

SUNCOAST CONNECTOR TASK FORCE FINAL REPORT

November 15, 2020

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

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

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

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

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

The statute directed FDOT to convene a Task Force for each corridor as an inclusive, consensus-building mechanism comprised of representatives from state agencies, regional planning councils, metropolitan planning organizations, water management districts, local governments, environmental groups, business and economic development groups, and the community. Members of each Task Force were appointed by the FDOT Secretary.

The statute charged each Task Force with:

- coordinating with FDOT on pertinent aspects of corridor analysis, including accommodation or co-location of multiple types of infrastructure;
- evaluating the need for, and the economic, environmental, hurricane evacuation, and land use impacts of, the specific corridor;
- considering and recommending innovative concepts to combine right of way acquisition with the acquisition of lands or easements to facilitate environmental mitigation or ecosystem, wildlife habitat, or water quality protection or restoration;

- 1 • addressing issues related to specific environmental resources and land uses identified in
2 each study area;
- 3 • holding public meetings in each local government jurisdiction in which a project in the
4 identified corridor is being considered; and
- 5 • issuing its evaluations in a final report to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and
6 the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

7 This report summarizes the activities and recommendations of the Suncoast Corridor Task Force.

8 Due to the early stage of planning for this corridor and the limited data and analysis on potential need
9 and impacts available at this time, the Task Force was not able to fully address its charge of evaluating
10 the need for and impacts of the Suncoast Corridor. The Task Force identified a series of potential high-
11 level needs for future evaluation by FDOT and developed recommendations for how FDOT should
12 assess the need for a corridor of the scale specified in statute. The Task Force did not reach a
13 conclusion based on the information available at this time that there is a specific need for a completely
14 new greenfield corridor through the study area to achieve the statutory purpose. The Task Force
15 expressed a preference for improvement or expansion of existing major highway corridors or existing
16 major linear utility corridors. The Task Force acknowledged the process for FDOT to consider a “no
17 build” alternative in future project development activities until a final recommendation about each
18 specific project is made. The Task Force also recommended guiding principles, instructions, and an
19 action plan as a set of directions to FDOT and other partners for future planning, project development,
20 and implementation activities related to the M-CORES Program.

21 In completing this report, the Task Force’s intent is to provide consensus recommendations for how
22 FDOT can work with local governments and other agencies and partners to carry out the M-CORES
23 Program as specified in s. 338.2278, F.S. Consensus on the report does not constitute agreement by
24 all Task Force members that at this phase in program delivery, project-specific needs or environmental
25 and economic feasibility are fully developed. Rather, the report is intended to provide consensus
26 recommendations for how needs should be evaluated and how corridor development and related
27 activities should move forward to implement the statute and support the environment, quality of life,
28 and prosperity of the study area and the state.

29 The statute charges FDOT, to the maximum extent feasible, to adhere to the recommendations of each
30 Task Force in the design of the multiple modes of transportation and multiple types of infrastructure
31 associated with the corridor. The Task Force recommended, and FDOT committed to, an action plan
32 for future activities in this study area consistent with the guiding principles and instructions.
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TASK FORCE OVERVIEW

Membership

In August 2019, FDOT convened the Suncoast Corridor Task Force with 41 members representing state agencies, water management districts, local governments, metropolitan planning organizations, regional planning councils, environmental groups, business and economic development groups, and community organizations (see **Appendix A** for Membership List).

Meetings

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

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

Issues for Consideration by All M-CORES Task Forces

s. 338.2278 (1), Florida Statute

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

Issues for Consideration by Suncoast Corridor Task Force

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

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

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

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

5 6 **Data and Mapping Tools**

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

18 The GIS tool served as a living tool and was updated based on feedback and suggestions from the
19 Task Force members. The GIS tool remains publicly accessible at all times on the project website
20 including through a mobile-friendly format.

21 22 **Public Engagement**

23 Public engagement was a critical component of the Task Force process. The public engagement
24 process was designed to allow residents and visitors to comment on all Task Force deliberations,
25 products, and the report. This was made available 24/7 through the 15-month process, using a variety
26 of media options.

27 Opportunities for public engagement were included at each Task Force meeting through a dedicated
28 public comment period. At in-person meetings, comment stations were made available to receive
29 written comments. The Task Force meetings that were held in-person included Tampa (Hillsborough
30 County), Lecanto (Citrus County), Perry (Taylor County), and Madison (Madison County). Virtual
31 webinars and hybrid Task Force meetings were held following the COVID-19 outbreak between April
32 2020 and October 2020. Several Task Force meetings were broadcast live on The Florida Channel,
33 and all recordings were posted on the project website for members of the public who could not attend
34 in person. The public could also attend the webinars and hybrid meetings virtually through the
35 GoToWebinar platform and public viewing locations. Overall, a total of 568 people attended the in-
36 person meetings, and 1,271 people attended the webinars and hybrid virtual meetings. See **Table 1**
37 for a summary of the Suncoast Corridor Task Force Meetings. (To be updated in final report)

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Table 1. Suncoast Corridor Task Force Meetings

Date	Type	Location (Town/County)	Total Attendees (Signed In)	Total Number of Speakers	Written Comments Received
Aug. 27, 2019	Task Force Meeting #1	Tampa (Hillsborough)	302	89	19
Oct. 23, 2019	Task Force Meeting #2	Lecanto (Citrus)	80	14	13
Dec. 17, 2019	Task Force Meeting #3	Perry (Taylor)	87	22	7
Feb. 11, 2020	Task Force Meeting #4	Madison (Madison)	99	31	18
Apr. 17, 2020	Task Force Meeting #5	Canceled due to COVID-19*			
Apr. 30, 2020	Webinar #1	GoToWebinar	397	40	n/a
May 12, 2020	Webinar #2	GoToWebinar	255	15	n/a
Jun. 9, 2020	Webinar #3	GoToWebinar	223	12	n/a
Jun. 23, 2020	Virtual Meeting #4	GoToWebinar	201	13	n/a
Jul. 21, 2020	Task Force Meeting #6	GoToWebinar (Public viewing locations in Trenton and Monticello)	215	10	3
Aug. 27, 2020	Task Force Meeting #7	GoToWebinar (Public viewing locations in Crystal River and Old Town)	180	15	3
Sep. 24, 2020	Task Force Meeting #8	GoToWebinar (Public viewing locations in Mayo and Madison)	157	14	2
Oct. 20, 2020	Task Force Meeting #9	GoToWebinar (Public viewing locations in x and x)	TBD	TBD	TBD
Total			x	x	x

*Note: Meeting materials were posted on the project website

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4 To further public engagement, eight Community Open Houses were held, covering each county within
5 the study area. The Community Open House meetings were held in Old Town, Mayo, Perry, Chiefland,
6 Crystal River, Monticello, Trenton, and Madison to share information about the process and receive
7 public input. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the last three Community Open Houses were held as a
8 combination of hybrid in-person and virtual meetings. At the meetings, members of the public were able
9 to directly ask questions of FDOT staff, view informational material, and experience hands-on use of
10 the GIS tool. A total of 588 people participated in the eight open houses. See **Table 2** for a summary
11 of the Suncoast Corridor Task Community Open House Meetings.
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Table 2. Suncoast Corridor Community Open House Meetings

Date	Location (Town/County)	Total Attendees (Signed In)	Written Comments Received
Oct. 24, 2019	Old Town/Dixie	126	39
Dec. 19, 2019	Mayo/Lafayette	45	8
Jan. 27, 2020	Perry/Taylor	27	15
Jan. 28, 2020*	Chiefland/Levy	173	59
Jan. 30, 2020*	Crystal River/Citrus	126	25
Sept. 1, 2020	Monticello/Jefferson	91	49
Sept. 29, 2020	Trenton/Gilchrist	x	x
Oct. 22, 2020	Madison/Madison	x	x
Total		x	x

**Note: Joint meetings held with the Northern Turnpike Corridor*

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Additionally, FDOT received communication 24/7 through the project website, FDOT Listens email address, phone, social media, letters, newsletters, and more. In total, FDOT received 1,875 unique and 10,477 form-letter comments through these communication methods, which were shared with the Task Force. (To be updated in final report).

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The comments varied from significant concerns over the development of these corridors due to their potential environmental, community, rural lifestyle, and financial impacts to strong support for the corridors due to their potential mobility, economic development, infrastructure, and hurricane evacuation benefits. In addition, there was concern about the timing of this process and project cost given the COVID-19 pandemic. A key theme of many public comments was a discussion or request that the no-build alternative be considered, or opted for, prior to the project phases that would occur after the Task Force Final Report. The Task Force was provided with periodic summaries of the comments received as well as copies of all comments, so this public input could be considered in the development and refinement of the Task Force’s recommendations. A detailed summary of the public comments can be found on the project website. A summary of the most common comments/themes received from the public are included below.

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- Concern for impacts to wildlife habitat (946 comments)
- Concern for impacts to property and rural quality of life (783 comments)
- Support to expand, improve, and maintain existing roads (421 comments)
- Need to improve and protect water resources and the aquifer (421 comments)
- Concern over project cost (367 comments)
- Need for protection and enhancement of conservation lands (356 comments)
- Support the need for jobs, economic development and business enhancements; but concern over potential negative economic impacts (269 comments)
- Concern over the cost of tolls (256 comments)
- Concern for impacts to wetlands (169 comments)
- Concern for increased water, ground, and air pollution (147 comments)
- Need for hurricane evacuation (144 comments)
- Concern over location/project alignment or route (137 comments)

- Support for multi-modal/mass transit (144 comments)
- Need for broadband (117 comments)

The draft Task Force report was posted for a 15-day public comment period from September 29-October 14, 2020. A total of # members of the public submitted a total of # comments during that period. A copy of these comments and a summary of the key themes was provided to the Task Force at its final meeting. (To be summarized when final).

In addition to engaging the public, FDOT conducted active engagement with partners. FDOT provided # (need to finalize/update) presentations to interested agencies and organizations at their workshops, meetings, and conferences. FDOT staff also attended metropolitan planning organization, regional planning council, and local government council and commission board meetings to share updates on the Task Force’s process and answer any questions. The Task Force also considered resolutions adopted by the Board of County Commissioners in Citrus County, Levy County, and Madison County; City Commission in the City of Cedar Key; Town Council of the Town of Greenville; and the Hernando/Citrus Metropolitan Planning Organization. The Task Force also considered letters from the Town of Bronson, the City of Chiefland, the City of Williston, and the Town of Yankeetown. A summary of the local government resolutions and letters is included in Table 3. Copies of these documents can be found on the project website.

Table 3. Suncoast Corridor Local Government Letters/Resolutions

Agency	Type/Date	Support, Oppose, or Neutral
Alachua County*	Resolution/ Aug. 11, 2020	Opposes – process does not address need and concern over funding; supports the no build option
Citrus County	Resolution/ Feb. 12, 2019	Supports – would like the Suncoast Parkway extended to Georgia
Levy County	Resolution/ Apr. 7, 2020	Opposes – concern over impacts to county and supports the no build option
Madison County	Resolution/July 10, 2019	Supports – welcomes the project to the county for economic development benefits
Hernando/Citrus MPO	Resolution/ Dec. 12, 2018	Supports - would like the Suncoast Parkway extended to Georgia
Town of Bronson	Letter/Jul. 7, 2020	Neutral – optimistic about opportunities for access and requests minimizing impacts to community
City of Cedar Key	Resolution (need date)	Opposes – concern over environmental impacts
City of Chiefland	Letter/ Apr. 28, 2020	Neutral – wants economic development impacts to community minimized

Town of Greenville	Resolution/ Jan. 21, 2019	Supports – pledges cooperation and supports project for economic development benefits
City of Williston	Letter/May 21, 2020	Neutral – concern for traffic impacts and wants economic development projects considered
Town of Yankeetown	Letter/ May 4, 2020	Supports – requests access to key locations for economic development

*Note: Outside of study area

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STUDY AREA OVERVIEW

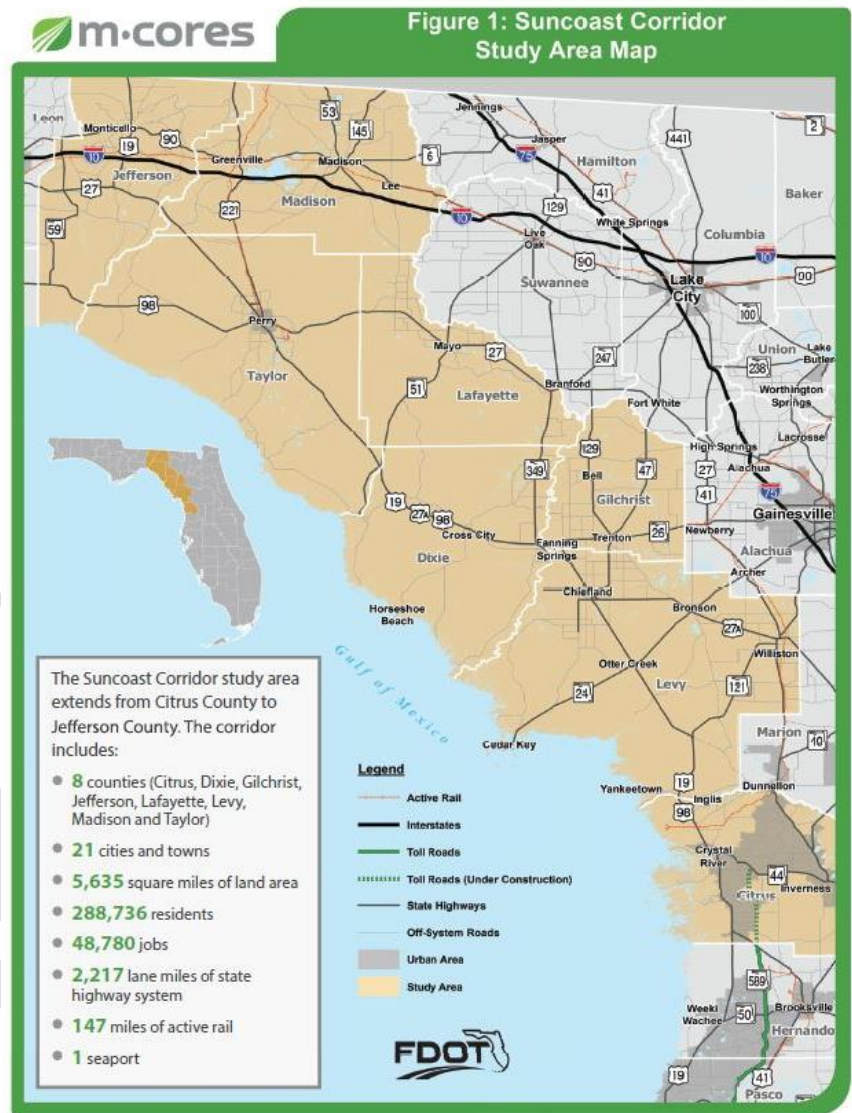
The Suncoast Corridor study area is located along Florida's Nature Coast through Citrus, Dixie, Gilchrist, Jefferson, Lafayette, Levy, Madison, and Taylor Counties and is home to more than 280,000 residents (Figure 1).

Environment

The predominately rural counties located within the Suncoast Corridor study area contain natural resources, landscapes, and public lands that have been highly attractive to residents and year-round visitors for decades. This area has many unique features and natural resources including rivers, springs, wetlands, aquifer recharge areas, coastal areas, conservation areas, state parks, and agricultural lands. Some notable resources include the Big Bend Seagrasses Aquatic Preserve, the Flint Rock and Aucilla Wildlife Management Areas, the Suwannee and Santa Fe Rivers, Blue Springs, Fanning Springs, Crystal River, and the Goethe State Forest. The study area also contains numerous large acreage conservation easements. These areas support significant fish, wildlife, and plant populations including threatened and endangered species such as the West Indian manatee, the Florida scrub-jay, and the gopher tortoise. The study area also includes an abundance of prime farmlands and agricultural properties that serve both economic and environmental functions in addition to Spring Protection and Recharge Areas, prospective Florida Forever Lands on the current priority lists for acquisition, and Florida Ecological Greenways Network critical linkages.

Community

The population of the eight-county study area is projected to increase approximately 15% by 2045, adding over 40,000 more residents to the area (Table 4).



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Table 4. Existing and Projected Population¹

County	2019	2045*	Percentage Change
Citrus	147,744	177,346	20%
Dixie	16,610	17,135	3%
Gilchrist	17,766	21,382	20%
Jefferson	14,776	15,686	6%
Lafayette	8,482	10,109	19%
Levy	41,330	45,460	10%
Madison	19,570	20,124	3%
Taylor	22,458	24,675	10%
Study Area	288,736	331,917	15%
Florida	21,208,589	27,266,909	29%

*Note: Population forecasts were developed prior to COVID 19

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Citrus County currently contributes almost half the population of the study area and will account for most of the population growth in the future. Citrus, Gilchrist, and Lafayette Counties are projected to have the highest growth by 2045 (approximately 20%) with Dixie and Madison Counties projected to have the lowest population growth (approximately 3%) during the same period. The state’s projected population increase is approximately 29% during this same time period, nearly twice the growth rate of the overall study area. Population within the study area is mostly driven by domestic migration from other parts of the state. All of the counties in the study area, except Gilchrist, experienced more deaths than births over the last decade, reflecting an older population.²

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The study area is a blend of coastal and inland areas, which are mostly rural and agricultural with conservation areas, small towns, and scattered suburban communities. Approximately 88% of the land is in agricultural or recreation/park use, while residential use accounts for approximately 8% of the overall land use.³ The remaining 4% of land uses are comprised of primarily industrial, institutional, and commercial development. While mostly rural in nature, there are 21 towns and cities within the study area with an abundance of community resources including schools, parks, places of worship, and downtown main streets. There are also several historic resources within the study area including the Monticello Historic District, the Crystal River Archaeological Site, and the Letchworth-Love Mounds Archaeological State Park.

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As one of the more rural areas of the state, the study area has limited infrastructure and lower levels of adequate broadband internet access, sewer and water service, and transit than the rest of the state. In addition, all of the counties have limited access to fresh food (within half a mile) and significantly lower access to healthcare (hospitals and physicians) than the rest of the state. Dixie, Gilchrist, Jefferson, and Lafayette Counties do not have any hospital facilities, and all of the counties (except for Citrus) have fewer than 10 licensed physicians.⁴ These deficiencies affect the quality of life for residents in the study area and limit the ability to attract new residents and businesses. Future vision and land use plans for the counties in the study area generally focus on the need to protect and enhance the

¹ Florida Office of Economic and Demographic Research. *Population Demographics 2019 Medium Projections*.

² US Census. *2013-2017 American Community Survey – 5 Year Estimates*.

³ FDOT *Generalized Land Use*, Florida Dept. of Revenue (2015), and University of Florida (UF) Institute of Food and Agricultural Science *Florida Agriculture 2018 Fast Facts*.

⁴ Florida Department of Health. *County Health Profiles and Resource Availability 2018*.

1 environment and quality of life for residents while providing economic opportunity and growth in an
2 environmentally and economically sustainable manner.

3 4 **Economy**

5 The local economy within the study area is primarily based on the trade, education, healthcare, and
6 construction industries. In addition, all of the counties list government services as one of their top
7 employers with many residents working in the county government (administration and schools) and
8 state correctional institutions. Several counties also list agricultural businesses as some of their largest
9 employers. The presence of various natural resources also provides local economic benefits as the
10 study area has successful and growing mining, silviculture, and ecotourism industries.

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12 All eight counties have a median household income below the 2017 state median income (\$50,833)
13 and all counties (except Jefferson County) have a poverty rate that exceeds the 2017 state poverty rate
14 (15.5%). In addition, educational attainment levels are lower in all eight study area counties than the
15 state average and the unemployment rates for counties within the study area have historically been
16 near or above the state unemployment average.⁵ All of the counties, except for Citrus, have been
17 designated by the Governor as Rural Areas of Opportunity in need of expansion of economic
18 development projects.⁶ Specific areas targeted for economic development include the City of
19 Monticello, the City of Madison, the Town of Greenville, the Town of Cross City, northern Gilchrist
20 County, northern Lafayette County, the City of Perry, and northeast Citrus County.

21 22 **Infrastructure**

23 Much of the study area is served by state highways and county roads with varying speed limits and
24 partial or full access. Many of these facilities are older and were not developed with the benefit of
25 environmentally sensitive design features and modern stormwater facilities. There are no high-speed,
26 high-capacity transportation facilities in the central portion of the study area. There are two high-speed,
27 high-capacity facilities within the study area at the northern- and southern-most boundaries. The
28 Suncoast Parkway (S.R. 589) is a toll road that runs north out of the Tampa Bay region in the southern
29 portion of the study area and terminates in Citrus County. I-10 runs east-west across the state at the
30 northern portion of the study area through Jefferson and Madison Counties. I-75, located east of the
31 study area, is the only north-south high-speed, high-capacity transportation facility serving this area.
32 There is also freight rail located in the northern and southern ends of the study area; however, there is
33 no rail within the central portion of the study area. The CSX “S” line, a major north-south freight line in
34 the state, is located east of the study area and I-75.

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36 While detailed traffic analysis for the corridor has not been conducted at this stage, there is some
37 transportation data for the general area that provides some framework for traffic conditions. Preliminary
38 traffic data shows that approximately 60% of vehicular trips stay within the study area, 30% of the trips
39 are to and from the study area, and only 10% of the trips pass through the study area.⁷ In addition,
40 future traffic conditions modeling, based on growth projections developed prior to COVID-19, indicate
41 that while some roadways within the study area are underutilized, portions of I-75 (east of and outside
42 the study area) and several roadways within the study area could operate at a poor Level of Service
43 (LOS) E or F with high to excessive levels of delay at peak times by the year 2050. FDOT analyzed

⁵ Florida Office of Economic and Demographic Research. *Statistics and County Profiles 2019*.

⁶ Florida Department of Economic Opportunity. *North Central Rural Areas of Opportunity*.

⁷ AirSage, Inc. *Study Area Daily Trips Summary 2016*.

1 future traffic in the study area based on population growth projections from local government
2 comprehensive plans. Based on improvements currently in the FDOT Work Program and existing cost-
3 feasible plans for the Strategic Intermodal System and MPOs in the study area, this traffic growth could
4 produce significant congestion along much of I-75 and portions of U.S. 41, S.R. 44, S.R. 200, and S.R.
5 121 by the year 2050.⁸

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7 Approximately 3,800 vehicle crashes resulting in nearly 90 deaths occurred along the state highway
8 system within the study area in 2018. In addition, there was a 44% increase in total traffic fatalities from
9 2010 to 2018 in the study area, compared to 28% statewide over the same period.⁹ In addition, I-75,
10 the contiguous north-south high-speed, high-capacity transportation corridor, also experiences
11 crashes above the state average. Mobility options are limited within the study area as most existing
12 roadways do not provide transit or safe bicycle and pedestrian facilities. In addition, five counties within
13 the study area (Citrus, Levy, Dixie, Jefferson, and Taylor Counties) are coastal counties susceptible to
14 hurricanes and storm surge with designated emergency evacuation zones.

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16 As previously noted, the study area has lower levels of adequate broadband internet access than the
17 rest of the state. According to the Federal Communications Commission, all eight counties in the study
18 area are below the Florida average (96.2%) for access to fixed-speed broadband internet. Only 1% of
19 residents in Dixie County and fewer than 20% of residents in Levy County have access to the common
20 standard of broadband speed of at least 25 megabits per second (Mbps) download.¹⁰ In addition, some
21 portions of the study area have no broadband service, and many residents are unable to afford what
22 service is available.

23 RECOMMENDATIONS

24 APPROACH AND FRAMEWORK

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26 The Task Force recognized the scope of the M-CORES purpose and program, as well as the scale of
27 the corridors authorized in statute, called for thoughtful decision making supported by the best available
28 data, analysis, and subject-matter expertise and extensive public input. The Task Force recognized
29 decisions about where these corridors should be located and how they should be developed,
30 particularly in relation to environmental resources and existing communities, could have
31 transformational impacts on the study area and the overall state.

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

- 36 • **High-Level Needs** – The Task Force identified key opportunities and challenges related to the
37 six statutory purposes for M-CORES that should be priorities for the M-CORES program in the
38 study area. The Task Force also developed guidance for how FDOT should work with partners
39 to evaluate these potential needs and form more specific purpose and need statements for

⁸ FDOT. Traffic Forecast Input. *2018 Existing Conditions and 2050 Traffic Conditions*.

⁹ Florida Dept. of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles. *Traffic Crash 2018 Annual Report*.

¹⁰ Federal Communications Commission. *Access to Fixed 25Mbps/3Mbps Broadband by County 2019*.

1 corridor improvements moving forward. The high-level needs, along with the purpose, answer
2 the question “why?”.

- 3 • **Guiding Principles** – The Task Force recommended a set of core values to guide decision-
4 making related to the M-CORES program in the study area throughout the planning,
5 development, and implementation process. These answer the question “how?”.
- 6 • **Instructions for Project Development and Beyond** – The Task Force recommended specific
7 instructions for future project development and implementation activities to ensure the Task
8 Force’s guiding principles are applied to subsequent activities as intended. These answer the
9 question “what’s next?”.

10 In completing this report, the Task Force’s intent is to provide these consensus recommendations for
11 how FDOT can work with other agencies and partners to effectively carry out the M-CORES program
12 as specified in s. 338.2278, F.S. Consensus on the report does not constitute agreement by all Task
13 Force members that, at this phase in program delivery, project-specific needs or environmental and
14 economic feasibility are fully developed. Rather, the report is intended to provide consensus
15 recommendations for how needs should be evaluated and how corridor development and related
16 activities should move forward to implement the statute and support the environment, quality of life,
17 and prosperity of the study area and the state.

18 s. 338.2278 (3)(c) 6, F.S. states “To the maximum extent feasible, the department shall adhere to the
19 recommendations of the task force created for each corridor in the design of the multiple modes of
20 transportation and multiple types of infrastructure associated with the corridor.” The Task Force viewed
21 this statement as inclusive of all of the recommendations contained in this report and applicable to all
22 activities associated with the M-CORES program. The Task Force also recognized that, as future work
23 continues in the study area, additional information or changing conditions may provide insight about
24 the feasibility and value of specific implementation steps that could warrant refinements to specific
25 recommendations. In these situations, the guiding principles and intent of the Task Force will guide any
26 such refinements.

27 **High-Level Needs**

28 Development of major transportation projects typically begins with a definition of purpose and need for
29 the project. The purpose identifies the primary goals of the project, and the need establishes the reason
30 for the project based on deficiencies, issues, and/or concerns that currently exist or are expected to
31 occur within the study area. A need typically is a factual, objective description of the specific
32 transportation problem supported by data and analysis.

33 Section 338.2278 (3) (c) 4, F.S., charged the Task Force to “evaluate the need for, and the economic
34 and environmental impacts of, hurricane evacuation impacts of, and land use impacts of” the corridor
35 on which the Task Force is focusing. The Task Force reviewed partner and public input, existing plans
36 and studies, and available data and forecasts on trends and conditions in the study area. **FDOT**
37 **provided preliminary baseline forecasts for future population, employment, and traffic; however,** the
38 amount and precision of the information provided was not sufficient to define specific corridor needs
39 prior to the initiation of project development. Based on the information provided, the Task Force
40 identified potential high-level needs for the corridor and developed recommendations for how FDOT
41 should assess the needs for a corridor of the scale specified in statute as part of future planning and
42 project development.
43

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

7
8 In general, the Task Force found significant high-level needs in the study area related to the six statutory
9 purposes, including revitalizing rural communities, supporting economic development, enhancing
10 quality of life, and protecting the environment. The Task Force recognized general needs to enhance
11 transportation safety, mobility, and connectivity; however, they did not identify a specific need for a
12 completely new greenfield corridor across the entire study area based on the available information at
13 this time. *It is important to note that The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) defines a greenfield*
14 *corridor as designed from the beginning with no constraints from the existence of prior facilities that*
15 *need to be modified or removed.* The Task Force identified a series of potential high-level needs for
16 future evaluation by FDOT:

17 • **Support projected statewide and regional population and economic growth**

18 FDOT preliminary traffic analysis indicates that projected state and regional population and
19 economic growth (based on forecasts developed prior to COVID-19) could produce congestion along
20 portions of I-75, U.S. 41, S.R. 44, S.R. 200, and S.R. 121 by the year 2050. The Task Force
21 recommended further refinement of these traffic projections, including evaluation of whether
22 potential improvements to or development of a new or enhanced inland corridor would relieve future
23 traffic on I-75, as well as whether traffic on the Suncoast Corridor would be impacted by completion
24 of the Northern Turnpike Corridor. The Task Force recommended that the traffic analysis consider
25 future demand for moving both people and freight, including both local/regional travel originating and
26 terminating within the study area and statewide/interregional travel to, from, and through the study
27 area. The traffic analysis also should consider potential changes in travel demand related to recovery
28 from COVID-19 and potential long-term changes in travel behavior, such as greater propensity for
29 working from home and increased home delivery of goods and services. The analysis also should
30 consider potential changes in travel demand and transportation system capacity related to increased
31 use of emerging technologies such as automated and connected vehicles and the next generation
32 of mobility. Finally, the analysis should consider potential shifts in economic activity that could be
33 related to a significant industry expansion or recession during the analysis period.

34
35 The Task Force also recommended that FDOT use population and economic growth projected in
36 local government comprehensive plans and/or the metropolitan planning organization long-range
37 transportation plans and the Florida Transportation Plan (FTP) as the baseline for estimating future
38 travel demand in the study area. These projections generally are consistent with the mid-range
39 projections developed annually by the University of Florida Bureau of Economic and Business
40 Research (BEBR), which could serve as a proxy for those counties which have not updated their
41 comprehensive plans in recent years.

42
43 • **Improve safety, mobility, and connectivity through access to a high-speed, high-capacity**
44 **transportation corridor for people and commercial goods**

45 The Task Force discussed and received subject matter and public input on how access to high-
46 capacity transportation corridors that provide interregional connectivity is a key factor for business

1 recruitment and retention, particularly for underserved rural areas in need of economic
2 enhancement. They also emphasized the need to have a better understanding of the potential
3 impacts and how the Suncoast Corridor and Northern Turnpike Corridor would affect the existing
4 transportation network, including whether development of these corridors would relieve traffic on
5 existing roadways (such as I-75) and divert traffic to/from northwest Florida and the study area. The
6 Task Force recommended additional refinement of traffic analysis (as noted in the previous bullet)
7 in addition to working with local governments on potential operational improvements, existing facility
8 enhancements, and interchange locations.
9

10 • **Protect, restore, enhance, and connect public and private environmentally sensitive areas**
11 **and ecosystems**

12 The Task Force reviewed multiple data sources and maps and discussed the unique characteristics
13 of the region's environment and natural resources including aquifer recharge areas, major
14 watersheds, springs, rivers, farmlands, wildlife habitats, native plants, and ecosystems within the
15 study area. They discussed how these resources need protection and enhancement and that many
16 have already been identified for conservation and acquisition. The Task Force recommended
17 guiding principles and instructions for how the M-CORES program could help achieve environmental
18 goals, including proactive opportunities to restore, connect, and enhance resources. The Task Force
19 recommended that FDOT give particular attention to these resources through application of these
20 guiding principles in addition to standard project development and environmental review processes.
21

22 • **Enhance travel options and safety for all transportation users**

23 FDOT presented recent crash data within the study area indicating that traffic fatalities over the last
24 decade are higher than the state average during the same period. The Task Force also heard how
25 mobility options are limited within the study area as most existing roadways do not provide transit or
26 safe bicycle and pedestrian facilities. The Task Force received subject matter and public input on
27 the need for transportation facilities that use innovative design and technology to improve automobile
28 safety, reduce the number of incidents, and accommodate multi-modal transportation, including
29 multi-use trails separated from the roadway. They also discussed the need to have a better
30 understanding of whether a new or enhanced corridor would improve safety and whether other
31 modes of transportation could be developed independent of a roadway. The Task Force
32 recommended guiding principles and instructions that the corridor safely accommodate and enhance
33 multiple modes of transportation (pedestrian, bicycle, transit, and rail) and that strategies and
34 technology be explored to reduce incidents and improve response.
35

36 • **Enhance emergency management at the local, regional, and state levels**

37 The Task Force heard from an industry expert on emergency response planning and discussed
38 evacuation and sheltering needs as five counties within the study area are coastal counties with
39 emergency evacuation zones. In addition, they discussed how I-75 serves as the primary
40 evacuation/response route for the study area in addition to large portions of central and southwest
41 Florida, including the heavily populated Tampa Bay region. The Task Force discussed the need for
42 the State Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan, local emergency management and
43 response plans, and the Statewide Regional Evacuation Studies to inform and support the needs
44 within and through the study area. The Task Force discussed the ongoing updates to the Statewide
45 Regional Evacuation Studies underway by the Florida Division of Emergency Management and
46 asked FDOT to consider those studies as they will provide updated information including evacuation

1 zones, travel behavior, and sheltering needs. They also suggested that FDOT conduct analysis that
2 documents mobility and connectivity needs related to both routine daily traffic and special events
3 such as evacuation and response to major emergencies and disasters.
4

5 • **Improve access to ecotourism and recreational assets**

6 The Task Force discussed the multitude of natural resources that are vital to the ecotourism and
7 nature-based recreation industry in the study area. They also received subject matter and public
8 input on how many of the outdoor activities and resources in the study area not only create economic
9 development opportunities for local businesses, but also provide unique opportunities for recreation,
10 wildlife viewing, and the ability to develop an appreciation of the natural environment and
11 conservation. The Task Force recognized the importance of access to the resources in addition to
12 the need to protect and enhance the very resources that serve as the basis for the industry and draw
13 many residents to live in the area.
14

15 • **Enhance economic and workforce development, access to education, and job creation**

16 The Task Force reviewed socio-economic data for the study area and heard from subject matter
17 experts, local governments, and the public on the challenges in the study area with regards to
18 employment and educational opportunities. They discussed how key demographic statistics indicate
19 the need for increased opportunities for educational attainment, job training, workforce development,
20 and overall economic development within the study area. The Task Force also discussed the
21 potential for infrastructure improvements (roadway, multi-modal, and communications) to create a
22 competitive environment to attract businesses, investment, and talent to a region. They also
23 discussed the need for FDOT to consider the positive and negative mobility, economic, and fiscal
24 impacts of potential shifts in economic activity from existing communities and corridors to enhanced
25 or new corridors, as well as potential net economic benefits to the region and state. They also
26 suggested working with businesses and economic development organizations to fully evaluate and
27 understand these economic development needs as the corridor moves forward and consider ways
28 that FDOT and the M-CORES program can support and build on their existing economic
29 development plans.
30

31 • **Improve connectivity to agricultural businesses, manufacturing, warehousing, freight
32 terminals, and intermodal logistics centers**

33 The Task Force reviewed GIS data of available transportation facilities and received subject matter
34 and public input on the importance of centrally located high-speed, high-capacity corridors for
35 logistics and movement of commercial goods and agricultural, forestry, and mining products. They
36 recognized that while transportation is often a vital component to ensure economic competitiveness
37 of these business, agricultural and rural land also need protection and enhancement to be
38 productive. They also discussed the fact that several counties have already identified areas for
39 farmland preservation and those areas should be taken into consideration. The Task Force
40 recommended additional analysis be conducted in addition to working with local governments and
41 stakeholders (businesses, farmers, organizations, etc.) to fully evaluate and understand emerging
42 trends and connectivity needs as the corridor moves forward.
43

44 • **Expand rural broadband infrastructure and access to broadband service**

45 The Task Force reviewed data on the limited availability of broadband access within the study area.
46 They heard from experts on a utility panel and the public on how broadband is crucial for education,

1 employment, business operations, and access to healthcare and has become part of a community's
2 critical infrastructure. They discussed how the lack of access to healthcare (physicians and hospitals)
3 and college/technical schools within the rural study area increases the need for improved broadband
4 service for virtual healthcare and learning opportunities. The Task Force recommended additional
5 analysis be conducted to see if there are ways to accommodate increased broadband independent
6 of a transportation facility and consider programs that make the service more affordable. There was
7 also discussion on the need to consider expansion of other utility needs at a regional scale.
8

9 • **Preserve and improve the rural character and quality of communities**

10 The Task Force discussed and heard from the public on the importance of preserving the character
11 of the area and protecting the variety of community resources in the study area including downtowns,
12 parks, schools, places of worship, and various cultural (historic and archaeological) resources. While
13 a key purpose of M-CORES is to revitalize rural communities with additional infrastructure and
14 economic development opportunities, input from the Task Force members and the public
15 emphasized the importance of preserving the quality of life in these communities. The Task Force
16 stressed the importance of working with local communities, listening to their concerns and
17 preferences, and understanding their goals and visions throughout the corridor development
18 process. They also discussed the need for minimization of negative impacts to the human
19 environment to ensure the corridor does not negatively impact the very communities it was designed
20 to improve.
21

22 **Needs Evaluation Process**

23 As input to project development, FDOT will work with partners to conduct a robust evaluation of the
24 potential high-level needs in the study area, building on the recommendations of the Task Force. This
25 process will evaluate and distinguish between conventional safety, mobility, and connectivity needs,
26 and broader regional needs related to transportation that also are included in the statutory purpose in
27 s. 338.2278, F.S. Additional details on the needs evaluation process as well as the steps involved in
28 identifying and evaluating alternatives are specified in the Action Plan on page 28 of this report.
29

30 The Task Force did not reach a conclusion based on the information available at this time that there
31 is a specific need for a completely new greenfield corridor through the study area to achieve the
32 purposes required by s. 338.2278, F.S. The Task Force expressed a preference for improvement or
33 expansion of existing major highway corridors or existing major linear utility corridors that already
34 have disturbed right of way.

35 The Task Force believed that the formal determination of need pursuant to statutory requirements and
36 consistent with accepted statewide processes is an important milestone in corridor planning and
37 development. The Task Force developed a series of guiding principles and instructions for future
38 planning and development of corridors for which high-level needs have been identified, including
39 analysis of the "no-build" option. While these determinations will be made after the Task Force has
40 completed its deliberations, the guidance provided by the Task Force will instruct the evaluation
41 process and FDOT will create ongoing opportunities for partners and the public to be engaged during
42 the process.
43

44 **Guiding Principles and Instructions**

1 The Task Force recommended guiding principles and instructions that are intended to function as a
2 set of directions to FDOT and other partners as they carry out future planning, project development,
3 and implementation activities related to the M-CORES program in s. 338.2278, F.S. These guiding
4 principles and instructions are intended to supplement the requirements of current FDOT processes
5 during planning, project development, design, and other implementation phases.

6 The Task Force developed a series of 13 guiding principles and associated instructions. The text
7 below lists the specific guiding principles and instructions with supporting text to document the intent
8 of the Task Force. The guiding principles function as an integrated set and are not presented in a
9 specific priority order.

10 11 **CONSISTENCY WITH STATEWIDE, REGIONAL, AND LOCAL PLANS**

12 The Task Force recognizes that there are plans specifically called out in statute, where consistency is
13 the standard by law or policy; these include the local government comprehensive plans, metropolitan
14 long-range transportation plans, strategic regional policy plans, and the statewide Florida
15 Transportation Plan (FTP). They stressed the importance of preventing growth from occurring in areas
16 that have not planned for that growth. The following guiding principle and instructions were developed
17 by the Task Force to address the consistency issue. *It is important to note that this is considered a*
18 *cross-cutting guiding principle with associated instructions to serve all high-level needs and support all*
19 *other guiding principles in this report.*

20
21 **Guiding Principle #1:** Be consistent with statutorily required statewide, regional, and local plans
22 including the local government comprehensive plans, Long-Range Transportation Plans (LRTPs),
23 strategic regional policy plans, and the Florida Transportation Plan (FTP).

24 25 **Instructions:**

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

1 **MAXIMIZE USE OF EXISTING FACILITIES**

2 The Task Force emphasized the importance of examining the potential to upgrade or use existing
3 transportation facilities or utility corridors to meet the purpose and need of the corridor before planning
4 a new greenfield corridor. They emphasized the importance of exploring opportunities to upgrade
5 existing roadways or construct the corridor with or within existing facilities or right of way (major roadway
6 or utility) to minimize the project footprint and impacts, in addition to using the upgrades or redesign to
7 improve the environmental design of existing roadways. The following guiding principle and instructions
8 were developed by the Task Force to address the use of existing facilities. *This is considered a cross-*
9 *cutting guiding principle with associated instructions to serve all high-level needs and support all other*
10 *guiding principles in this report.*

11
12 **Guiding Principle #2:** Evaluate potential alternatives for addressing the M-CORES purposes and
13 interregional statewide connectivity and mobility needs in this priority order:

- 14
15 1. Make safety and operational improvements to existing transportation facilities.
16 2. Add capacity to existing transportation facilities or other publicly owned right-of-way in or near
17 the study area, including co-location of facilities within existing disturbed right-of-way and other
18 approaches to transforming existing facilities and right-of-way to accommodate additional
19 modes, uses, and functions.
20 3. In circumstances where purpose and need and/or guiding principles cannot be addressed by
21 operational or existing facility improvements, then evaluate new alignment alternatives.
22

23 **Instructions:**

- 24 • Identify and advance safety and operational improvements to existing transportation facilities,
25 particularly those that would be adjacent to a new or improved north-south corridor.
26 • Evaluate potential capacity improvements to a broad range of existing transportation facilities
27 (rail and roadway) in or near the study area, including their impact on surrounding environmental
28 resources, land uses, and communities.
29 • Evaluate opportunities for co-location within or adjacent to existing disturbed rail, utility, and
30 roadway right-of-way in or near the study area, including their impact on surrounding
31 environmental resources, land uses, and communities.
32 • Give priority to exploring opportunities for co-location along existing major roadways and major
33 utility easements.
34 • Assess connectivity gaps between existing transportation facilities and areas identified as
35 priorities for attraction, and potential opportunities for closing those gaps.
36 • Advance specific improvements that support a system meeting the long-term needs of statewide
37 and interregional flows of people and freight.
38 • Collaborate with local governments, regional planning councils, metropolitan planning
39 organizations, and DEO on operational improvements, existing facility enhancements, and, if
40 needed, interchange locations to ensure consistency with local government comprehensive
41 plans. This collaboration should consider how proposed improvements can help enhance the
42 vitality of the residential and business communities and provide access to vital resources (police,
43 fire, shelters, etc.).
44

1 **TECHNOLOGY**

2 The Task Force encouraged FDOT to explore ways for new and emerging technology to meet the needs
3 of the corridor and potentially reduce impacts to the natural and human environment. The following
4 guiding principle and instructions were developed by the Task Force to address technology. *This is*
5 *considered a cross-cutting guiding principle with associated instructions to serve all high-level needs*
6 *and support all other guiding principles in this report.*
7

8 **Guiding Principle #3:** Incorporate technology into corridor planning, design, construction, operations,
9 and maintenance. Accommodate emerging vehicle and information technologies such as autonomous,
10 connected, electric, and shared vehicles (ACES) and mobility as a service (MaaS).
11

12 **Instructions:**

- 13 • Leverage existing technology to help avoid, minimize, or mitigate adverse impacts from the
14 corridor.
- 15 • Consider how future and emerging technologies, such as electric and automated vehicles, may
16 be accommodated.
- 17 • Apply innovative planning and design strategies such as using state-of-the-art and/or energy
18 efficient methodologies, technologies, and materials to develop the corridor.
- 19 • Plan and design the corridor to accommodate technologies/applications, considering their ability
20 to evolve/adapt over time.
- 21 • Plan for and provide infrastructure for electric vehicle charging stations.
22

23 **RESILIENCE**

24 The Task Force stressed the importance of ensuring that new or improved infrastructure is designed to
25 address existing vulnerability to flooding, storm surge, sea-level rise, and other risks and adapt to
26 significant changes or unexpected impacts to make the state’s transportation system more resilient.
27 The following guiding principle and instructions were developed by the Task Force to address
28 infrastructure resilience. *This is considered a cross-cutting guiding principle with associated instructions*
29 *to serve all high-level needs and support all other guiding principles in this report.*
30

31 **Guiding Principle #4:** Plan and develop a corridor that considers vulnerability to risks such as inland
32 flooding, storm surge zones, and changing coastlines/sea-level rise. Design and construct
33 infrastructure to withstand and recover from potential risks such as extreme weather events and climate
34 trends.
35

36 **Instructions:**

- 37 • Identify sea-level-rise projections appropriate to the planning horizon of road and bridge
38 infrastructure.
- 39 • When developing and evaluating corridors, place a high priority on the ability of co-located or
40 new infrastructure to withstand and recover from storm surge (tropical storm through category
41 5), inland flooding, extreme weather events, and climate trends.
- 42 • When developing improvements along co-located roadways, identify opportunities to enhance
43 those roads to address deficiencies in design standards or elevation related to water quality,
44 water quantity, inland flooding, sea-level rise, and storm surge.
45

1 **TRANSPORTATION MODES**

2 The Task Force emphasized the importance of examining opportunities to include other transportation
3 modes such as shared-use trails, freight and passenger rail, and public transit in the corridor. They
4 encouraged FDOT to think beyond personal automobile travel to meet a variety of mobility needs and
5 travel options and to look for ways that this corridor can improve existing gaps in greenways and trails.
6 The following guiding principle and instructions were developed by the Task Force to address multi-
7 modal transportation. *It is important to note that this is considered a cross-cutting guiding principle with*
8 *associated instructions to serve all high-level needs and support all other guiding principles in this*
9 *report.*

10
11 **Guiding Principle #5:** Plan, design, construct, and operate a corridor that accommodates multiple
12 modes of transportation.

13
14 **Instructions:**

- 15 • Consult with local communities and the public on needs and preferences for multimodal forms
16 of transportation that could be included with the corridor.
- 17 • Consider innovative planning and design strategies to accommodate multiple modes of
18 transportation.
- 19 • Enhance mobility and accessibility in areas with high concentrations of transportation-
20 disadvantaged populations.
- 21 • Review applicable metropolitan planning organization long-range transportation plans, local
22 government comprehensive plans, and transit development plans. Use these plans to help
23 inform and refine the corridor’s purpose and need for evaluating modal solutions and identifying
24 potential alternatives.
- 25 • Prioritize closing gaps on high priority segments in the Florida Greenways and Trails System
26 Plan.

27
28 **COMMUNITY IDENTITY AND CHARACTER**

29 Enhancing communities was an area of focus for Task Force members. While they recognized the
30 need to enhance the quality of life for residents, they also emphasized the importance of preserving
31 many of the rural qualities of this area. They stressed the importance of allowing flexibility so that each
32 community can determine its preferences for corridor location and access (including bypasses and
33 interchanges) and aesthetics based on individual community needs and visions. The following guiding
34 principle and instructions were developed by the Task Force to address the need to preserve and
35 improve the rural character and quality of communities in the study area.

36
37 **Guiding Principle #6:** Seek opportunities to maintain and enhance the rural character and quality of
38 life in communities, and ensure the corridor provides for their future vitality.

1 **Instructions:**

- 2 • Work with communities on preferences to enhance and maintain the safety, quality of life, and
3 character of communities. Community preferences for incorporation into corridor planning,
4 interchange locations, additional infrastructure needs, and project development may include:
5
6 ➤ access (toll vs. limited access and access locations),
7 ➤ aesthetics (including signs, billboards, etc.) and native landscaping,
8 ➤ branding, and
9 ➤ signage.
- 10
- 11 • Explore opportunities to view, understand, and access the environmental uniqueness of the Big
12 Bend Ecosystem.
- 13 • Plan, design, construct, operate, and maintain a corridor that recognizes and incorporates the
14 surrounding community character (including downtown areas and social and cultural centers)
15 while accommodating potential growth and development. Balance the need to move vehicles
16 safely and efficiently while preserving and enhancing scenic, aesthetic, historic, and
17 environmental resources.
18

19 **HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES**

20 The Task Force discussed many of the important cultural resources in the study area including historic
21 districts and archaeological sites that contribute to the community and enhance the quality of life in the
22 study area. They encouraged the preservation, protection, and enhancement of existing resources as
23 well as any new resources that are discovered throughout the planning and project development
24 process. The following guiding principle and instructions were developed by the Task Force to address
25 the need to preserve and improve the rural character and quality of communities in the study area with
26 regards to historic and cultural resources.

27 **Guiding Principle #7:** Avoid adverse impacts to these identified resources:

- 28
- 29 • Known cultural sites with human remains
30 • Known cemeteries
31 • Lands owned by Native American Tribes
32 • Historic resources listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP)

33 If new resources are discovered, they will be addressed consistent with state and federal policies and
34 regulations.

35 **Instructions:**

- 36 • Work with communities and their stakeholders to identify needs for enhancement or protection
37 of historic and cultural resources.
- 38 • Follow (FDOT) Project Development & Environment (PD&E) Manual; Part 2 Chapter 8, Section
39 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966 as amended; 36 Code of Federal
40 Regulations (CFR) Part 800; and the Florida Historical Resources Act (FHRA), Chapter 267,
41 Florida Statutes (F.S.), for coordination of involvement with historic and cultural resources,
42 including lands owned by Native American Tribes.

43

1 **NATURAL ENVIRONMENT**

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

11 The Task Force developed an integrated approach for addressing environmental resources including
12 conservation lands, wildlife and plant habitat, and water resources. This approach reflects a priority
13 order of first, avoiding negative impacts to resources; second, enhancing, restoring, and connecting
14 resources; and third, minimizing or mitigating negative impacts.

15 To help implement this approach, FDOT identified and committed to specific environmental resources
16 that will not be impacted by a corridor or where no new corridor will be placed through the resource,
17 such as existing conservation lands or habitat already fragmented by existing transportation facilities.
18 In these cases, the existing facilities or right of way could be improved, but steps should be taken to
19 enhance or restore the environmental resource at the same time. In addition, the Task Force identified
20 other important resources where avoidance is not explicitly defined at this time, but where great care
21 should be taken to evaluate potential corridors and their impacts moving forward.

22 In addition, the Task Force recognized the opportunities to contribute toward broader regional and
23 statewide environmental goals through the decisions made about corridor development as well as the
24 abilities the statute provides to FDOT regarding right of way acquisition and other mitigation activities.
25 The Task Force also recommended that FDOT commit to working closely with other local, regional,
26 state, and federal agencies and nongovernmental organizations to advance key priorities such as high-
27 priority land conservation, water quality and quantity (flow) improvements, habitat and water resource
28 protection, and ecosystem connectivity initiatives developed by other partners.

29 The following guiding principle and instructions were developed by the Task Force to address the
30 purpose and need to protect the environment and natural resources and to restore, enhance, and
31 connect public and private environmentally sensitive areas and ecosystems.

32
33 **Guiding Principle #8:** Avoid adverse impacts to these identified resources:

- 34 • Do not impact:
 - 35 ➤ Springheads
 - 36 ➤ Named Lakes
 - 37 ➤ High-Risk Coastal Areas
 - 38
 - 39
 - 40

- 1 • Apply the following priority order for all of the below-listed resources:

- 2
3 1. Avoid negative impacts to these resources
4 2. Enhance, restore, and connect these resources while continuing to avoid negative
5 impacts
6 3. Minimize and mitigate negative impacts to these resources
7

8 FDOT will consider these resources during the development, analysis, and comparative evaluation of
9 project alternatives including the no-build option. Resources include:

- 10
11 • Do not develop a new corridor through:

- 12
13 ➤ Coastal Areas
14 ➤ Aquatic Preserves
15 ➤ Mitigation Banks
16 ➤ Florida Forever Acquired Lands
17 ➤ Managed Conservation Areas
18 ➤ State Forests
19 ➤ State Parks
20

- 21 • Additional resources identified as priorities by Task Force members:

- 22
23 ➤ Waccasassa Flats
24 ➤ Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Floodways
25 ➤ Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) Surface Water Sites
26 ➤ SWFWMD Groundwater Sites
27 ➤ SWFWMD Atmospheric Sites
28 ➤ SWFWMD Proposed Well Sites
29 ➤ Water Management Lands (including Fee and Conservation Easements)
30 ➤ State Owned Lands
31 ➤ Other Park Boundaries
32 ➤ Wildlife Refuges
33 ➤ Florida Forever Targeted Property
34 ➤ Prime Farmland
35 ➤ Springs Priority Focus Areas
36 ➤ Tri-Colored Bats, Critical Wildlife Areas
37 ➤ Florida Ecological Greenway Network – Priority 1 & 2
38 ➤ Aquifer Recharge Priorities
39 ➤ Surface Water Resource Priorities
40 ➤ Rare Species Habitat Conservation Priorities
41 ➤ Preservation 2000 Lands
42 ➤ Basin Management Action Plans (BMAPs)
43 ➤ Natural Resources of Regional Significance
44

1 **Instructions:**

2
3 **GENERAL**

- 4 • Place a high priority on avoiding impacts to:
- 5
- 6 ➤ Florida Ecological Greenway Network – Priority 1 and 2 lands
- 7 ➤ High Priority Critical Lands and Waters Identification Project (CLIP) lands
- 8

9 **CONSERVATION LANDS**

- 10 • Continue to identify and prioritize private and public conservation lands for enhancement or
- 11 avoidance.
- 12 • Coordinate with agencies and partners early in the project development process to identify land
- 13 acquisition plans and identify strategic opportunities to advance acquisition and funding
- 14 priorities [including s. 338.2278 (3)(c)(6) & (8), F.S.] with the intent to acquire lands prior to or
- 15 in parallel with corridor development.
- 16 • Coordinate with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and other agencies for
- 17 Florida Forever Program projects that are in the highest priority for acquisition (including
- 18 consideration for Florida Ecological Greenway Network Priority 1 & 2), potential Water
- 19 Management District lands, conservation easements by land trusts, and lands within the optimal
- 20 boundaries of the adopted management plans for regional, state and national parks, forests,
- 21 refuges, and water management areas.
- 22 • Minimize impacts of transportation lighting on nearby agricultural, environmental, and
- 23 conservation lands.
- 24

25 **WILDLIFE HABITATS**

- 26 • Continue to identify and prioritize wildlife areas for enhancement or avoidance.
- 27 • Ensure the corridor minimizes impacts to wildlife corridors and that high priority is given to
- 28 design features that establish functional wildlife crossings that maintain connectivity of critical
- 29 linkages to provide for adequate wildlife/water passage.
- 30 • Use best available technology to limit impacts to wildlife including road kills, and notify vehicles
- 31 of other hazards such as smoke from prescribed burns and wildfires.
- 32 • Coordinate with the Florida Forest Service to identify lands managed with prescribed or
- 33 controlled burns and their associated smokesheds and minimize impacts associated with
- 34 corridor location and operations.
- 35 • Consult with state and federal agencies to identify and protect threatened and endangered
- 36 species (wildlife and plants) and their habitats.
- 37

38 **WATER RESOURCES**

- 39 • Work with local governments and the water management districts to ensure best management
- 40 practices (BMPs), local/known data (including historic flooding areas), and emerging
- 41 technologies are utilized to maintain, restore, and enhance water quality and mitigate inland
- 42 flooding issues within the corridor.
- 43 • Continue to identify and prioritize water resources for enhancement or avoidance.
- 44

- Look for opportunities to improve water quality and quantity (flow) and reduce water quality/quantity deficiencies as part of new corridor construction as well as upgrades to existing facilities that do not have the benefit of environmentally friendly design and modern stormwater improvements.

ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIVITY

- Continue to identify and prioritize ecosystems for enhancement or avoidance while considering wildlife-crossing linkages and overall ecosystem connectivity.
- Work with local organizations and businesses to understand the needs for ecotourism improvements and protections.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Economic development was another major focus area for the Task Force as it serves several purposes including revitalization of rural communities, job creation, and enhancing the quality of life. They discussed the importance of agricultural businesses in the study area and their contribution to the local, regional, and state economies. They also stressed the importance of economic diversification. The following guiding principle and instructions were developed by the Task Force to address the need to enhance economic and workforce development, access to education, and job creation in the study area.

Guiding Principle #9: Maximize opportunities to enhance local community and economic development with an emphasis on rural areas. Avoid and minimize adverse economic impacts to individual communities, businesses, and resources.

Instructions:

- Be consistent with economic development elements of local government comprehensive plans (s. 163.3177, F.S. and s. 163.3178, F.S.), and comprehensive economic development strategies developed by regional planning councils in their capacity as federal economic development districts.
- Conduct early outreach to communities and the public and private sectors to fully understand economic development needs including job training, education, and workforce development.
- Give priority to and enhance potential economic development opportunities and employment benefits in the study area by providing, improving, or maintaining accessibility to activity centers, employment centers, learning institutions, and agricultural lands, and locating interchanges in a manner that is consistent with the local government existing and future land uses.
- Build on existing economic development priorities and plans by state and local organizations including economic development organizations, partnerships, chambers of commerce, and regional planning councils. Work with the community and organizations to look for opportunities for the corridor to help them reach their economic development goals.
- Review analysis done by local, state, and federal agencies to further support opportunities for recreational tourism.

AGRICULTURAL LAND USES

The Task Force acknowledged its statutory direction to evaluate design features and the need for acquisition of state conservation lands that mitigate the impact of project construction on agricultural land uses. The Task Force emphasized the importance of protecting and enhancing the abundance of

1 productive agricultural lands (including mining and silviculture) in the study area as they serve both
2 environmental and economic purposes and contribute to revitalization of rural communities through job
3 creation and protection of the environment. They encouraged FDOT to work with local government,
4 state/federal agencies, and private agricultural/farmland organizations on protection and enhancement
5 of these resources. The following guiding principle and instructions were developed by the Task Force
6 to address the need to improve connectivity to agricultural businesses, manufacturing, warehousing,
7 freight terminals, and intermodal logistics centers.

8
9 **Guiding Principle #10:** Plan and develop a transportation corridor in a manner that protects the
10 region's most productive agricultural lands and other rural lands with economic or environmental
11 significance. Improve transportation connectivity to, from, and between working farms and other
12 economically valuable rural lands.

13
14 **Instructions:**

- 15 • Work with landowners/operators of agriculture, silviculture, mining, equine, aquaculture,
16 horticulture, and nursery lands to understand their needs and plans.
- 17 • Emphasize protection and enhancement of farmland preservation areas designated within local
18 government comprehensive plans and lands in the Florida Rural and Family Lands Program,
19 and other farmland conservation programs.
- 20 • Minimize the fragmentation of agriculture, forestry tracts, and facilities, and consider how the
21 project could affect mobilization of equipment and prescribed burning activities.

22
23 **HIGHWAY SAFETY**

24 Enhancing public safety was also an area of focus for Task Force members. The following guiding
25 principle and instructions were developed by the Task Force to address the need to enhance travel
26 options and safety for all transportation users.

27
28 **Guiding Principle #11:** Plan, design, construct, and operate a corridor that safely accommodates
29 multiple modes of transportation and types of users.

30
31 **Instructions:**

- 32 • Reduce transportation incidents and improve response by using advanced safety strategies
33 including innovative technology, design, and operations.
- 34 • Consult with the Florida Highway Patrol (FHP) and counties to determine current
35 bottlenecks/safety hazards and mitigate or correct these issues during the design phase.
- 36 • Identify opportunities for additional truck parking facilities.

37
38 **EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT**

39 The Task Force emphasized the importance of ensuring the corridor supports existing emergency
40 management plans. The following guiding principle and instructions were developed by the Task Force
41 to address the need to enhance emergency management at the local, regional, and state levels.

42
43 **Guiding Principle #12:** Support and enhance local, regional, and state emergency management plans
44 and studies in all phases: mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery.

1 **Instructions:**

- 2 • Evaluate the immediate and long-term needs and demand for emergency evacuation and
3 sheltering at the local, regional, and state levels for natural and man-made disasters (including
4 but not limited to flooding, hurricanes, wildfires, terrorist threats/attacks, industrial
5 accidents/chemical spills, etc.).
- 6 • Consider both existing state and local emergency response plans and ongoing updates to the
7 Statewide Regional Evacuation Studies underway by the Florida Division of Emergency
8 Management and the regional planning councils, including updated data being developed on
9 travel behavior during emergencies.
- 10 • Support emergency evacuation needs by enhancing emergency evacuation and response time
11 including providing, maintaining, or expediting roadway access to emergency shelters and other
12 emergency facilities.
- 13 • Conduct additional emergency management needs analysis as part of the project-related traffic
14 studies.
- 15 • Identify opportunities for fueling facilities and charging stations.

16
17 **BROADBAND AND OTHER UTILITIES**

18 The Task Force emphasized the importance of ensuring the corridor supports the need to expand
19 broadband and utility service (water, sewer, electric, gas, etc.) to the area for the purposes of revitalizing
20 rural communities, encouraging job creation, and leveraging technology. The following guiding principle
21 and instructions were developed by the Task Force to address the need to expand rural broadband
22 infrastructure and access to broadband service in the study area.

23
24 **Guiding Principle #13:** Plan and design the corridor to enable co-location of broadband and other
25 utility infrastructure in right-of-way. Plan for broadband and other utility needs at a regional scale,
26 independent from the transportation facility; address these needs through the corridor, where feasible.

27
28 **Instructions:**

- 29 • Ensure broadband provider access to FDOT right-of-way is non-discriminatory and
30 competitively neutral.
- 31 • Coordinate with private internet service providers (ISPs) to determine how construction of the
32 corridor identifies opportunities for reducing rural broadband deployment costs.
- 33 • Support local governments and utility providers regarding existing and planned utility projects,
34 including identifying opportunities within the study area to co-locate and/or extend utilities within
35 and adjacent to transportation corridors.
- 36 • Explore opportunities to coordinate with local governments and utilities for septic to sewer
37 conversions to improve quality of life and water quality, with an emphasis on higher density
38 communities and areas targeted in BMAPs.

1 **Action Plan**

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

5 1. **Evaluate potential needs.** FDOT will work with partners to conduct a robust evaluation of
6 potential corridor needs, building on the Task Force’s recommendations on high-level needs.
7 This process will evaluate and distinguish between conventional safety, mobility, and
8 connectivity needs, and broader needs or co-benefits related to transportation, such as
9 economic development or environmental stewardship benefits. The needs evaluation will
10 include a detailed technical analysis of current and future traffic conditions in the study area
11 building on the guidance provided by the Task Force in this report. The needs evaluation will
12 include the best available data and most recent projections on travel demand and underlying
13 population and economic growth. This needs analysis will support development of a Purpose
14 and Need statement for potential corridor improvements.

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

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

23 The alternatives evaluation will include the specific economic, environmental, land use, and
24 emergency management impacts required in s. 338.2278(3)(c)4, F.S. and the standard
25 processes outlined in FDOT’s PD&E manual. The evaluation will be consistent with the guiding
26 principles and instructions recommended by the Task Force. The evaluation will consider the
27 best available data on the full range of potential impacts.

28 The Task Force discussed the importance of considering a “no build” option during all stages of
29 Planning and PD&E. FDOT confirmed that, according to both state and federal law and
30 established procedures, a “no build” is always an option in the planning and PD&E processes.
31 In this context, “no build” would mean no major capacity investments beyond those already
32 committed in FDOT’s Five Year Work Program, as well as no associated investments related
33 to land acquisition, broadband and other utilities, and other statutory capabilities specific to M-
34 CORES. FDOT would continue to maintain the safety and operation of existing transportation
35 system in this study area. As this early stage of planning and corridor development focused on
36 the full study area, “no build” may refer to no major corridor capacity investments in the entire
37 study area. During later phases as specific projects and segments are identified, “no build”
38 would mean no capacity investments for that specific project area. The “no build” would remain
39 an option throughout the PD&E process and be analyzed at the same level of detail as all “build”
40 options, including consideration of economic, environmental, land use, and emergency
41 management impacts and consistency with the guiding principles and instructions. The analysis
42 of the “no build” also must include impacts on the study area such as the potential for increased

1 traffic on existing facilities, impacts to multimodal facilities, and impacts on emergency response
2 times.

3 The planning process also will include initial, high-level consideration of potential costs and
4 funding approaches based on reasonable assumptions at this early stage. It is not likely that
5 any alternatives would be sufficiently defined at this stage to conduct detailed analysis of
6 economic feasibility, but early identification of the order of magnitude of potential costs and
7 funding sources can be used to support decision making on the range of alternatives including
8 the “no build” option.

9 The planning and PD&E processes combined will narrow the range of alternatives and identify
10 opportunities to segment corridor development into multiple projects. These processes also will
11 produce more specific information about potential alignments, interchange locations, and other
12 project features.

13 After the PD&E study is completed, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection will
14 review the environmental feasibility of any projects proposed as part of Florida’s Turnpike
15 system and submit a statement of environmental feasibility to FDOT, consistent with s. 338.223,
16 F.S.

- 17 **3. Support consistency review and update of local and regional plans.** FDOT will coordinate
18 early and often with local governments, metropolitan planning organizations (MPO), and
19 regional planning councils (RPC) to ensure consistency with applicable local and regional plans
20 throughout all activities. Consistent with s. 338.223, F.S. and with the Task Force’s guiding
21 principles, proposed corridor projects must be consistent, to the maximum extent feasible, with
22 applicable approved local government comprehensive plans, included in the transportation
23 improvement plan (TIP) of any affected MPOs, and developed in accordance with the Florida
24 Transportation Plan and FDOT’s Five Year Work Program.

25 As required by s. 338.2278(3)(c)10, F.S., FDOT will provide affected local governments with a
26 copy of the Task Force report and project alignments identified through the PD&E process so
27 each local government with one or more planned interchanges within its jurisdiction can meet
28 the statutory requirement to review the Task Force report and local government comprehensive
29 plan no later than December 31, 2023. Each local government will consider whether the area
30 in and around the interchange contains appropriate land uses and environmental protections
31 and whether its comprehensive plan should be amended to provide appropriate uses and
32 protections. FDOT will coordinate with the local governments, RPCs, and Florida Department
33 of Economic Opportunity (DEO) to assist with plan updates, including consideration of technical
34 and financial support needs.

- 35 **4. Assess economic feasibility and identify potential funding sources.** Following PD&E,
36 FDOT will evaluate the economic feasibility of the corridor at the 30 percent design phase, when
37 sufficient information is available to assess the ability to meet statutory requirements for projects
38 as part of Florida’s Turnpike system consistent with s. 338.223, F.S. The economic feasibility
39 will account for required costs to develop and implement the corridor, such as engineering, right-
40 of-way, construction, mitigation, enhancement, and utility costs. These would include typical
41 corridor costs plus FDOT’s contribution toward the additional corridor elements related to
42 environmental enhancements or multi-use opportunities as envisioned in statute. This economic
43 feasibility test will focus on specific corridor projects; additional analyses may be needed to
44 examine the cost and funding of all M-CORES program initiatives.

1 FDOT also will identify potential funding sources for preferred corridor alternatives identified
2 during PD&E, including a combination of the specific sources allocated to the M-CORES
3 program in s. 338.2278, F.S.; toll revenues and associated Turnpike revenue bonds; right of
4 way and bridge construction bonds or financing by the FDOT Financing Corporation; advances
5 from the State Transportation Trust Fund; funds obtained through the creation of public-private
6 partnerships; and other applicable state, local, and private revenue sources.

7 FDOT has committed that projects currently in its Five-Year Work Program for Fiscal Years
8 2021-2025 will not be impacted by M-CORES funding needs. M-CORES program costs that
9 are not covered through the dedicated funding sources identified in statute or through toll
10 revenues and associated Turnpike revenue bonds and other financing and partnerships would
11 need to be prioritized along with other needs for future Five-Year Work Programs, working
12 through the standard process including the applicable MPO TIP and rural transportation
13 planning processes. All M-CORES projects, regardless of funding source, will be included in
14 applicable MPO TIPs and long-range transportation plans, consistent with federal guidance for
15 projects of regional significance.

16 5. **Advance innovative land acquisition concepts.** FDOT, in consultation with the Florida
17 Department of Environmental Protection, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission,
18 Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Affairs, and relevant federal agencies, will
19 advance the Task Force’s recommendations for combining right-of-way acquisition with the
20 acquisition of lands or conservation easements to facilitate environmental mitigation or
21 ecosystem, wildlife habitat, or water quality protection or restoration. A key focus will be on how
22 M-CORES program decisions can support broader regional or statewide conservation and
23 environmental stewardship goals, such as priorities in the Florida Ecological Greenway
24 Network. This process will identify opportunities to advance specific land acquisition and related
25 recommendations prior to or in parallel with corridor construction. FDOT will determine how to
26 provide funding, in whole or part, for land acquisition projects consistent with its statutory
27 authority in s. 338.2278(3)(c) 6, with the expectation that FDOT funding supplements and
28 leverages other state, federal, local, private, and nonprofit sources. FDOT will work with DEP,
29 FWC, water management districts, and nongovernmental organizations to explore potential
30 indicators for setting and tracking progress toward land conservation goals.

31 6. **Advance multi-use opportunities.** FDOT will coordinate with local governments, RPCs, other
32 state agencies, and industry organizations to advance multi-use opportunities for the corridor
33 as provided for in statute. An early emphasis will be on broadband and other utility co-location
34 opportunities, including coordination with DEO on the development of the statewide broadband
35 strategic plan. FDOT will determine how to provide funding, in whole or part, for broadband
36 consistent with its statutory authority in s. 339.0801, F.S., with the expectation that FDOT
37 funding supplements and leverages other state, federal, local, private, and nonprofit funding
38 sources.

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

1 about and provide input to subsequent planning and project development activities, such as
2 periodic meetings to reconvene Task Force member organizations in an advisory role. FDOT
3 also will create multiple ongoing opportunities for members of the public to be aware of and
4 provide input to this process, with emphasis on direct engagement of the public in local
5 communities.

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

14 FDOT also recognizes the need for continued improvements to its planning, project
15 development, and related processes to fully implement the M-CORES purpose and objective
16 as identified in statute and the guiding principles and instructions as recommended by the Task
17 Force. This may include the need for additional technical and financial support for the activities
18 identified in this report for enhanced planning, collaboration, and public engagement.

19 The specific commitments in this Action Plan indicate how FDOT will work with local governments
20 and other agencies and partners to carry out the Task Force’s recommendations for the M-CORES
21 program in the full study area, augmenting established statutory requirements and FDOT procedures.
22 Specific corridor projects identified through this process will advance based on determination of need,
23 environmental feasibility, economic feasibility, and consistency with applicable local government
24 comprehensive plans and MPO TIPs.

Appendix A

Suncoast Corridor

Task Force Membership List

ORGANIZATION	MEMBER NAME / TITLE
Florida Department of Transportation	Greg Evans, District Two Secretary
Florida Department of Transportation	Jason Peters, District Three Director of Operations
Florida Department of Environmental Protection	Chris Stahl, State Clearinghouse Coordinator
Florida Department of Economic Opportunity	Brian McManus, Chief of Staff
Florida Department of Education	Mary Cross, Assistant District Administrator, Division of Blind Services
Florida Department of Health	Paul D. Myers, Administrator, Alachua County
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission	Chris Wynn, North Central Regional Director
Florida Department of Agricultural and Consumer Services	Pegeen Hanrahan, Former Mayor, City of Gainesville
Florida Public Service Commission	Mark Futrell, Deputy Executive Director – Technical
Enterprise Florida	Eric Anderson, Director of Rural and Agriculture Development
Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation	Chris Lee, Field Office Manager – North Florida
CareerSource Florida	Diane Head, Executive Director of CareerSource North Florida
Volunteer Florida	Audrey Kidwell, Volunteer Generation Fund Program Manager
Northwest Florida Water Management District	Lyle Seigler, Regulatory Division Director
Suwannee River Water Management District	Ashley Stefanik, P.E., Office of Engineering
Southwest Florida Water Management District	Michelle Hopkins, Regulatory Division Director
Hernando/Citrus Metropolitan Planning Org.	The Hon. Jeff Kinnard, Chair <i>Chair, Citrus County Board of County Commissioners</i>
Capital Region Transportation Planning Agency	The Hon. Kristin Dozier, Board Member <i>Commissioner, Leon County Board of County Commissioners</i>
Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council	The Hon. Ronald E. Kitchen, Jr., Chair <i>Commissioner, Citrus County Board of County Commissioners</i>
Apalachee Regional Planning Council	Chris Rietow, Executive Director
North Central Florida Regional Planning Council	Scott Koons, Executive Director
Florida Chamber of Commerce	Christopher Emmanuel, Director of Infrastructure and Governance Policy
Florida Trucking Association	Ken Armstrong, President / CEO
Florida Rural Water Association	Randy Wilkerson, Public Works Director, City of Chiefland
Florida Internet & Television Association	Chris Bailey, State Government Affairs Director, Charter Communications
Florida Economic Development Council	Susan Ramsey, CEO, Integrity Professional Services
Florida Farm Bureau Federation	Charles Shinn, Director of Government & Community Affairs
Florida Gateway College	Dr. Lawrence Barrett, President

Task Force Membership List (Continued)

North Florida Community College	John Grosskopf, President
1000 Friends of Florida	Thomas Hawkins, Former Policy & Planning Director
Audubon Florida	Charles Lee, Director of Advocacy
Defenders of Wildlife	Kent Wimmer, Senior Northwest Florida Representative
The Nature Conservancy	Janet Bowman, Senior Policy Advisor
Local governments in Citrus County	The Hon. Scott Carnahan, 2nd Vice Chairman, Citrus County Board of County Commissioners
Local governments in Levy County	The Hon. Matt Brooks, Commissioner, Levy County Board of County Commissioners
Local governments in Dixie County	The Hon. Mark Hatch, Chair, Dixie County Board of County Commissioners
Local governments in Taylor County	The Hon. Pam Feagle, Chair, Taylor County Board of County Commissioners
Local governments in Jefferson County	The Hon. Betsy Barfield, Chair, Jefferson County Board of County Commissioners
Local governments in Gilchrist County	The Hon. Todd Gray, Chair, Gilchrist County Board of County Commissioners
Local governments in Lafayette County	The Hon. Anthony Adams, Chair, Lafayette County Board of County Commissioners
Local governments in Madison County	Sherilyn Pickels, Interim County Manager, Madison County

Meeting	Objectives
<p>Task Force Meeting #1 August 27, 2019 Plenary session with breakouts for each Task Force</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide overview of legislation and M-CORES program • Review Task Force role and responsibilities • Provide briefing on Florida's Government in the Sunshine Law and Public Records laws • Share background information on corridor planning and Task Force products • Identify potential considerations for future discussion at Task Force meetings • Develop Task Force consensus on work plan, meeting schedule, and overall outcomes
<p>Task Force Meeting #2 and Community Open House October 2019</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce approach for identifying Avoidance, Minimization, Mitigation, and Enhancement (AMME) considerations • Discuss avoidance and minimization considerations for developing corridor opportunities • Discuss potential guiding principles for avoidance and minimization • Receive public comment
<p>Task Force Meeting #3 and Community Open House December 2019</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review M-CORES vision and Task Force goals • Highlight the data/fact sheets by various public agencies and organizational partners • Review corridor planning and project development process • Discuss purpose of the corridor • Discuss regional and local needs • Discuss the AMME considerations for community and economic resources • Receive public comment
<p>Community Open Houses January 2020</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community open houses in each study area to share information about the process and gather public input about AMME considerations
<p>Task Force Meeting #4 February 2020</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receive public comment summary to date • Review economic and workforce development opportunities • Review regional and local plans and visions to identify considerations for corridor planning • Review corridor planning process • Discuss draft AMME guiding principles and identify avoidance areas • Receive public comment

Meeting	Objectives
Task Force Meeting #5 March-April 2020 <i>Note: Task Force Meeting #5 conducted in person for Southwest-Central Florida Corridor Task Force and as a "virtual task force meeting" (distribution of presentations and materials) for Suncoast Corridor and Northern Turnpike Corridor Task Forces</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss corridor utility needs and opportunities • Discuss draft high-level needs summary • Review public engagement activities and public input received to date • Review additional data requested by Task Force and proposed Task Force avoidance comments • Discuss existing corridor enhancement opportunities • Refine draft AMME guiding principles • Receive public comment
Task Force Webinar #1 April 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receive update on Task Force activities • Receive briefing on process for identifying avoidance and attraction areas as input to Task Force recommendations • Describe "homework" process for receiving Task Force member input prior to next in-person meeting • Receive public comment
Task Force Webinar #2 May 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receive briefing on emerging technology trends and opportunities • Discuss implications of emerging technologies for corridor development • Receive public comment
Task Force Webinar #3 June 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receive briefing on opportunities for coordination of broadband deployment with corridor development • Obtain Task Force member input on implications for high-level needs and guiding principles • Receive public comment
Task Force Virtual Meeting #4 June 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receive update on Task Force work plan and recommendations framework • Receive update on avoidance and attraction layers • Refine high-level needs and guiding principles and identify potential instructions for project development and beyond • Receive public comment
By June 30, 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FDOT submits report on Construction Workforce Development Program to Governor and Legislature
Task Force Meeting #6 July 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review public engagement activities • Establish initial consensus on high-level needs • Discuss and refine draft guiding principles • Discuss draft instructions for project development and beyond • Review draft report outline and report drafting process • Review corridor planning activities • Receive public comment
July 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Florida Transportation Commission presentation

Meeting	Objectives
Task Force Meeting #7 and Community Open House August 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss how Task Force recommendations will be used to identify and narrow paths/courses • Provide update on recommendations framework and work plan • Establish initial consensus on guiding principles • Discuss draft instructions for project development and beyond • Review draft Task Force report sections with focus on high-level needs • Receive public comment
Task Force Meeting #8 and Community Open House September 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish initial consensus on instructions for project development and beyond • Review and refine draft Task Force report • Receive public comment
Late-September to mid-October 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public comment period on draft Task Force recommendations
Task Force Meeting #9 and Community Open House October 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receive public comment • Discuss revisions to final draft Task Force report • Adopt final Task Force report
By November 15, 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit Task Force report to Governor and Legislature

Rev. 8/24/2020

Appendix C Suncoast Corridor Meeting Schedule and Locations

Meeting	Location
Task Force Meeting #1 Tuesday, August 27, 2019	<i>Tampa</i> <i>Tampa Convention Center</i> <i>333 S Franklin Street, Tampa, FL 33602</i>
Task Force Meeting #2 Wednesday, October 23, 2019	<i>Citrus County</i> <i>College of Central Florida - Citrus Conference Center</i> <i>3800 S Lecanto Highway, Lecanto, FL 34461</i>
Community Open House Thursday, October 24, 2019	<i>Dixie County</i> <i>Old Town Education Center</i> <i>823 SE 349 Highway, Old Town, FL 32680</i>
Task Force Meeting #3 Tuesday, December 17, 2019	<i>Taylor County</i> <i>IFAS Auditorium</i> <i>203 Forest Park Drive, Perry, FL 32348</i>
Community Open House Thursday, December 19, 2019	<i>Lafayette County</i> <i>Day Community Center</i> <i>4673 North County Road 53, Mayo, FL 32066</i>
Community Open Houses January 2020	<p>Monday, January 27, 2020 <i>Taylor County</i> <i>IFAS Auditorium</i> <i>203 Forest Park Drive, Perry, FL 32348</i></p> <p>Tuesday, January 28, 2020 – (with Northern Turnpike Corridor) <i>Levy County</i> <i>College of Central Florida</i> <i>15390 NW Hwy 19, Chiefland, FL 32626</i></p> <p>Thursday, January 30, 2020 – (with Northern Turnpike Corridor) <i>Citrus County</i> <i>Crystal River Armory</i> <i>8551 W. Venable Street, Crystal River, FL 34429</i></p>
Task Force Meeting #4 Tuesday, February 11, 2020	<i>Madison County</i> <i>Madison Church of God Life Center</i> <i>771 NE Colin Kelly Hwy, Madison, FL 32340</i>

Meeting	Location
Community Open House Postponed	<i>Jefferson County First Baptist Church, Fellowship Hall 325 W Washington Street, Monticello, FL 32344</i>
Task Force Meeting #5 April 2020	<i>Online Modules</i>
Task Force Meeting #6 Tuesday, July 21	<i>Virtual - GoToMeeting Platform</i>
Community Open Houses April/May 2020	<i>Online Modules/Webinars</i>
Task Force Meeting #7 Thursday, August 27, 2020	<i>Virtual - GoToMeeting Platform</i>
Community Open House Tuesday, September 1, 2020	<i>Jefferson County Monticello Opera House 185 W. Washington St., Monticello, FL 32344</i>
Task Force Meeting #8 Thursday, September 24, 2020	<i>Virtual - GoToMeeting Platform</i>
Community Open House Tuesday, September 29, 2020*	<i>Gilchrist County Gilchrist County Woman's Club 2107 S. Bronson Memorial Hwy., Trenton, FL 32693</i>
Task Force Meeting #9 Tuesday, October 20, 2020	<i>Virtual - GoToMeeting Platform</i>
Task Force Report By November 15, 2020	<i>Submit Task Force reports to Governor and Legislature</i>

*Note: Public comment period on draft report recommendation (September 29, 2020 through October 14, 2020).