

RESOLUTION NO. 2018 – R – 194

A RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF MARION COUNTY, FLORIDA, REQUESTING THE HONORABLE GOVERNOR RICK SCOTT TO DIRECT THE FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION, FLORIDA'S TURNPIKE ENTERPRISE, TO REJECT ALTERNATIVE CORRIDORS PROPOSED FOR THE COASTAL CONNECTOR IN WESTERN MARION COUNTY.

WHEREAS the Florida Department of Transportation, Florida's Turnpike Enterprise, is conducting an Alternative Corridor Evaluation (ACE) for the Coastal Connector, a new transportation corridor proposed in Citrus and Marion Counties and five alternative routes have been identified in western Marion County; and

WHEREAS, the Board of County Commissioners held a public workshop with representatives of the Florida Department of Transportation and the Florida Turnpike Enterprise, regarding the Coastal Connector project, and received public input thereon, on May 18, 2018; and

WHEREAS, additional discussions and deliberations were conducted by the Marion County Transportation Planning Organization on May 22, 2018; and

WHEREAS, the Board of County Commissioners recognizes that the growing population of Florida will require additions to critical transportation infrastructure within the State; and

WHEREAS, in furtherance thereof, the Board strongly supports the recommendations of the I-75 Relief Task Force, to expand the capacity of that facility, contained in the final Task Force Report, dated October 1, 2016; and

WHEREAS the Florida Department of Transportation's ACE process is to help identify and evaluate corridor alternatives by considering transportation needs and environmental issues early in the project development, encourages the public to be involved, and integrates opportunities for community input into every step of the study to allow for meaningful participation in the process; and

WHEREAS, in consideration of the compelling public testimony received by the Board of County Commissioners, the Board concludes that the five alignments proposed through western Marion County must be rejected for a number of reasons, including, but not limited to:

- A. In 2016, the I-75 Relief Task Force considered the suitability of three "Areas of Opportunity" through western Marion County (see Exhibit "A," attached hereto) as part of that analysis, and none of them were adopted by the Task Force. Now, the five proposed alignments would have significant negative impacts within some of the Areas of Opportunity previously rejected, or not recommended by, the Task Force; and

- B. While some have characterized the Coastal Connector as a facility for hurricane evacuation, the Board of County Commissioners urges that making the improvements to I-75 recommended by the Task Force should be given a much higher priority for hurricane evacuation than the Coastal Connector project; and
- C. Marion County's unique limestone-based soil classified as locally important and prime farmland, provides key natural agronomic benefits to the equine industry and increasingly diverse agricultural industries such as blueberry and vineyard production; and
- D. Marion County is recognized as the Horse Capital of the World, particularly western Marion County, whose equine industry impacts the local economy with a \$1.6 Billion value added contribution to the gross domestic product, \$2.62 Billion added contribution in industry outputs, and 19,209 full and part time jobs, which was more than 15% of Marion County's overall economy in 2012; and
- E. Marion County's unique karst geology provides high recharge to the Floridian Aquifer, the key source of freshwater for central Florida and numerous springs, including Marion County's world class Rainbow Springs and Silver Springs, both first magnitude springs, along with providing a nutrient laden freshwater source which supports and enhances the County's extensive agricultural production; and
- F. It would not be possible to construct any Coastal Connector Turnpike Route from the Suncoast Parkway at State Road 44 to I-75 without significant adverse impacts to some of the important Conservation Land tracts in Marion County, including Halpata Tastanaki Preserve, Ross Prairie, Rainbow Springs State Park (and its additions), Lake Rousseau, and the Cross Florida Greenway; and
- G. Marion County's adopted Comprehensive Plan includes the Future Land Use and Conservation Elements which recognize the unique environment and economy of Marion County, including classifying locally important and prime farmland and springs as locally significant and environmentally sensitive natural resources deserving of protection as listed in Conservation Element Policies 1.1.1, and 1.1.2; and
- H. Marion County's Comprehensive Plan further recognizes the unique nature, character, and economic impact of the equine and agricultural industries of northwestern Marion County by establishing the Farmland Preservation Area and creating a Transfer of Development Rights Program to preserve and enhance the nature, character, economic impact, and quality of life of the area as listed in Future Land Use Element Goal 9; and

- I. Marion County further recognizes the unique need to preserve important resources such as agriculture, equestrian and rural character with rural neighborhoods along with the scenic context of these areas as listed in Future Land Use Element Policy 3.1.4.1 & 2, and Goal 8; and
- J. It must be recognized that the issue is not simply the payment of “full compensation” to owners of the most valuable equine and agricultural properties in Marion County. Rather, it must be recognized that as a result of any of these corridors, the required right-of-way acquisitions and resulting construction of the proposed facility will not only damage, but may destroy many of these important operations in Marion County, and consequently, negatively impact the economic vitality and long-range growth of Marion County; and
- K. While it is understood that the evaluation and study of major new transportation facilities is a long term activity that may go on for decades, where, as here, some proposed alignments are manifestly not viable options, they should be affirmatively and unequivocally removed from consideration at the earliest possible date, so as to remove the cloud of economic uncertainty that their very existence leaves on all properties within their footprints.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Board of County Commissioners of Marion County, Florida:

Section 1. In order to protect our rural lands, our vital equine industry, our precious conservation land tracts, the quality of life of our citizens and the overall objectives of our adopted Comprehensive Plan, the Board hereby opposes each and every one of the five alternative corridors of the Coastal Connector currently under consideration through western Marion County, as well as any new proposed corridor that would traverse the Farmland Preservation Area of western Marion County, as depicted on Exhibit B, attached hereto; or any new proposed corridor within the City of Dunnellon or rural areas adjacent thereto, conservation lands including Halpata Tasthanaki Preserve, Ross Prairie, Rainbow Springs State Park (and its additions), and Lake Rousseau. Furthermore, in addition to the foregoing specifically described areas, the Board opposes any other corridor for the Coastal Connector that would traverse any other part of Marion County.

Section 2. The Board respectfully requests the Honorable Governor Rick Scott to intervene in the Coastal Connector project, and to direct the elimination of any of the five currently proposed corridor alignments in western Marion County, as well as any other area referenced in Section 1, above; and that the Governor further direct the Turnpike Enterprise to terminate the current Coastal Connector Study, and direct that in any future planning, the Florida Department of Transportation and Florida Turnpike Enterprise should avoid proposing any new turnpike routes in the areas described in Section 1 above.

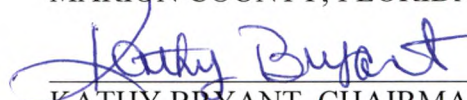
Section 3. In consideration of the impacts that major new roadways may have on the communities within a county, and in recognition of the fact that the members of the Board are the elected representatives of our citizens, we respectfully ask that whenever the FDOT or the FTE are considering new major highway alignments in Marion County, that the County be engaged early on in the planning process, before particular alignment corridors are identified. This cooperation will save time and expense in the overall planning process.

Section 4. The Board of County Commissioners of Marion County further urges the Honorable Governor Rick Scott to direct that the Florida Department of Transportation and Florida Turnpike Enterprise refocus their efforts upon achieving the primary recommendation of the I-75 Relief Task Force made on October 1, 2016, which provides: *"Transform I-75 from Hernando to Columbia counties by expanding its capacity and improving its safety, efficiency, and reliability through potential strategies such as express lanes and truck-only lanes."*

Section 5. EFFECTIVE DATE. This Resolution shall take effect upon adoption by the Board.

DULY ADOPTED this 5th day of June, 2018.

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
MARION COUNTY, FLORIDA


KATHY BRYANT, CHAIRMAN

ATTEST:


DAVID R. ELLSPERMANN, CLERK

Approved as to form:

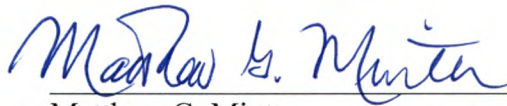
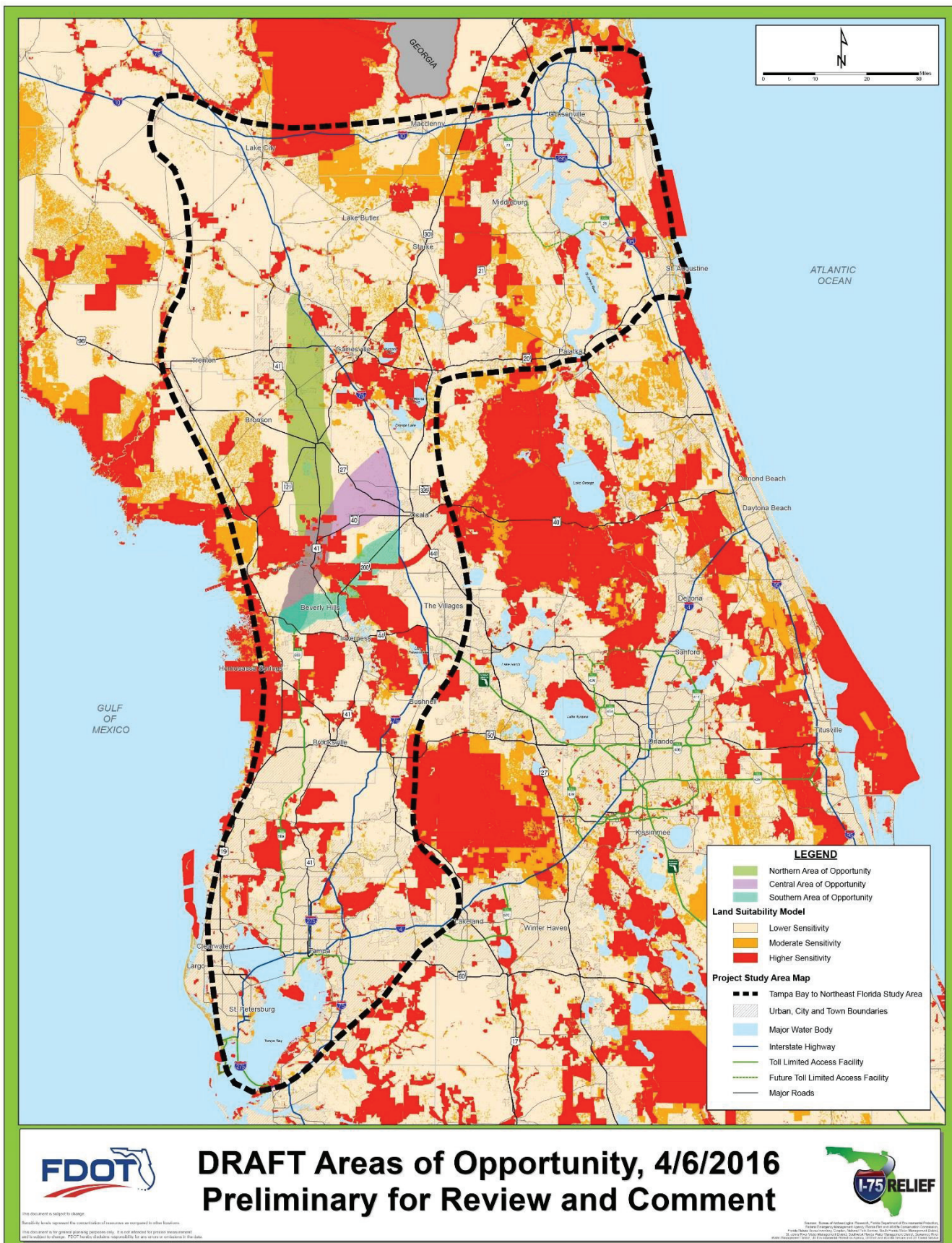

Matthew G. Minter
County Attorney

EXHIBIT "A"



MARION COUNTY, FLORIDA

FARMLAND PRESERVATION AREA

EXHIBIT "B"



Legend

- Farmland Preservation Area
- Rainbow Springs 10-Yr Primary Protection Zone
- Municipalities

