



**RECOMMENDATIONS ON M-CORES GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND INSTRUCTIONS FOR PD&E  
BASED ON STATUTORY PURPOSE AND GOALS**

1000 Friends of Florida -- July 20, 2020

**STATUTORY GOAL: DETERMINE NEED FOR AND FINANCIAL FEASIBILITY OF EACH M-CORES CORRIDOR**

**In compliance with applicable state and federal statutes, prior to moving forward on planning the road system, required analysis shall be undertaken regarding transportation need AND financial feasibility, including examination of bonding capacity, to determine if each roadway segment needs to be constructed and can be feasibly financed.**

- In forecasting future travel demands, the speeds and capacities of roadway facilities will reflect full implementation of connected and autonomous vehicles (autos and trucks) for all existing highways, planned highways and each M-CORES expressway being evaluated, and will be the basis of identifying any travel operating deficiencies.
- In forecasting future travel demands, the anticipated population and anticipated employment shall be that which is in the Comprehensive Plan of each county in the study area.
- In analyzing project need, travel demand forecasts for each "build" alternative will be compared with the travel demand forecasts for the "no build" alternative. Any savings in vehicle miles of travel or vehicle hours of travel from the "build" alternative to the "no build" alternative travel demand forecasts will be considered the benefits to be compared with the total construction and operating costs of the "build" alternative being evaluated.
- In estimating costs of the project for the purpose of determining whether or not it meets the minimum financial feasibility requirement of Florida Statutes, all costs for construction, land, mitigation, planning, design, etc. needed for M-CORES to be functional that were not in the 2018 FDOT Transportation Improvement Program (when the legislation was passed) shall be included regardless of funding source. This includes all interchange connections including terminal points at I-4 and I-75, widening or construction of connecting highways, and all mitigation activities needed to meet statutory requirements.
- In evaluating financial feasibility, estimate the loss in city property taxes and loss in business sales taxes along existing highways within cities and rural communities that will result from the loss of traffic that will now bypass the city or rural community. This analysis should specifically estimate fiscal impacts to the budgets of cities and counties.

***If there is no formal determination of both need and financial feasibility pursuant to state and federal definitions, the decision shall be made to suspend the planning process and withdraw funding for it.***

*If there is a formal determination of both need and financial feasibility pursuant to state and federal definitions and the decision is made to move forward on the planning process, the following guiding principles should be followed:*

**Consider and evaluate a full range of alternative alignments and configurations of each M-CORE**

- Include a "no build" option
- In identifying alternative alignments for each M-CORE, at least one alternative will completely avoid any direct impact to: lands identified as CLIP 1, 2 or 3 priorities in the Florida Natural Areas Inventory; existing conservation lands including Preservation 2000 lands, Florida Forever acquisitions and projects, and lands under conservation easement in aquifer recharge areas; lands identified for purchase by Florida Forever, Rural and Family Lands, and other state, county and municipal conservation programs; springs and locally designated springs protection zones and resource preservation areas; Outstanding Florida Waters; lakes and other surface waters; aquatic preserves; State parks and recreation lands; mitigation banks; habitat for endangered, threatened, rare or endemic species and rare or endemic plant communities; Florida Ecological Greenways priorities 1 or 2; wildlife refuges; other significant natural resources identified in local comprehensive plan Future Land Use Maps; Conservation Elements, and other Elements; and Natural Resources of Regional Significance as identified in Regional Planning Council Strategic Regional Policy Plans.

**STATUTORY GOAL: ENSURE ROBUST COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT THROUGHOUT THE PLANNING PROCESS**

**Consult with impacted parties**

- Provide extensive opportunity for citizen engagement throughout the planning, design and construction process
- Consult with local city and county government, Regional Planning Councils (RPCs), Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), Native American Tribes, and communities to ensure consistency with local comprehensive plans and regional plans and understand community preferences.
- Work with owners of agricultural and silviculture lands to understand their needs and plans and avoid/minimize impacts to their properties
- Partner with private and public conservation organizations to understand priority species protection and needed wildlife crossings and/or corridors to assist with acquisition of identified conservation and agricultural lands
- Engage with the private sector on opportunities for technology and enhancements along the corridor (broadband, renewable energy, etc.)

- Consult with businesses to understand their needs and ensure that the corridor enhances the local and regional economy, especially business such as environmental tourism, cultural tourism, and agriculture which depend on the existing character of the study area.

## **STATUTORY GOAL: REVITALIZE RURAL COMMUNITIES**

### **Protect rural communities from suburban sprawl**

- To prevent sprawl and protect the economies of existing downtown and communities, do not construct any interchange until all land within a 5- mile radius of the future interchange is protected by agricultural easement, conservation easement, purchase of development rights, or similar instrument.
- Give priority to upgrading existing highways or, if not possible, co-locating any new highway to minimize impacts on sensitive natural resources and existing communities.
- Prevent sprawl by strictly limiting interchanges and specifying their locations in statute, requiring legislative action to add new interchanges.

### **Preserve agricultural lands to support rural communities and economies**

- To protect agricultural land and support rural communities and economies, do not construct any interchange until all land within a 5 mile radius of the future interchange is protected by agricultural easement, conservation easement, purchase of development rights, or similar instrument.
- Avoid impacts to: Florida Rural and Family Lands Protection Program lands; locally designated farmland protection areas; agricultural and timberlands under conservation easements
- Minimize impacts to: Prime farmland; prime timberland; large contiguous agricultural properties in order to minimize fragmentation; other essential agricultural lands

### **Protect and enhance cultural resources**

- Avoid impacts to: tribal lands, cultural sites with human remains (including cemeteries), and resources listed in or determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP)
- Survey impacted lands for potential NRHP-eligible resources and avoid or minimize impacts pursuant to NEPA and state law.
- Strengthen heritage tourism efforts based on sustainable promotion of local and regional cultural resources
- Develop, support and expand local and regional heritage tourism efforts

## **Protect community character**

- The design of any highway facilities within existing communities shall maintain and enhance the existing scale, character and quality of life in rural towns and communities and ensure the economy and character of these areas are enhanced by the highway investment, consistent with adopted local government comprehensive plans, regional plans, and visions.
- Avoid or minimize negative economic, social, and quality of life impacts to important community resources including schools, parks, places of worship, hospitals, airports, prisons, public water supply plants, wastewater facilities and electric generating facilities.
- Ensure that roadway design meets the highest aesthetic standards to protect the traditional character of the area, including significant viewsheds, downtowns, historic and archaeological resources, sensitive natural areas, wildlife habitat, agricultural lands, and other features.
- Ensure that roadways fit in with the rural character, remain close to current grade, include landscaping appropriate to the context, with no billboards allowed.
- In locations where roads impact downtowns, neighborhoods, historic and/or cultural sites, undertake a detailed analysis -- exceeding minimum required state and federal standards -- to determine how to best minimize economic, design and other impacts to the resources and traditional economy.
- Maintain and enhance the existing character and quality of life in rural towns and communities and ensure the corridor provides for the future sustainability and vitality of these areas consistent with currently existing local, regional, and state plans and visions.

## **STATUTORY GOAL: ENCOURAGE JOB CREATION**

### **Protect existing businesses in the rural communities**

- To protect existing businesses in rural communities from unfair competition at new interchanges, do not construct any interchange until all land within a 5 mile radius of the future interchange is protected by agricultural easement, conservation easement, purchase of development rights, or similar instrument.
- Minimize impacts of new transportation facilities by following existing transportation rights of way, utility corridors or easements, and other existing human-disturbed corridors through conservation, agricultural, and other natural lands.
- Ensure consistency with local and regional economic plans and initiatives that enhance sustainable local economic development, job creation, and community development, with emphasis on preserving rural character and environmental resources in affected areas.
- Avoid military sites and lands important to maintain the site's military mission and economic viability.

### **Promote the creation of sustainable new business opportunities**

- Bring broadband services to rural communities, utilizing existing rights of way where possible rather than depending on new highways to be built, so existing residents can work remotely in the global economy, so the next generation can choose to stay in these areas because they are connected to the global economy, and so these areas can attract "untethered" new residents that desire the rural lifestyle as long as they have broadband service
- Maintain and enhance transportation connectivity to, from, and between working farms, forests, and mines; recreational areas, trails, and other eco-tourism attractions; rural employment centers; and other economically valuable rural lands.
- To expand job opportunities, create and help implement sustainable local and regional tourism efforts focusing on eco-tourism, heritage tourism, and cultural tourism to build on existing resources and sense of place in a compatible manner
- Enhance mobility and accessibility in areas with high concentrations of transportation-disadvantaged populations.

### **STATUTORY REQUIREMENT: PROVIDE REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY**

- Enhance transportation connectivity by emphasizing linkages to existing communities and the existing regional roadway network and by using state-of-the-art and energy-efficient infrastructure, vehicles, materials, technologies, and methodologies.
- Identify additional infrastructure needs, evaluate cost to assist with determining financial feasibility of the corridor, and commit funding to accommodate the corridor (local roads, rail, utilities, sewer and water) prior to construction of the roads.
- Avoid or minimize impacts to funding for programmed FDOT projects, particularly in over-capacity urbanized areas.
- In transportation corridor planning and project development, evaluate improvements and access to existing and planned trail networks.
- Provide for multiple modes of transportation (bike, pedestrian, transit, rail) in the design.

### **STATUTORY GOAL: LEVERAGE TECHNOLOGY**

- Enhance areas where infrastructure, such as broadband linked to significant civic buildings including (but not limited to) public schools and libraries, can be combined with transportation through nondiscriminatory, competitively neutral access to FDOT rights of way for utility and service providers or joint deployment of infrastructure.

## **STATUTORY GOAL: ENHANCE QUALITY OF LIFE AND PUBLIC SAFETY**

- Design roadways to meet the needs of traditional, electric and autonomous vehicles.
- Enhance emergency response and evacuation access, plans, and routes. Evaluation of hurricane evacuation needs shall be based on fully connected and autonomous vehicles, and shall be based on adopted emergency management plans that may include shelter in place as preferred to evacuation.

## **STATUTORY GOAL: PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES**

### **Avoid and/or minimize impacts to sensitive natural resources critical to Florida's water supply and quality, economy, wildlife habitat, and quality of life**

- Avoid impacts to: aquifer recharge areas; springs; Outstanding Florida waters; lakes and other surface waters; aquatic preserves; conservation lands, including Preservation 2000 lands, Florida Forever acquisitions and projects, and lands under conservation easement; State parks and recreation lands; Florida Ecological Greenways Network Priorities 1 and 2 and other wildlife corridors; mitigation banks; habitat for endangered, threatened, rare or endemic species and rare or endemic plant communities; wildlife refuges; locally designated springs protection zones and resource preservation areas; other significant natural resources identified in local comprehensive plan Future Land Use Maps (FLUMs), Conservation Elements, and other elements; Natural Resources of Regional Significance as identified in Regional Planning Councils' Strategic Regional Policy Plans.
- Minimize impacts to: wetlands; floodplains; managed lands.

### **Mitigate unavoidable impacts**

- Mitigate unavoidable impacts to significant lands and waters, including but not limited to regionally significant environmental lands, watersheds, aquifer recharge areas, agricultural lands and other priority resource areas:
  - Identify and fund the acquisition of, or put under perpetual conservation easement, priority lands and waters prior to commencing road construction.
  - Minimize the fragmentation of large, contiguous properties important for wildlife corridors, hydrologic functions, agricultural production and other needs.
  - Restore and/or enhance resource integrity using a regional and/or landscape scale approach when appropriate.
- Work with landowners to understand their future plans.
- Ensure stormwater Best Management Practices (BMPs) are utilized and that they maintain, restore, and enhance water quality and watershed integrity, and construction follows the highest engineering standards to eliminate or minimize impacts

- Minimize impacts of transportation lighting on nearby agricultural, environmental and conservation lands.

#### **Protect environmental lands and natural resources vulnerable to direct and secondary impacts of each M-CORE**

- To avoid indirect impacts to environmental and natural resources, all of the following lands within 10 miles of the centerline of the preferred alignment shall be protected by acquisition, easement or other legal instrument before construction begins on any segment of each M-CORES expressway: lands identified as Clip 1, 2 or 3 in the Florida Natural Areas Inventory; all lands identified for purchase by Florida Forever, Rural and Family Lands, and other state, county and municipal conservation programs; springs and locally designated springs protection zones and resource preservation areas; and Florida Ecological Greenways priorities 1 or 2.
- Develop a land protection program as part of the project to coordinate and implement the acquisition of identified conservation lands before construction begins.

#### **Avoid fragmentation**

- Locate roads in a manner that avoids or minimizes fragmentation of biodiversity features, wildlife habitat corridors, critical agricultural lands and other resources; where needed, wildlife underpasses or bridges and other mitigation measures shall be undertaken to maintain connectivity.

#### **Apply innovative planning and design strategies**

- Use state of the art and energy efficient methodologies, technologies and materials to develop the corridor.
- Follow forestry and stormwater Best Management Practices (BMPs) to maintain, restore and enhance water quality and watershed integrity.
- Enhance springs priority focus areas and impaired water bodies by prioritizing opportunities to convert septic to sewer systems, and watershed-wide water quality improvements, and ruling out plans that would degrade quality in impaired water bodies.
- Accommodate multiple modes of transportation.

#### **Consult established state and federal resources to identify endangered species (wildlife and plants), their habitats, and wildlife corridors**

- FWS Endangered, Threatened, and At-Risk Species
- Native/Endemic Species
- USGS Species Habitat Suitability Layers
- CLIP Species Data
- Biodiversity layers reviewed for overlap