



Florida's Transportation Planning Process

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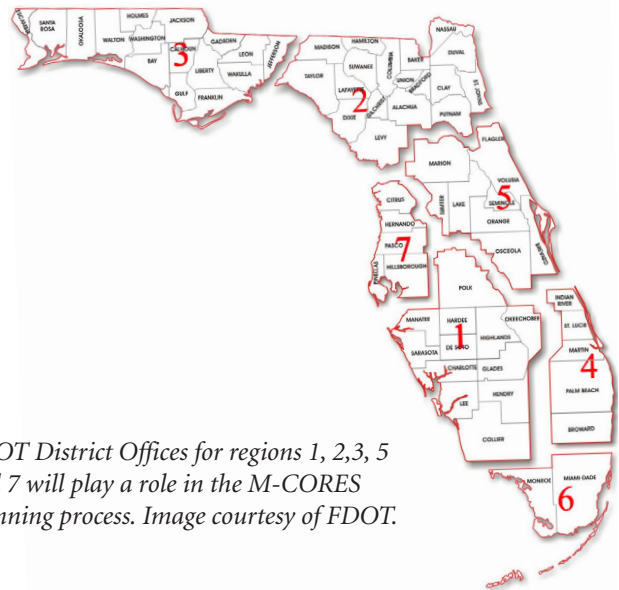
One of the challenges facing citizens seeking involvement in M-CORES is how this process interfaces with Florida's complex transportation planning and permitting processes. This primer is intended to provide a very cursory overview of major components of Florida's transportation process to provide a background for those following M-CORES.

Normally, the transportation planning and permitting process for major new highways in Florida can take 10 or more years. Because of the tight construction deadlines included in the M-CORES legislation, planning and permitting will need to be sped up considerably with some steps conducted simultaneously instead of sequentially.

Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT)

The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) is responsible for planning, operating and maintaining the State Highway System (of which M-CORES will be a part) and assisting local and regional governments with other transportation systems. FDOT Secretary Kevin Thibault leads the agency and reports directly to Gov. DeSantis.

FDOT is decentralized with seven regions each having a District Office managed by its own District Secretary who answers to the FDOT Secretary. At least five District Offices are expected to be involved in planning for M-CORES including Districts 1, 2, 3, 5 and 7. In some cases, District Office Secretaries will be taking the lead on the M-CORES planning process.



FDOT District Offices for regions 1, 2, 3, 5 and 7 will play a role in the M-CORES planning process. Image courtesy of FDOT.

FDOT Transportation Planning Process

M-CORES is not included in any of the current major FDOT transportation plans, including the long-range Florida Transportation Plan (FTP) which has a planning horizon year of 2060. This means that each of the following state plans and work programs, developed by FDOT, will need to be updated to incorporate M-CORES:

Florida Transportation Plan (FTP) – This plan is updated at least every 5 years and includes long range goals, objectives and strategies to meet the needs of Florida's "entire transportation system."

Strategic Intermodal Systems (SIS) Plan – Also updated every 5 years, the SIS includes corridors, facilities and services of statewide and multi-regional significance, and guides future state investments in and management of the SIS.

FDOT Work Program – Each year FDOT develops and adopts a five-year work program which includes all projects planned by the department for that period. FDOT holds at least one public hearing in each district, followed by a statewide public hearing by the Florida Transportation Commission. The program is then

submitted to the Governor and Legislature. Once adopted, it takes effect July 1 of each year. FDOT may propose an amendment to the Governor, who has the right to approve or deny it.

State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) – Required by the federal government, the STIP incorporates the first four years of FDOT’s Work Program.

Florida Corridors Planning Process

Florida’s first major planning initiative designed to incorporate environmental concerns related to the design of the Wekiva Parkway in Central Florida. In 2003, Gov. Jeb Bush created a broad-based committee of stakeholders to develop “enhanced land use planning strategies and development standards to protect water resources of the Wekiva River Basin” in the design and construction of the parkway. In 2004, Bush appointed a commission, also representing diverse interests, to oversee the project. The process has been widely hailed by conservationists as a model for highway planning.

In the final days of Gov. Bush’s administration, FDOT adopted Florida’s Future Corridors Action Plan to address the development of a series of transportation corridors, including some in similar locations to that proposed under M-CORES. This plan raised serious environmental and smart growth concerns and was subsequently shelved by Gov. Charlie Crist.

The Future Corridors concept was resurrected again under Gov. Scott and 1000 Friends convened meetings with conservation groups and FDOT Secretary Prasad to develop a series of *conservation and evaluation principles*. The corridors process was subsequently shelved by Gov. Scott.

FDOT’s website currently includes a three-stage process for planning statewide corridors. The first step of this process – including determination of need – was not undertaken for M-CORES.

1. In the **concept phase**, define a study area and identify “statewide connectivity and mobility” needs, determine whether significant transportation investment “is consistent with statewide policies and available regional and community visions and plans for growth,” identify community and environmental issues, and develop a framework for moving forward.
2. In the **evaluation phase**, identify potential corridors and alternatives, build consensus, and move forward on an action plan for viable corridors.
3. In the **project development phase**, use FDOT’s Efficient Transportation Decision-Making and Project Development and Environment processes to conduct a more detailed analysis and move forward into implementation.

Evaluating Environmental and Cultural Impacts of Transportation Systems

Florida has two primary mechanisms for evaluating environmental, cultural and other impacts of new roadways and transportation systems, the ETDM and PD&E processes. Due to the truncated time frame for building the toll roads, corridor planning and the ETDM and PD&E review processes described below may be undertaken simultaneously.

Efficient Transportation Decision Making (ETDM) Process – This is Florida’s screening process to review the potential environmental and cultural impacts of certain transportation projects. Stakeholders include Metropolitan Planning Organizations, local, state and

federal government agencies, Native American tribes, and the public who may provide input to FDOT during the planning and programming processes. This is intended to identify issues and resolve disputes before the project is forwarded to the federally mandated PD&E Process.

Project Development & Environment (PD&E) Process – The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 requires that federal agencies (and state projects using federal funding) evaluate the environmental impacts of their actions. FDOT has assumed the Federal Highway Administration’s (FHWA’s) responsibilities under NEPA for projects related to the State Highway

System (SHS) whose federal funding comes from FHWA. As part of the SHS, it is anticipated that at least portions of the M-CORES toll roads will need to comply with NEPA.

FDOT is guided by the *Project Development and Environment (PD&E) Manual* which describes its requirements under NEPA including environmental assessment, the drafting of Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) when needed, public involvement, environmental permits and more. It also includes extensive information on the types of resources to be considered (including farmland, archaeological and historical resources, wild and scenic rivers, floodplains, etc.) as well as the process to identify and mitigate adverse impacts on those resources.

Other Agency Review – Other agencies involved in Florida’s transportation planning process include the Department of Environmental Protection, which evaluates impacts of proposed projects on natural resources, air quality and other environmental issues; Florida’s five Water Management Districts, which assess potential impacts on water resources; and the Department of State, which evaluates impacts on cultural resources. To ensure consistency between state, regional and local plans, each year the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity reviews the FDOT Work Program and MPO transportation improvement programs to ensure that projects are consistent with the appropriate local comprehensive plans.

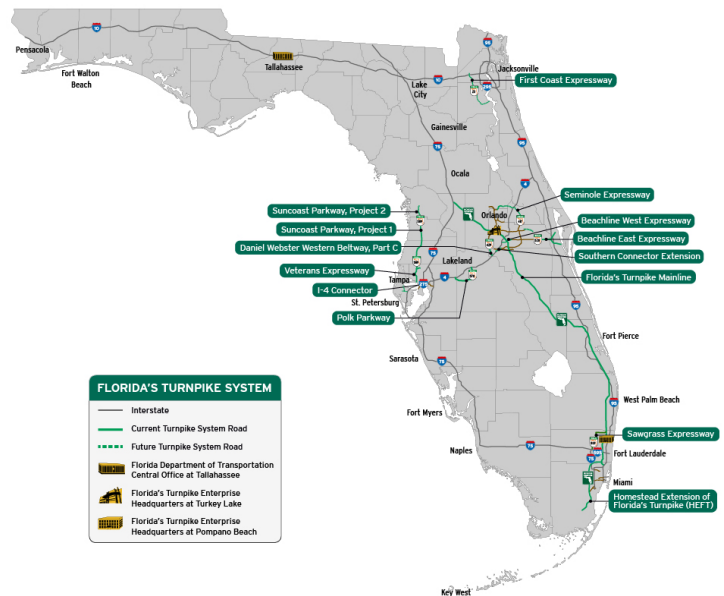
Florida’s Turnpike Enterprise (FTE)

The FTE was created in 2002 as a “separate business unit” of FDOT. Led by Executive Director and CEO Nicola Liquori, PE, it has a five-year work plan and handles all operations on every FDOT owned and operated toll road and bridge.

The three tolled roads to be built under M-CORES will be part of Florida’s Turnpike System. The FTE will play a role in planning M-CORES but is not expected to take the lead.

However, Florida Statutes include several provisions related to financing proposed turnpike projects that are relevant to M-CORES. Chapter 338.223(1)(a) indicates that “a proposed project or group of proposed projects may not be added to the turnpike system unless such projects are determined to be economically feasible and a statement of economic feasibility has been completed for such project or projects and such projects are determined to be consistent, to the maximum extent feasible, with approved local government comprehensive plans of the local governments in which such projects are located.... The department may not request legislative approval of a proposed turnpike project until the design phase of that project is at least 30 percent complete.”

Regarding the definition of “economically feasible,” Chapter 338.221(8)(a) indicates that the net revenue estimate of a proposed turnpike project “will be



Florida’s existing and proposed turnpike system, will be extended by M-CORES. Image courtesy of FDOT.

sufficient to pay at least 50 percent of the annual debt service on the bonds associated with the project by the end of the 12th year of operation and to pay at least 100 percent ... by the end of the 30th year of operation.” Additionally, turnpike projects are “expected to generate sufficient revenues to amortize project costs within 15 years of opening to traffic.”

Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs)

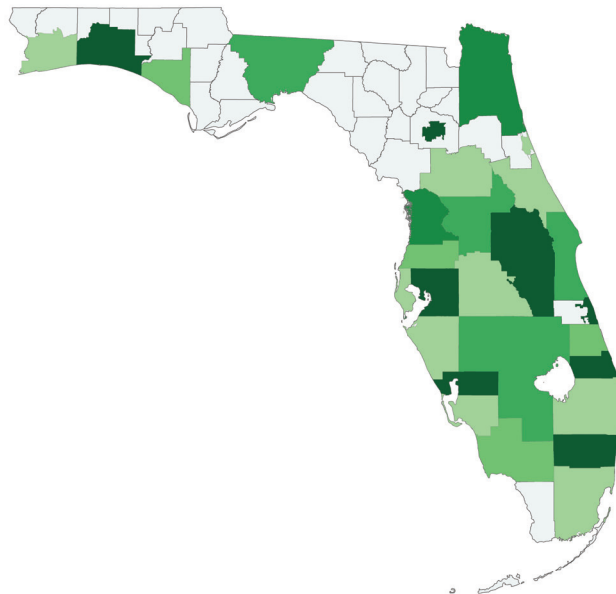
Comprised of representatives from local governments and transportation authorities, MPOs are federally mandated transportation planning organizations. MPOs develop and maintain federally required transportation plans to ensure that Federal funds are used to support local priorities. Federal law requires that MPOs involve the public in the planning process.

Florida has 27 MPOs (sometimes called Transportation Planning Organizations or Authorities), each with a planning area that includes urbanized areas plus the area expected to become urbanized in 20 years. Each MPO develops long range transportation plans and improvement programs and sets transportation funding priorities for its jurisdiction.

Most of the M-CORES proposed corridors fall under the jurisdiction of existing MPOs, including the Capital Region TPO, Hernando/Citrus MPO, Ocala/Marion TPO, Lake/Sumter MPO, Polk TPO, Heartland Regional MPO, Charlotte County-Punta Gorda MPO, Lee County MPO, and Collier MPO.

For rural counties not under the jurisdiction of MPOs

the board of county commissioners shall serve as the MPO and shall be involved in the development of the department's Work Program to the same extent as an MPO.



A number of Florida MPOs will play a role in M-CORES planning. Image courtesy of Center for Urban Transportation Research.

Next Steps

As noted, due to the accelerated pace of M-CORES, multiple transportation planning processes likely will take place simultaneously. In addition to the task force meetings for each of the three proposed corridors, there will be multiple public meetings to update state and regional plans impacted by M-CORES. Each process will provide opportunities for citizen engagement to protect significant natural and cultural resources. Here's how you can help:

- **Provide input when FDOT updates its plans** including the Florida Transportation Plan (FTP), Strategic Intermodal Systems (SIS) Plan, Work Program, and State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) to incorporate M-CORES.
- **Provide input when Florida's Turnpike Enterprises and the impacted Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) update their plans** to incorporate M-CORES.

- **Provide input into FDOT's Efficient Transportation Decision Making (ETDM) process and Project Development & Environment (PD&E) process** as each M-CORES corridor is evaluated.
- **Network with other concerned citizens and organizations** as M-CORES is sure to generate many documents to review and public meetings to attend. It is important to share the load!

1000 Friends of Florida will provide information on dates and times of relevant meetings and hearings and links to documents at www.1000fof.org/mcores as they are made available, so please check back regularly.