



I-75 Relief Task Force Comments and Coordination Report



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Introduction

Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) Secretary Jim Boxold established the I-75 Relief Task Force in October 2015 with the purpose of providing consensus recommendations on maximizing existing and developing new high-capacity transportation corridors to serve the Tampa Bay to Northeast Florida study area, with emphasis on the area along and to the west of I-75 in Alachua, Citrus, Hernando, Levy, Marion and Sumter counties. The I-75 Relief Task Force is one component of FDOT's Future Corridors planning process. This is a long-term, large-scale approach for planning major transportation corridors in the context of environmental stewardship, community development, and economic development decisions. Corridors are planned and developed through a structured process **emphasizing early and ongoing coordination with local, state, and federal planning and resource agencies, and the public.**

The Task Force included 21 members representing state agencies, local governments, regional planning councils, environmental organizations, business and economic development interests, and the public. **The Task Force's charge included soliciting and considering input from a range of stakeholders, including government agencies, property owners, agricultural interests, business and economic development interests, environmental organizations, study area residents, and other interested individuals.** During the first Task Force meeting, the Task Force members developed a Work Plan, which included opportunities for public and agency involvement. Throughout the Task Force process, the Task Force considered all input when identifying its recommendations and reiterated the need for transportation corridors to be compatible with local plans and to support regional and community visions consistent with the Task Force's guiding principles.

The overall public and agency involvement process, which supplemented the work of the Task Force included:

- Providing early and continual opportunities for public input during the Task Force process with a variety of outreach methods including public comment periods at **Task Force meetings, public meetings** (a webinar and two rounds of open houses), and **ongoing comment opportunities** through the Task Force project manager and website;
- Engaging agency representatives at **Agency Coordination Meetings** to provide an opportunity for discussion of technical issues related to the Task Force's charge;
- Utilizing various **tools and techniques** to facilitate public outreach including an I-75 Relief website, surveys, and comment forms; and
- Maintaining regular communication with **interested individuals** throughout the Task Force process through information updates distributed at key milestones.

The information and input collected as part of the public and agency involvement process was documented and provided to the Task Force at each meeting to facilitate consideration of all public and agency comments when developing its final recommendations. This **Comments and Coordination Report** is intended to serve as support documentation to the **Task Force Recommendations Report** and summarizes all Task Force comments, agency resolutions and comments, and public comments received during the Task Force process, including summaries of Task Force, Agency Coordination, and public meetings. The information contained within this report provides a summary of the extensive public and agency outreach process conducted to support the Task Force's evaluation of recommendations and documents the public and agency input that should be considered during any future evaluation studies or implementation of the Task Force recommendations.

This report is organized into two sections. The first section provides a brief summary of outreach methods, including a summary of opportunities for public and agency input as well as outreach tools and techniques. The second section provides a summary of the input received from the public and agencies throughout the process, including the key themes of public input.



Summary of Outreach Methods

Public Meetings

The Task Force **Work Plan** provided in Appendix 1 lists the meetings (including locations, times, and meeting objectives) held throughout the Task Force process. Seven **Task Force meetings** were held between December 2015 and August 2016 at locations within the Initial Focus Area. These meetings were held on weekdays and ranged from three to seven hours in length. The primary focus for these meetings was to provide the Task Force with pertinent technical information relative to the Task Force charge and facilitate discussion among Task Force members. The Task Force meetings were conducted in compliance with Florida's Sunshine Law (Article I, Section 24, Florida Constitution and Chapter 286, Florida Statutes (F.S.)). A **public comment period** was provided during each Task Force meeting to receive input on the information presented and identify community concerns. Public attendance at the Task Force meetings ranged from 34 to 153.

In addition to the agency representation on the Task Force, ongoing coordination and outreach was conducted with local, state, and federal agencies and organizations. Three **Agency Coordination meetings** were held in Ocala between December 2015 and June 2016. These meetings were scheduled for three hours each and provided an opportunity for agency representatives to stay informed about the ongoing work of the Task Force, discuss technical issues related to the Task Force's charge with FDOT staff, and coordinate with other agencies in attendance. Over 190 agency representatives were invited to these meetings including local governments, Metropolitan/Transportation Planning Organizations (MPOs/TPOs), regional planning councils (RPCs), state and federal agencies, environmental resource agencies, water management districts, and Environmental Technical Advisory Team (ETAT) members. Agency representative attendance ranged from 15 to 38. A public comment period was scheduled at each Agency Coordination meeting to receive additional public input on the information presented. Public attendance at Agency Coordination meetings ranged from 4 to 29. **Task Force and Agency Meeting Summaries are included in Appendix II.**

One **Public Information Webinar** was held in January 2016 to introduce interested members of the public to the Task Force purpose, charge, and work plan as well as explain upcoming opportunities for public involvement. A total of 68 people participated in the webinar. The input from the webinar was presented to the Task Force at the second Task Force Meeting.

Community Open Houses were held at key milestones during the Task Force process. The first round of Community Open Houses were held in March 2016 to solicit input on the data collection, areas of avoidance and minimization, purpose and need, and the evaluation approach. The second round of Community Open Houses were held in June 2016 to share the Task Force work to date and gather input on the draft Task Force recommendations. The open houses were held during the evening hours at central locations within the Initial Focus Area including Gainesville, Ocala, and Lecanto. The Community Open Houses were held in a standard open house format, where participants could view an informational video as well as exhibits and handouts, ask questions, and provide comments any time during the meeting. The March Open Houses had a total of 102 participants and 22 comment forms were submitted. The June Open Houses had a total of 410 participants and 234 comment forms were submitted.

Comment forms were provided to solicit public input at the Task Force meetings, Agency Coordination meetings, and both rounds of Community Open Houses. At the request of the Task Force, a **survey** questionnaire was developed for the second round of Community Open Houses and the feedback provided was summarized in a presentation to the Task Force at Task Force meeting #6 on June 24, 2016. Over 234 survey questionnaires, 146 electronic comments, and 439 comment forms were received as a result of the June Open Houses. The Task Force used this feedback to refine its recommendations during their final meetings.

The Task Force meetings, Agency Coordination meetings, and other public meetings were **advertised** in the Florida Administrative Register, the Florida Department of Transportation website, and the I-75 Relief website,



www.i75relief.com. Email invitations were also sent to all agencies and individuals on the mailing list. In addition, invitational fliers were posted on the website and newspaper ads were published in major newspapers in the Initial Focus Area for both rounds of Community Open Houses.

Other Outreach

Additional agency outreach included an **ETAT Webinar** held in late January 2016 to introduce the Planning Corridor Assessment Tool (PCAT) methodology proposed to identify potential areas of opportunity and solicit initial input from the ETAT members. A total of 15 ETAT members participated in the webinar. This early coordination with the ETAT members will facilitate future ETAT coordination as part of FDOT's standard Efficient Transportation Decision Making (ETDM) and Project Development and Environment (PD&E) processes for any future studies resulting from the Task Force recommendations.

Agency representatives were regularly updated on the Task Force work through emails, and were invited to review Task Force related documents throughout the process, including the draft Briefing Books which cover conservation, countryside, centers and communities, and corridors in the Initial Focus Area, the Planning Corridor Assessment Tool (PCAT) methodology used for the Land Suitability Mapping and subsequent development of the potential areas of opportunity, the preliminary framework of options for future study, and the draft Task Force Report. FDOT also conducted individual briefings and interviews with various agencies and interest groups during the development of the Briefing Books. In addition to these scheduled meetings, FDOT staff were available to present information about the ongoing Task Force work during the regularly scheduled meetings of various partner agencies and interest groups throughout the process.

I-75 Relief Website

The website www.i75relief.com was developed specifically for the I-75 Relief Task Force and served as the central hub for study information. The website contained information related to the study process, study documents, and public involvement opportunities, including contact information and the ability to submit a comment or question to the project manager. Documents, presentations, meeting announcements, and other information were frequently updated and Task Force members and the public were reminded to check the website regularly to obtain the most up to date information on the Task Force's work. Video recordings are available for most of the Task Force meetings, and were made available by live stream on www.thefloridachannel.org for those unable to attend meetings in person.

Statistics on activity related to the I-75 Relief website, including number of unique visits to the website and number of document downloads, were frequently tracked throughout the Task Force process as one measure of effectiveness of outreach efforts and dissemination of Task Force related documents to interested members of the public. Between January and early September 2016, the website was visited 20,335 times and 12,449 documents were downloaded. The most commonly downloaded documents include the first draft potential areas of opportunity map, the first draft preliminary framework of options, the revised framework and potential areas of opportunity map, the Task Force member list, and the informational handout from the June Community Open Houses.

Mailing List

An agency mailing list database was developed at the beginning of the Task Force process and included contact information for key elected and appointed officials for each of the counties, cities, and towns within the Initial Focus Area as well as representatives from regional agencies and ETAT representatives whose jurisdictions are within the Initial Focus Area. Additional agency representatives were added to the agency mailing list if they attended an I-75 Relief meeting, provided a comment by email or through the website, or requested to be added to the mailing list. Members of the public were added to the interested individuals mailing list if they attended an I-75 Relief meeting, provided a comment by email or through the website, or requested to be added to the mailing list. During the Task Force process, a total of 1,505 agencies and individuals were represented in the study's mailing list. This mailing list should be utilized during any future outreach efforts for future studies related to the Task Force recommendations.



Summary of Input Received

Input from Task Force Members

The input received from the Task Force members throughout the Task Force process is summarized in the Task Force Recommendations Report. Individual written comments were also submitted in advance of upcoming meetings to formalize the Task Force member’s input and for other Task Force members’ consideration. These written comments are included in Appendix III.

Input from Agency Representatives

Representatives from the counties and MPOs in the Initial Focus Area made presentations to the Task Force during initial meetings to provide the Task Force with local information on opportunities and constraints related to community resources, county comprehensive plans, and regional long range transportation plans, and to provide input on the development of the preliminary purpose and need. Key input was also provided by these agencies regarding the resources and relative ranking of data for the development of the Avoidance Areas and Land Suitability Mapping and subsequent development of the potential areas of opportunity prior to the first round of Community Open Houses. Several partner agencies passed resolutions and/or submitted position letters for the project record and for the Task Force’s consideration. These position letters, resolutions, and comments regarding key considerations are summarized in the table below. All agency resolutions, letters, comments, and relevant reference documents are included in Appendix III.

Agency	Summary
Alachua County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC)	Early in the Task Force process, the BOCC requested that any planned transportation corridors should avoid impacts to County-designated Strategic Ecosystems, Critical Ecological Corridors, or lands designated as part of the Alachua County Forever Program. The BOCC submitted a subsequent letter outlining the County’s position that capacity, operational, and safety deficiencies should be met through improvements to existing corridors. The letter stated that new transportation corridors should only be considered once significant improvements to existing corridors have been planned and programmed and requested that the potential areas of opportunities be considered as “alternatives considered but eliminated” in future analyses. The letter was supportive of any additional transportation needs being met through expansion of non-automotive modes.
Citrus County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC)	Passed a resolution in support for the expedited planning and construction of an extension of the Suncoast Parkway 2 from S.R. 44 to I-75 within the potential areas of opportunity in the Initial Focus Area. The Public Works Director also requested that the map of the areas of opportunity discussed by the Task Force and the BOCC support of the areas of opportunity be included in the Task Force final report.
Hernando County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC)	Passed a resolution in support of a new north-south corridor parallel to I-75 to provide relief to I-75, accommodate expected growth and travel demand, provide connectivity between larger urban areas, provide opportunities for economic growth in the region, and provide greater capacity and safety for freight movement and hurricane evacuation.



Agency	Summary
Levy County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC)	<p>Submitted a letter supporting the general goals of the Task Force, but requested that the Task Force recommendations include that new transportation corridors only be considered once significant improvements to existing corridors have been planned and implemented, including addressing the existing deficiencies on U.S. 41, S.R. 121, S.R. 24, and S.R. 26 in Levy County. The letter also outlined concerns of potential negative impacts to the County tax rolls if a new transportation corridor is constructed in Levy County.</p>
Archer	<p>Passed a resolution and submitted a letter opposing infrastructure investments within the City of Archer due to the detrimental impact these investments could have on the City’s way of life historically, environmentally, and economically, including expansion of S.R. 41 or a new transportation corridor near the community. The City requested that recommendations have a strong emphasis on rail as the preferred mode for the movement of freight and passengers.</p>
Gainesville	<p>Submitted a letter in appreciation of the Task Force’s efforts in developing a range of transportation options for I-75 Relief. The City of Gainesville noted support of local reliever corridors to reduce interstate traffic and multimodal investments in public transportation systems. The City noted the SW 62nd Blvd extension is a critical local future bypass to I-75 that is currently in design and an unfunded construction project in the 2040 LRTP. The City requests consideration of investments beyond the U.S. 301 rail corridor within the Gainesville urban area for improved access to multimodal transportation options. The City also requested that FDOT consider a short-term strategy to reduce the posted speed limit on I-75 between S.R. 331/Williston Rd and S.R. 222/NW 39th Ave to address safety concerns.</p>
Newberry	<p>Submitted a letter in support of increasing capacity and safety on I-75. The city requested that additional data and supportive need be developed before new corridors are considered, and only after improvements to existing corridors have been exhausted.</p>
Williston	<p>Submitted a letter requesting that all possible improvements to existing transportation infrastructure be exhausted before any new transportation corridors are considered, especially through Levy County. The letter expressed concern that a new corridor would exacerbate deficiencies on existing corridors in Levy County as well as disrupt the environment, economy, and way of life in the region, including the agricultural industry and rural lifestyle. The letter also outlined concerns that a new corridor would take a large amount of taxable property off of the city’s tax rolls.</p>
Gainesville Metropolitan Transportation Planning Organization	<p>Submitted a letter requesting that options are evaluated for consistency with the Alachua County and City of Gainesville comprehensive plans and 2040 Long Range Transportation Plan. The letter also recommended that state statutes be amended to enable FDOT to allocate State Highway System (SHS)/Strategic Intermodal System (SIS) funds to projects on local-maintained facilities that provide congestion relief to SHS/SIS facilities.</p>
Hernando/Citrus Metropolitan Planning Organization	<p>Submitted a comment of their support for the inclusion of at least one potential area of opportunity in the final Task Force report.</p>



Agency	Summary
North Central Florida Regional Planning Council	Submitted a letter requesting that options are evaluated for consistency with the North Central Florida Strategic Regional Policy Plan and county and city comprehensive plans for Alachua, Levy and Marion Counties. Recommended that state statutes be amended to enable FDOT to allocate State Highway System/Strategic Intermodal System (SHS/SIS) funds to projects on local-maintained facilities that provide congestion relief to SHS/SIS facilities. Supported a recommendation for new transportation corridors to only be considered once significant improvements to existing corridors have been planned and programmed.
Florida Forest Service	Submitted a comment requesting that the optimum forest boundary layer be used as an avoidance consideration in any future refinements.
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC)	Submitted a comment noting their concern about impacts to herbaceous and forested wetlands along with significant areas of high groundwater recharge potential and requested the use of FWC’s Integrated Wildlife habitat ranking system and FWC’s strategic habitat conservation areas richness for future screenings as areas are refined in future evaluations.
Seminole Tribe of Florida	Submitted a comment requesting that Seminole Tribe of Florida Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (STOF-THPO) be notified of any developments and would like adequate provisions provided to identify any unidentified historic properties.
U.S. Fish and Wildlife	Submitted a comment noting concern about the potential fragmentation of critical habitats for Florida and for federal and state listed species, including but not limited to Florida wood stork, sand skink, oval pigtoe, Suwannee moccasinshell, Florida scrub jays, and eastern indigo snakes. Requested that future coordination be done to ensure these habitats are being appropriately represented.

Input from Interest Groups

While numerous interest groups were directly represented on the Task Force, many other interest groups were active participants in the Task Force process, including various conservation organizations, economic development groups, and homeowner associations. The establishment of these key contacts from interest groups and local citizens groups through the work of the Task Force provides a valuable resource for future outreach efforts for any future studies based on the Task Force’s recommendations. This information also provides a means to determine potential interest groups not engaged in the Task Force process that could be targeted in future public involvement plans and outreach efforts. Key input from interest groups as well as the primary contact for future outreach is summarized in the table below. Interest group letters and comments are included in Appendix III.



Special Interest Group	Primary Contact	Summary
1000 Friends of Florida, Conservancy of Southwest Florida, Defenders of Wildlife, and St. Johns Riverkeeper	Thomas Hawkins, Policy and Planning Director, 1000 Friends of Florida; Kent Wimmer, Northwest Florida Representative, Defender of Wildlife; Nicole Johnson, Director of Growth Management and Planning, Conservancy of Southwest Florida; and Lisa Rinaman, St. Johns Riverkeeper	Submitted a letter in support of recommendations to optimize existing corridors and the evaluation of enhancements and transformation of existing corridors. The letter outlined the groups' joint opposition to the potential central or northern areas of opportunity being included in the Task Force's final recommendations. The letter noted support for considering freight and passenger rail in the evaluation of new corridors.
Citrus County Chamber of Commerce	Josh Wooten, President / CEO	Passed a resolution and submitted a letter in support of planning for an extension of the Suncoast Parkway 2 to I-75 north of Wildwood to enhance economic opportunities in Citrus County and the surrounding communities.
Citrus County Council	John Wade, President and Teddi Rusnak, Program Chair	Submitted comments requesting the development of additional data and traffic evaluations to support the purpose and need for enhanced and new corridors in the region.
Economic Development Authority for Citrus County	Don Taylor, Board President	Submitted a letter in support of planning for an extension of the Suncoast Parkway 2 to I-75 north of Wildwood to enhance economic opportunities in Citrus County and the surrounding communities.
Florida Farm Bureau Federation	Charles Shinn	Submitted a letter outlining their position of support for solutions to accommodate increasing freight tonnage on I-75 and requested that avoidance and minimization of impacts to highly productive agricultural lands are considered at a similar degree as environmentally sensitive lands. The letter noted concern about potential impacts to highly productive agricultural lands in the northern portions of the potential northern and central areas of opportunity.
Garden Club of the Lakes	Jackie Host	Submitted comments supportive of enhancements and transformation of U.S. 301 to improve the connection to Northeast Florida. Comments requested that a new corridor in the potential central area of opportunity be removed from consideration due to the potential impacts to the environment and local businesses.
Hernando Progress, Inc.	Cliff Manuel, Chairman	Submitted a letter supporting the extension of the Suncoast Parkway 2 from S.R. 44 to a connection to I-75 in the Gainesville area for improved safety on I-75, added convenience for travelers to the west coast, and the cost effectiveness of a user-funded (toll) road as opposed to taxpayer funded road.

Special Interest Group	Primary Contact	Summary
Historic Melrose, Inc.	Keith Bollum, President	Submitted comments noting concern about impacts to the region due to the proximity of a new corridor. Comments were supportive of enhancements and transformation of U.S. 301, and noted concern for the preservation of the historic homes in the Melrose Historic District, a small historic cemetery in Earleton, a pioneer grist mill site, and the Historic Melrose, Inc. headquarters within a 19 th century commercial building.
Lake Rosa and Lake Swan Coalition and Lake Rosa Homeowners Association	Beverly Ritter, Secretary/Treasurer, Lake Rosa Homeowners Association and Member, Board of Directors, Lake Rosa and Lake Swan Coalition	Submitted a letter supporting enhancements and transformation of existing corridors. The letter requested that a new corridor in the potential central area of opportunity be removed from consideration due to the potential impacts to their community and the Lake Region of Putnam County.
Marion Audubon Society	Sandra Marraffino	Provided research and information on Lake Rousseau and existing wading bird populations and nesting areas. Comments requested avoidance and mitigation of impacts to these resources, including noise disturbance and impacts to water levels. Provided research on the Halpata Tastanaki Preserve, an important bird area with a globally significant scrub-jay population. Provided information about the Marion Audubon Society's previous coordination with the Sabal Trail pipeline regarding alternative routes to avoid critical impacts, which they explained would be relevant to corridor planning during this effort as well. Additional comments requested the avoidance of vulnerable aquifer lands near Rainbow Springs, and suggested coordination with the Seminole Wars Foundation, which has identified important historical sites in Marion County related to the Seminole Wars including Camp Izard and Fort Dade along the Withlacoochee River and Fort King in Ocala.
Pine Ridge Civic Association	Robert and Joan Kohler	Submitted comments expressing concerns about the community impacts in Citrus County if the Suncoast Parkway 2 is extended north.
Putnam County Environmental Council, Inc.	Karen Chadwick and Kate Gallagher	Submitted a letter in support of enhancements and transformation of U.S. 301 to improve the connection to Northeast Florida. The letter requested that a new corridor in the potential central area of opportunity be removed from consideration due to the potential impacts to Putnam County including important wildlife corridors, and historic communities in the region.
Rainbow River Conservation, Inc.	Paul Marraffino and Burt Eno	Submitted comments expressing concern about the potential impacts to the existing communities of Dunnellon, Rainbow Springs, and the Village of Rainbow Springs and Rainbow Lakes Estates from a northern extension of the Suncoast Parkway 2. Comments requested

Special Interest Group	Primary Contact	Summary
		<p>that any proposals consider and align with the goals outlined in the Rainbow Springs Basin Management Action Plan including the avoidance of the primary recharge area, as well as the efforts of the Rainbow River Corridor Project, which is currently under negotiations to acquire the undeveloped parcel on the edge of Rainbow River; provided additional research on these projects. Provided suggested alternatives to the potential areas of opportunity for the northern extension to avoid the above impacts by providing a more western crossing of the Withlacoochee River at a relatively narrow point and following an abandoned rail line right of way in Levy and Marion counties.</p>
<p>Santa Fe Audubon Society</p>	<p>Paul and Margret Kidd and Laura Berkelman</p>	<p>Submitted comments in support of enhancements and transformation of I-75 and U.S. 301 to improve the connection to Northeast Florida, rather than a new parallel facility, to minimize right of way and environmental impacts including the potential for further fragmentation of the existing habitat and wildlife corridors between Ocala National Forest, the Osceola National Forest, and the natural areas in Camp Blanding. Comments noted concern that a new highway would accelerate the distribution of exotic pests and invasive plants, damaging native habitat and agricultural crops.</p>
<p>Santa Fe Lake Dwellers Association</p>	<p>Jill McGuire and Marihelen Wheeler</p>	<p>Submitted comments in support of enhancements and transformation of U.S. 301 to improve the connection to Northeast Florida, rather than a new parallel facility. Comments noted concern about impacts to Melrose and the Lake Santa Fe Lake District, including the Ordway Preserve, Lake Santa Fe, and other natural and historic assets. Requested the consideration of elevated sections of roadway to enhance wetland and wildlife corridor connectivity during any future improvements. Requested coordination with local wildlife corridor experts.</p>
<p>Shady Greenway Conservation Alliance</p>	<p>Michelle Shearer</p>	<p>Submitted comments in support of the evaluation of park and ride lots along I-75 as well as the consideration of bike lanes and bike trail connectivity in any future evaluations, as well as the evaluation of truck-only lanes on I-75. Comments noted concern about impacts to horse farms and the Shady Greenway area in Marion County.</p>
<p>Sierra Club Florida Chapter and Suwannee/ St. Johns Group</p>	<p>Whitey Markle, Conservation Chair</p>	<p>Submitted a letter requesting the rebuilding of U.S. 301 across the foot of Orange Lake at the Marion/Alachua County line to use a causeway type crossing rather than the existing box culvert that impacts the drainage of the lake. The letter noted their support of improvements to existing roads, including the use of express lanes and truck-only lanes on I-75, enhancements to U.S. 301 to improve connectivity to Northeast Florida, and the development of high-speed freight and passenger rail, but noted opposition to new corridors and development outside existing urban boundaries. The letter explained their opposition to the use of U.S. 41 through</p>



Special Interest Group	Primary Contact	Summary
		Alachua and Levy counties as an alternative corridor for I-75 relief, and instead proposed that U.S. 19 be used as a reliever corridor in the northwest, and S.R. 200 to U.S. 301 to the northeast.
Stand By Our Plan	James Dick	Submitted comments noting concern that a new corridor would encourage development in eastern Alachua County and conflict with the Alachua County Comprehensive Plan.
Sunshine Citizens	Amanda Brown	A smart growth advocacy group for the Tampa Bay region, submitted comments opposing new highway corridors as well as widening existing highway corridors, including I-75, due to concerns about creating more congestion points in the Tampa Bay region. Requested that solutions be found through rail and/or automated vehicle technology.
Women of Melrose	Deborah Kotler	Submitted comments noting concern that this is the revival of previous studies that proposed a new corridor through Melrose, and also highlighting potential impacts to historical resources in Melrose and the surrounding community.
University of Florida, Institute for Food and Agricultural Sciences	Stephen Coates	Submitted comments that requested the mitigation of impacts to prescribed fire practices on managed lands when locating new corridors. Comments also suggested consideration of the potential for accidents due to this smoke as well as negative impacts to conservation efforts due to any potential limitations placed on controlled burns because of the proximity of a new corridor. Comments highlighted the Ordway-Swisher Biological Station in Melrose, which is over 9,500 acres of conservation lands and regularly practices controlled burns, and requested the avoidance of impacts to this area be considered.

Input from Members of the Public

Members of the public were encouraged to participate in meetings, provide information, recommend potential solutions to the identified needs, and provide comments on potential options under consideration. **Over 1,100 comments were submitted by individual members of the public throughout the Task Force process.** This input was instrumental in guiding the Task Force’s final recommendations. As input was received, FDOT made a concerted effort to provide feedback to every written comment with either an acknowledgement or a written response (as applicable). Additionally, this input provides an early insight to local community values, priorities, and concerns and provides questions that can help inform the next steps of future evaluations. The input gathered during the Task Force can also be used to help shape future public involvement efforts in regards to what messaging and information to provide to proactively address potential concerns or misinformation. The key themes from public input throughout the process are summarized in the table below. Next steps to address these concerns are outlined within the Task Force recommendations report in the evaluation approach and implementation plan. All public comments and responses are included in Appendix III.

Category	Key Theme
Purpose and Need <i>These themes summarize comments related to next steps in the evaluation of any potential improvements to refine and strengthen the potential purpose and need for future projects</i>	<p>Support of the purpose and charge of the Task Force. Comments stressed the desire for enhanced connectivity of the region and the ability to travel between cities safely and efficiently, and recognized the future need for alternative north-south routes in the study area.</p>
	<p>Desire for further traffic evaluations to provide a more detailed purpose and need for improvements to I-75. Comments questioned the need for investment on I-75 based on the existing and projected average annual daily traffic (AADT) and level of service (LOS), which suggest that I-75 should be operating at an adequate capacity. Comments questioned what makes traffic on I-75 unique and why it does not operate as expected based on the AADT and LOS. While some comments acknowledged the congestion and high number of incidents on I-75, others individuals commented that I-75 operates at an acceptable level and does not appear to be near capacity. Comments requested that the effects of commuter vehicles, tourists, and freight vehicles be analyzed for their contribution to the congestion and incident rate on I-75.</p>
	<p>Desire for detailed traffic projections for various improvement scenarios during the evaluation of a potential new corridor. Comments requested robust origin and destination information to determine existing travel patterns and travel demand between the Tampa Bay and Northeast Florida regions through various routes. Other comments noted interest in travel demand projections for various potential alignments for an extension of the Suncoast Parkway to I-75 as well as projections on how much “relief” to I-75 and other local roads that those alternatives would provide. Some were concerned about adding additional traffic to the I-75/Florida’s Turnpike Wildwood interchange. Other comments questioned how much congestion relief truck-only lanes can provide and how a travel demand model accounts for the use of truck-only lanes. A key theme that was incorporated into the Task Force final recommendations was the desire to evaluate new corridors after the evaluation of maximizing existing corridors and the determination of need. Other commonly expressed concerns were about the methodologies used to estimate economic feasibility of new corridors and the unknown impact of autonomous vehicle technology, changing transportation choices, and demographic trends on traditional travel demand forecasting. Comments requested that future traffic studies should also consider the impacts of changing global trade on travel demand and freight movement, the impact of the Panama Canal expansion and improvements to Florida ports, and the changing needs of freight and logistics. Others commented on the need to consider impacts of sea level rise and potentially related shifts in investment in coastal areas on future population centers and population projections used to determine travel demand.</p>
	<p>Consider impacts of the transportation network from outside of the Initial Focus Area on enhanced and new corridors. Comments expressed the need for I-4 to be considered during any evaluation studies, including I-4 as an alternative route between Tampa Bay and Jacksonville and the I-4 connection to U.S. 301. Some commented that if a new route is considered, relief to both I-75 and I-4 should be a goal. Comments requested that improvements to I-4 and I-95 be considered in addition to the improvements to I-75 in the evaluation of need for a new corridor and that freight movement out of Lakeland/Winter Haven be considered in the context of freight movement throughout the study area.</p>
<p>Consider that you “can’t build your way out of congestion.” Comments questioned the potential congestion relief that increasing capacity on an existing corridor or development of a new corridor will provide in the long-term and questioned the impact of induced demand. Comments expressed the desire for the exploration and evaluation of creative, new solutions to congestion and to reduce overall travel demand.</p>	

Category	Key Theme
<p>Suggestions and Considerations for Potential Transportation Corridor Improvements</p> <p><i>These themes summarize comments related to considerations for potential future projects involving design and capacity enhancements to existing and new transportation corridors.</i></p>	<p>Recommendations to improve the safety and efficiency of the I-75 corridor. Safety concerns on I-75 were a key issue recognized by the public. Comments supported evaluating the potential safety impacts of lowering the speed limit, increasing highway patrol presence, increasing penalties and enforcement of traffic and/or truck regulations including distracted or reckless driving, and/or implementing transportation systems management and operational solutions, including dynamic message boards to display alternative routes during incidents. Comments were very supportive of the concept of truck-only lanes and other potential solutions to reduce freight traffic on the I-75 corridor, such as incentivizing freight movement by rail for local trips. Other comments suggested that the addition of frontage roads to I-75 be evaluated. Bus lanes and other high occupancy vehicle lane concepts were also among suggestions for enhancements to I-75. As an alternative to a new corridor, and to minimize right of way impacts, several comments expressed support for I-75 to be multi-level to accommodate additional traffic, including the possibility of separating freight vehicles. Others suggested that reversible lanes be used during periods of peak congestion.</p>
	<p>Support for the evaluation of the extension of the Suncoast Parkway 2 north to a connection with I-75. Comments cited growing population, economic development, more efficient movement of freight goods from ports to distribution centers, a direct connection to the Tampa International Airport for tourists, and existing congestion on I-75 as needs for a new corridor in this area. Comments highlighted the benefits of a limited-access highway, including the potential to minimize sprawl through limited access points. Support varied for the potential northern and central areas of opportunity. Other comments recommended the evaluation of a connection directly to I-10 that bypasses I-75; a route parallel to U.S. 41 with a connection to U.S. 301 north of Gainesville; a route to the west of Williston through Levy County; and a route connecting Suncoast Parkway 2 to U.S. 301 using S.R 200. Several questions related to the plans for the extension of the Suncoast Parkway 2 to the west connecting to U.S. 19 and asked why an alternative route (to I-75) is being considered. Commenters noted that they did not understand why the U.S. 19 corridor to I-10 is not being considered as an alternative route.</p>
	<p>Support for the evaluation to transform the U.S. 301 corridor. Comments supported the further evaluation of the recommendations in the U.S. 301 Transportation Alternatives Study, as well as the use of the existing U.S. 301 footprint to create an enhanced high-speed corridor to connect to Northeast Florida, with some individuals noting that the U.S. 301 corridor is underutilized today. Some comments noted the desire for truck-only lanes to extend from I-75 to U.S. 301. Comments emphasized the need for bypasses to be incorporated in the alignment to avoid impacts to existing communities along the route.</p>
	<p>Desire for freight rail and intercity passenger rail investments. Comments requested that future transportation investments prioritize the support and development of an integrated rail system for freight and/or passenger transportation as an alternative to new or enhanced roadways. Comments suggested that a rail corridor could be developed within the right of way for I-75 with a connection directly to the ports in Tampa and Jacksonville as well as intermodal logistics centers. Others noted that a focus should be on opportunities to utilize the S-line and/or abandoned rail lines for future passenger rail.</p>
	<p>Support for enhancements along new or existing corridors. Comments expressed support for the inclusion of multiuse trails in the right of way of corridors such as on the existing Suncoast Parkway. Several comments requested that intercity transit be provided within the right of way of corridors as well. Comments also included a desire for landscape beautification to be a component of any future projects. Suggested considerations included overlooks and other context sensitive designs including the minimization of impacts to environmental resources.</p>

Category	Key Theme
	<p>Desire for wildlife underpasses to be incorporated in all transportation improvements. Comments requested the incorporation of wildlife crossings in any new or enhanced corridor project. The Florida Wildlife Corridor and the Ocala to Osceola Greenway Corridor are representative of efforts to provide continuous wildlife connectivity between the Ocala National Forest and the Osceola National Forest and were initiatives often cited in comments. Other suggestions included enhanced habitat connectivity on I-75 in Paynes Prairie or requests for significant portions of highways be raised during the enhancement of I-75, U.S. 301 and/or any new corridor.</p>
<p>Concerns about Potential Corridor Improvements and Potential Impacts <i>These themes summarize comments regarding commonly noted concerns. Some of these concerns can be addressed during alternatives analyses in future studies, while other concerns may be alleviated by providing the public more information on these topics during future outreach.</i></p>	<p>Concerns about the conservation and enhancement of unique environmental resources. One of the most common comments received by the public was the need to protect and conserve environmental resources. Comments stressed the important role that eco-tourism plays in the regional and local economies as well as concerns for impacts to the quality of water, rivers, wetlands, watersheds, springs and spring sheds, the aquifer, and high aquifer recharge areas from potential transportation improvements. Comments specifically noted the high recharge area in western Alachua County and High Springs and the U.S. 41 corridor in general as highly sensitive environmental areas. The area east of Newnans Lake as well as the lakes in Putnam County were highlighted as key avoidance considerations. Commenters provided maps of sink holes and karst sensitive areas in Citrus County and high recharge areas and sinks to the aquifer in Alachua County to consider in future studies.</p> <p>Concerns about impacts to agricultural and rural communities, historic downtowns, and the desire to preserve “Old Florida.” These concerns were especially noted from individuals in Citrus, Levy, and Alachua counties and farmers from Jonesville, Newberry, and Archer. Many of the residents who submitted comments have lived on and/or farmed their lands for several generations and have a strong desire to protect their heritage and legacy. Commenters expressed concern about rest stops, gas stations, crime, and sprawl that could come to their communities due to an enhanced or new corridor. Others noted concerns that a new corridor in western Alachua County would be inconsistent with the Alachua County growth management plan, which includes a low density rural greenbelt or that a new corridor in Marion County could impact the designated farmland preservation areas.</p> <p>The importance of maintaining the connectivity and character of rural communities and preventing sprawl. While comments acknowledged the benefits of enhanced and new corridors, including more employment opportunities and transportation choices in rural areas. However, they also stressed the importance of proactively planning for smart growth and the need to prevent sprawl development as an outcome of transportation improvements. Comments reflected on experiences with past transportation projects, especially interstate projects including I-75, which either divided existing communities in two or pulled investment out of downtown communities. It was suggested that directed redevelopment efforts could be provided to mitigate these impacts, citing a similar effort in Georgia involving Georgia Institute of Technology and downtown Atlanta as an example of a best practice. Comments recommended that future studies quantify potential impacts to local economies, including the potential addition of long-term, well-paying jobs for local citizens.</p> <p>Concerns about relocation or impacts to housing values. Comments were made regarding the number of homes that would need to be bought and relocated to accommodate potential projects, especially a new roadway. Some wondered if the homeowners could be fairly compensated for their loss. These concerns were heard most often from residents in western Alachua and Levy Counties. Others were concerned about diminishing home values due to the proximity of a new or widened corridor, or even a planned corridor.</p>

Category	Key Theme
	<p>Desire for the incorporation of advanced mitigation and restoration projects for water resources. Comments expressed a desire for future improvements to carefully consider mitigation strategies for stormwater runoff, including stormwater harvesting and potential partnerships for regional stormwater reuse. Historic transportation impacts to the Orange Lake watershed were often cited as areas to improve and restore in conjunction with any transportation improvements in the area.</p> <p>Lack of perceived benefit or use of new and enhanced roadways by local residents. Many residents of the local communities explained that they felt very disconnected from these plans as their perception is that these recommended transportation improvements would only benefit real estate developers, tourists, and those that live in more urbanized parts of the state such as Tampa and Jacksonville. Comments noted concern over the cost of toll roads and questioned whether they would be utilized by local residents, in part due to the large retiree and lower income populations, as well as the unfamiliarity of toll roads in the study area. Comments cited lower than projected traffic volumes on the Suncoast Parkway as an example of their concerns.</p> <p>Concerns about cost and funding of proposed improvements. Comments expressed concerns that the costs of enhanced and new transportation projects will be a burden on local taxpayers. Commenters explained their concerns over local economic impact if toll revenues do not match projections. A common theme was the comment that a new corridor would be too expensive and improving existing corridors is a more fiscally responsible option. Some noted concern that construction of a new corridor would directly affect the funding received for the maintenance of local roads. Other comments recommended that additional funds be provided to help fund MPO and local level roadway improvements, or noted support for accelerated funding for planning and construction of new and enhanced corridors. It was suggested that fiscal constraints and the limitations of different funding sources for various types of improvements be a focus of future public involvement efforts.</p>
<p>Future Public Involvement <i>These themes summarize comments regarding the future public involvement approach and identify potential outreach strategies and groups to involve in future studies.</i></p>	<p>Need to distinguish the I-75 Relief effort from previous transportation studies. Individuals familiar with a 1988 planning study, which proposed potential alignments for a new corridor to connect Jacksonville to Tampa Bay expressed concerns that this study was a continuation of that effort. This concern was felt most heavily in the Melrose and Micanopy areas. This sentiment was echoed more broadly by those who indicated they had distrust of FDOT to consider environmental and community impacts or public input in the decision-making process.</p> <p>Recommendations for an improved public involvement process. While some comments expressed gratitude for the public outreach during the Task Force process, other comments offered suggestions for expanded outreach for future studies, including requests for night and weekend meetings, more public meetings, and interactive involvement. Comments expressed the desire for more direct involvement of local residents as opposed to representation by elected officials. Others asked that more specific data and evaluations be done before proposing transportation improvements in a public setting as there is a perception by members of the public that these projects will go to construction.</p> <p>Suggested and/or requested future outreach to specific groups. Commenters suggested targeted outreach to student populations at the University of Florida and other regional college campuses, realtor associations, the rail industry, distribution centers and large employers in Ocala (especially FedEx, AT&T, Walmart, and Dollar General), and farmers in Levy County. Many comments were received from Putnam and Clay Counties, and residents from these communities expressed concern that though transportation decisions that will directly affect them will be made without their involvement. Future outreach should be provided to these counties and specifically the communities of Middleburg, Keystone Heights, Melrose, Hawthorne, Palatka, and Interlachen. Others commented on the need to engage a more diverse sampling of demographics and socio-economic status, especially minorities and lower-income groups that could benefit from increased economic opportunities. Two large landowners in the Initial Focus Area commented on support for the Task Force recommendations and requested to have their sites considered in future efforts.</p>



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