said she lives in Polk County. She had been through this before when the Heartland Parkway was proposed and then the Central Polk Parkway and she opposed that alignment, so she considered herself as the sacrificial lamb for the developers. She lives on a property that her family has had since World War II and would hate to see it destroyed just to satisfy these superficial goals. They say we need economic growth in the area and when I was in junior high people thought we were too dependent on citrus and we needed other industries. So, we got Disney and Universal but now they say we were too dependent on tourism. This will always be a problem; it doesn't matter what you move into. This is just a nice way to promote this project. You talk a lot about resilience, and I don't know how much more resilient my family can get. We had no electricity; my dad built our house. Took care of the road until people started moving in. You can do broadband without this. The reason you don't have broadband everywhere is because it's not a regulated monopoly like electricity and telephones were. You should just improve existing roads. Spirit Lake Road is part four-lane and part is two, why not just finish the rest. Get rid of the bottlenecks, add turn lanes and lights and there will be flow and get traffic off of US-27. She has seen panthers on her property, and they are in this area, you just don't want to realize it.
- Mr. Nandam concluded the public comment period and thanked everyone for their comments. He reminded the audience that comments can be submitted online at any time. He then adjourned the meeting.

5:35 PM

Adjourn

Text Format:

Regular – Agenda outline; *Italic* – Discussion notes; **Bold** – Action items