

Meeting Summary Agency Coordination Meeting #3

June 8, 2016, 9:00 AM Hilton Ocala 3600 SW 36th Avenue Ocala, Florida 34474

I-75 Relief Study Government / Agency Partners Present:

George Boyle	Florida Department of Transportation, District 7
Ramond Chiaramonte	Tampa Bay Regional Transportation Authority
Steven Dopp	Gainesville Metropolitan Transportation Planning Organization
Walt Eastmond	Citrus County
Michael Escalante	North Central Florida Regional Planning Council / Gainesville Metropolitan Transportation Planning Organization
Derek Fusco	Federal Highway Administration
Melanie Gaboardi	Ocala
Terry Gilbert	Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Jeff Hays	Alachua County
Hannah Hernandez	St. Johns River Water Management District
Lee Ann Jacobs	Federal Highway Administration
Ryan Marks	Florida Department of Transportation, District 5
Masood Mirza	Marion County
Pamela Richmond	Lake – Sumter Metropolitan Planning Organization
Marc von Canal	St. Johns River Water Management District

Number of Other Interested Individuals in Attendance: 29

The meeting sign-in sheets are included as an **Appendix**.





Meeting Highlights

Note: All meeting materials referenced (including presentations) are available for download at the I-75 Relief Project website www.i75relief.com.

Welcome and Introductions, Xavier Pagan, FDOT - 9:15 AM

Xavier Pagan, Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) Natural and Community Resources Administrator, welcomed everyone to the third Agency Coordination Meeting for the I-75 Relief Task Force. Mr. Pagan asked the agency partners to introduce themselves and their representative agency, and reminded the public of the public comment period scheduled at 11:00 AM.

Review Meeting Agenda and Objectives – 9:20 AM

Mr. Pagan reviewed the meeting objectives and agenda, emphasizing the importance of the agencies' input on the preliminary framework for enhanced and new high speed, high capacity transportation corridor options, and explained that input received would carry forward into any future evaluation studies.

Meeting Objectives

- Review I-75 Relief Study/Task Force work to date and discuss technical issues
- Review and gather feedback on the draft evaluation approach and framework for enhanced and new high speed, high capacity transportation corridors in the study area

Update on the I-75 Relief Task Force Work to Date, Xavier Pagan, FDOT – 9:25 AM

Mr. Pagan presented a review of the I-75 Relief Task Force work to date, including an update on the Task Force meetings held since the last Agency Coordination Meeting. Mr. Pagan asked if there were any questions.

No questions/ comments were offered.

Evaluation and Framework, 9:30 AM

Mr. Pagan introduced John Kaliski, Cambridge Systematics, and Sunserea Dalton, CH2M, to present the Framework for Enhanced and New High Speed, High Capacity Corridors and the Evaluation Approach.

Framework for Enhanced and New High Speed, High Capacity Corridors, John Kaliski, Cambridge Systematics and Sunserea Dalton, CH2M

Mr. Kaliski began the presentation by reviewing the short and mid-term options for enhancing existing corridors proposed within the framework of options for future studies. Ms. Dalton concluded the presentation by reviewing the long-term options for potential new corridors, represented by two areas of opportunity, which would be further refined and narrowed in future studies. Mr. Kaliski asked if there were any questions.

The following questions/ comments were offered:

- Mike Escalante, Gainesville MTPO, offered the following questions and comments. The responses provided are noted in italics.
 - 1. Can a Task Force representative make a presentation and/or have a discussion with a TPO/ MPO?





Staff can schedule a presentation to any group that requests one. The presentation requests should be coordinated through Huiwei Shen, Project Manager for the I-75 Relief Task Force.

2. How can a MPO/ TPO provide formal comments to the Task Force on the draft recommendations presented today?

The Task Force has requested to receive agency and public comments one week prior to its next meeting in order to review and consider prior to their discussions at Task Force Meeting #6, June 24, 2016.

3. There are concerns about the southern area of opportunity being dropped for consideration so early in the process, without much apparent thought. How did a single alignment within that area of opportunity not seem acceptable to anyone on the Task Force, and what are the future implications of such a decision?

Ms. Dalton explained that it was clear to the Task Force based on the preliminary traffic counts that were presented, which showed that the most congested areas on I-75 in the study area are located between Ocala and Gainesville, that an alternative south of Ocala would not meet the purpose and need to relieve congestion and improve safety on I-75. NEPA policy is to eliminate alternatives early in the process that do not meet purpose and need. As land use patterns and traffic projections change over time, there is an opportunity to revisit eliminated alternatives during future evaluation studies.

4. Why was the Beverly Hills area avoided? What does that mean for potential economic development opportunities related to increased transportation options in that area?

Mr. Kaliski clarified that the shared southern portion of both remaining areas of opportunity was redrawn to recognize that it is not the intention to place a high capacity corridor through existing communities. Consistent with the guiding principles, the areas of opportunity were refined, and will continue to be refined, to reflect opportunities to enhance, and not disrupt, existing communities, including opportunities for economic development where consistent with local plans. Similar refinements will take place during any potential future studies to other areas encompassing existing communities.

5. As it relates to MPO/TPO long range transportation plans, at what point would these options affect these plans? Would there be a need for a long range plan amendment or for these new corridors to be considered in the MPO/TPO travel demand models?

Mr. Kaliski explained that one goal of this process is to engage and coordinate with local and MPO plans early in the planning process. He explained that the MPOs within the East Central Florida Corridor Task Force study area adopted language to acknowledge the recommendations of the Task Force, including the areas identified for further study and evaluation. Mr. Kaliski invited Lee Ann Jacobs from FHWA to weigh in on her perspective.

• Lee Ann Jacobs, FHWA, stated that it would be premature to amend long range plans or update the MPO travel demand models as there are no specific projects yet identified. However, she suggested that language recognizing that these evaluation studies are taking place could be included in plans, depending on the LRTP update cycle.





- Pam Richmond, Lake Sumter MPO, stated that the language provided previously by FDOT regarding the work of the I-75 Relief Task Force was included in the Lake Sumter MPO LRTP, and asked if this needed to be revised or if it was the sufficient recognition that Lee Ann Jacobs was suggesting.
 - Mr. Kaliski said that this language is sufficient acknowledgement at this point in the process. Ms. Dalton explained that LRTP amendments would be required if/when an alignment is determined in future PD&E studies.
- Ramond Chiaramonte, TBARTA, shared that TBARTA is working closely with the West Central Florida MPO
 Coordinating Committee, made up of 7 counties. He said that the northern area of opportunity seems to best
 meet the purpose and need, and believes this route will help divert the portion of tourist traffic using I-75 to
 access Tampa Bay. He inquired about the relative travel distance saved using a route through the northern area
 of opportunity to the Suncoast Parkway in comparison to I-75 to Tampa.

Mr. Kaliski explained that these distances have not been calculated but that staff could try to get that information for him.

- Jeff Hays, Alachua County, offered the following questions and comments:
 - 1. What was the methodology for developing the 2065 traffic projections for I-75 (shown on slide 10)? Was growth trended out?
 - Josiah Banet, AECOM, clarified that the future traffic is not based on trends, but a statewide traffic model developed using the population growth projections for each county, which were then extrapolated to 2065.
 - 2. Did the traffic projections include improvements to I-75? Is I-75 6, 8, or 10 lanes in these projections? The 2040 projections only included those improvements currently within the MPO cost feasible plans, which do not include any significant widening projects within the study area. Because the cost feasible plans do not extend past 2040, a range of alternatives were developed with various roadway improvements included and not included. He explained that that is why the 2065 projections are a range, based on these different possible scenarios.
 - 3. Will there be any traffic modeling projections provided to the Task Force prior to them making their final recommendations?
 - Mr. Kaliski explained that the Task Force has seen the traffic data which were presented today, as well as data on existing and future visitor and freight flows. Any travel demand projections for specific alternatives that come out of the Task Force recommendations would be evaluated in future studies.
 - 4. Have you done any right of way analysis for the potential improvements to I-75, for example, for truck-only lanes or tolled express lanes?
 - Some preliminary analysis has been done, however nothing conclusive. From this high level analysis it appears there are some places where sufficient right of way is available, while in certain locations along the corridor there are constraints such as an existing development that would need to be considered.





- Marc von Canal, SJWMD, asked the following questions: Regarding the mid and long-term options, what enhancements to the connection to Northeast Florida have been considered? What has been considered to enhance capacity on U.S. 301? Have any additional areas of opportunity been looked at east of U.S. 301?
 - Mr. Kaliski replied that a high-level Transportation Alternatives Study was completed last year and looked at possible options for U.S. 301 between Marion and Duval Counties. These options included freight and operational improvements, bypasses, and truck-only lanes. The Task Force considered this report, and recommended the area of considered improvements be extended south of Marion to Hernando County in future studies. More detailed analysis of these options would occur in future studies. No areas of opportunity for new corridors have been considered to the east of I-75.
- Masood Mirza, Marion County, asked why a new model was developed, as opposed to using the Florida Turnpike Enterprise traffic model, which is used to determine revenue forecasts? Once an alignment is determined, won't the revenue need to be forecast?
 - Mr. Banet explained the complexities of modeling out 50 years, and the desire to use the latest available information within the model. He explained that a new corridor would take at least 15 years to feasibly be constructed, so at this point, looking at traffic and revenue is not feasible, and instead we are simply trying to focus on projecting the potential demand. He equated this to trying to plan for travel demand today in 1966.
- Walt Eastman, Citrus County, voiced his appreciation for the refinement of the areas of opportunity around the Beverly Hills area, and stated that the area of opportunity through Citrus County now makes sense. He said that he agrees with TBARTA's opinion that the northern area of opportunity makes logical sense, however he does not think we should be looking at an either/or scenario, but rather at both areas of opportunity together, since the traffic projections are very large, and demand is located in different areas of the state. He explained that from a mobility point of view, it would be beneficial to have multiple areas of improvement.

Evaluation Approach, John Kaliski, Cambridge Systematics – 10:35 AM

Mr. Kaliski presented on the proposed evaluation approach that FDOT will use to evaluate the options for enhanced and new corridors recommended by the Task Force moving forward. Mr. Kaliski asked if there were any questions. The following questions/ comments were offered:

- Hannah Hernandez, SJRWMD, stated that while mitigation options are traditionally only considered during PD&E, given the large study area, she sees an opportunity to address early mitigation strategies, such as to look at both public and private storm water partnerships. Ms. Hernandez proposed a joint meeting between all of the water management districts in the study area to begin the conversation and early coordination.
 - Mr. Kaliski encouraged this meeting, and explained that the desire for joint partnerships and identifying early mitigation strategies has been part of the Task Force's conversations.

Break - 10:50 AM

Public Comment Period – 11:00 AM

Xavier Pagan announced the beginning of the public comment period, and reminded the speakers that there is a three minute time limit on comments.

• Art Jackson explained that he is a farmer on a small farm, and voiced his concern that the richest farmlands in the state are located along U.S. 41, and would be destroyed to connect to the Veteran's Parkway, which he believes





is currently deserted. He then explained that the Sabal Trail pipeline parallels U.S. 41, inquiring how wide that alignment is, and whether sharing that same alignment and right of way had been considered.

- Katheryn Taubert explained that she is the president of the Rainbow Springs/ Suwannee/ St. John's Sierra Club, which represents 15 counties within the study area. She expressed her support upon hearing that many more studies would be done to minimize environmental and community impacts, while also relieving I-75. She stressed the importance of the ecological resources found within the northern area of opportunity, including the spring shed and the \$2 billion eco-tourism industry that is reliant on the rural nature of this area. She encouraged staff to read a report by the Brookings Institute explaining that the effort of building roads out of congestion is futile. She concluded by stressing the importance of considering the communities that exist along U.S. 41, starting at Dunnellon and extending northward of Gainesville, and expressed her concern that these communities were not represented on the maps on display.
- Terry Thompson introduced himself as the Chairman of the Marion County Planning and Zoning Commission Citizen Board. He expressed his concern that volunteer citizens like himself are not able to take a seat at the front of the room to participate in the discussions. He said that because of his role within Marion County Planning and Zoning, he has heard a large number of concerns over the central area of opportunity due to the large number of horse farms in this area, and stated that a corridor in this area would not be consistent with Marion County land development plans. He stated that the traffic problems on I-75 are not created by residents, but are created instead by visitors, especially on holidays. He suggested alternate existing routes that could be used to divert traffic, including U.S. 19 and U.S. 27 or I-95. He suggested that a reliever corridor could connect to I-10 close to Tallahassee rather than I-75 to best divert this tourist traffic.
- Harriett Jones, Williston resident, stated that average income is higher in Levy County than in Citrus County, and that Levy County has a lot of wetlands. She explained that she has seen what has happened in places like Starke, Fort Lauderdale, and the empty box stores along U.S. 19. She pleaded that Levy County's water and land be left alone.
- Whitey Markle, Sierra Club Florida Chapter, expressed a desire for more communication and coordination between the Sierra Club and the FDOT. He explained that the Sierra Club policy is no new roads. He suggested that arterial roads be enhanced so that I-75 is not used for commuter trips. He suggested that new roads are used to advance economic development interests and not for the purpose of relieving congested highways. He instead expressed his support of using truck-only lanes and express lanes on I-75. He stated that environmental preservation and environmental policy seems to be the lowest priority of the Task Force, and said that this plan endangers Florida's water supply. He concluded by suggesting that if U.S. 301 is enhanced, that the disruption of Orange Lake caused by the roadway construction in the 1960s be restored and enhanced.
- Paul Marraffino, Dunnellon resident, gave a short presentation (see Appendix B) on an alternative to "threading the needle" between the sensitive areas around Dunnellon, as previously suggested by Task Force member Charles Lee. He explained that he looked at property appraiser data, and that this area is densely populated, including Dunnellon's historic district, commercial district, and residential neighborhoods, and stressed that a corridor through this area would divide the Dunnellon community. As an alternative, he suggested moving the areas of opportunity slightly to the west so that in the Dunnellon area a corridor would not follow U.S. 41, but rather cross the Withlacoochee River at the narrowest part of the river west of Dunnellon, in a relatively undeveloped area. He suggested that the northern area of opportunity then follow the edge of the Goethe State Forest and the central area of opportunity follow a similar path to what is currently proposed once north of





Dunnellon. He stated that the central area of opportunity crosses many horse farms, which could be a constraint. He concluded that his proposal is preferential to cutting through Dunnellon.

- Sally Ann Collins introduced herself as a retired programmer/ analyst who moved to Levy County from Broward,
 Florida. She explained that, from her experience, she has seen development plans and greed ruin communities.
 She stated her concern about the northern area of opportunity because impacted communities are not on the
 map. She explained the potential negative impacts on the springs in this area that would be caused by population
 growth, and warned that this part of Florida is the sinkhole capital of the world. She concluded by expressing her
 concerns over the potential for the horse, blueberry, and peanut industries in Western Alachua and Levy County
 to be ruined by this proposal.
- PJ Auffhammer explained that she moved to Citrus County from South Florida, in part because she was drawn to the large amount of land in conservation. She voiced her displeasure with the Citrus County Board of County Commissioners and County Staffs' decisions regarding the Suncoast Parkway 2 and their letter of support for the work of the I-75 Relief Task Force, as these proposals do not benefit the local residents of Citrus County. She stated that the Task Force has not been given sufficient data to make informed decisions, and the webinar and community open houses have not been formatted in a way that is easy for the public to understand and give meaningful input. She asked that the Task Force process be extended to allow adequate time for proper planning, for the areas of opportunity to be removed, and for the Task Force to focus on ways to enhance I-75.

Summary of Next Steps, Xavier Pagan, FDOT - 11:30 AM

Mr. Pagan presented the next steps, including the Task Force report outline, the second round of Community Open Houses, and the final Agency Coordination meeting. Mr. Pagan asked if there were any final questions.

- Walt Eastman, Citrus County, commented on the potential for storm water harvesting and re-use at the local level, which would require the storm water drainage to be planned at the basin level. He requested coordination and partnership with the local governments to explore this concept, as it may provide economic benefits at the local level.
- Jeff Hays, Alachua County, commented that within the northern end of the northern area of opportunity there are a number of sinkhole features with a direct connection to the aquifer. He stated that when the PCAT lines were buffered out into a larger area, a consequence is that it misrepresents the actual potential opportunities to connect to I-75 in that area, and explained those opportunities are much more limited than what is displayed.

Sunserea Dalton, CH2M, acknowledged that the PCAT considers sinkholes and karst sensitive areas, and that staff has the data Mr. Hay's is referring to. She explained that this layer would be used as a refinement layer and would be taken into consideration in future phases and when specific alignments are determined as it is too detailed to be considered when looking at areas several miles wide.

Review of Action Items, John Kaliski, Cambridge Systematics – 11:35

Mr. Kaliski reviewed the following action items:

- Agencies to provide input on the draft recommendations before June 16th;
- Agencies to request presentations to their organizations so that those can be scheduled;
- FDOT to coordinate with the Water Management Districts as requested so they may begin early coordination on storm water mitigation strategies.





Mr. Kaliski concluded the meeting by inviting members of the public to talk with staff one-on-one after the meeting if they had any further questions.

Meeting Adjourned - 11:40 AM





Public Sign-In Sheet

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Newspaper Website	☐ Mailing☐ Other	Joyce Hinkle		hinkle 632 @ yahoo.com	632 NW 3rd Ave, Williston, MO 32696
Newspaper Website	☐ Mailing Øother	Lamar Greene		elgreene@Centurylinkinet	P.O. Box 458 Morriston, F1 32668
Newspaper Website	☐ Mailing	Eleen Greene			//
Newspaper Website	☐ Mailing ☐ Other	RICH BEILOCK	IND. CONSULTANT/ TRANS ECON	MATILDAI @ UFL.EDU	PG 1307 423 MCINTOSH, FL 32664
Newspaper Website	Mailing Other	J.11 Ye westow		payeluerton Oembaramail.	on 34915 O'Berry dd Dude City 35523
Newspaper Website	Mailing Other	Aage Schroder	Stokes Creative Grove	aschroder@stokesco.com	1013 W. Terranova Way U St. Augustine, FL. 32092
Newspaper Website	Mailing Other	Bill Halback		h.billee@gnail.com	POB 1097 MICANOPY, FL 32667
Newspaper Website	Mailing Other	James + Mar Joy	Resident Williston	marefox es mail come	P0315 Williston P1 32696
Newspaper Website	Mailing Other			,	
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Newspaper Website	☐ Mailing ☐ Other	Wayner	Owne		
Newspaper Website	Mailing Other	MRS Annonson	PRIVATE CITIZEN		
Newspaper Website	Mailing Other	DARRYL LAWKER Wayner Mayner Mrs Annonson Scott Larker	Material supplier	SCOTTLANKER@ GMAIL, COM	
Newspaper Website	Mailing Other	John Rudnianyn	Landowrer	John@IPSOcala.com	
Newspaper Website	☐ Mailing☐ Other	KAYLA SOSHOW			
Newspaper Website	☐ Mailing ☐ Other				
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Name	Affiliation	Email	
Ackley Perron, Cara	St. Johns River Water Management District	cperron@sjrwmd.com	
Albright, Justin	Marion Soil and Water Conservation District	albrightinvestments@gmail.com	
Arnold, Bradley	Sumter County	bradley.arnold@sumtercountyfl.gov	
Backhouse, Paul	Seminole Tribe of Florida	paulbackhouse@semtribe.com	
Baier, Richard	Sumter County	richard.baier@sumtercountyfl.gov	
Barnett, Anita	National Park Service	anita_barnett@nps.gov	
Barron, Robert	US Army Corps of Engineers	Robert.B.Barron@usace.army.mil	
Bartolotta, Al	Pinellas County MPO	abartolotta@co.pinellas.fl.us	
Beltran, Robert	Southwest Florida Water Management District	robert.beltran@watermatters.org	
Berkowitz, Mike	Micanopy	micanopytown@gmail.com	
Biblo, Adam	FL Department of Economic Opportunity	adam.biblo@deo.myflorida.com	
Bohl, Steve	FL Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services	Steve.Bohl@freshfromflorida.com	
Booth, Ed	High Springs	ebooth@highsprings.us	
Bouyounes, Mounir	Marion County	mounir.bouyounes@marioncountyfl.org	
Bryan Parsons, Melissa	St. Johns River Water Management District	mparsons@sjrwmd.com	
Burke, Thomas	Lake-Sumter MPO	tburke@lakesumtermpo.com	
Burkett, Annette	South Florida Water Management District	aburkett@sfwmd.gov	
Burnell, Dave	Crystal River	dburnell@crystalriverfl.org	
Busby, Ruth	Coleman	ccityhall@cfl.rr.com	
Caldwell, Connie	Otter Creek	ottercreektownha@bellsouth.net	
Cannon, Bill	Wildwood	bcannon@wildwood-fl.gov	
Carnahan, Scott	Citrus County	scott.carnahan@citrusbocc.com	
Carter, Hugo	South Florida Water Management District	hcarter@sfwmd.gov	
Carver, Jennifer		Jennifer.Carver@dep.state.fl.us	
Catala, Sarah	FDOT	sarah.catala@dot.state.fl.us	
Chiaramonte, Ramond	TBARTA	raymond.chiaramonte@tbarta.com	
Collins, Jenette	Citrus County	jenette.collins@citrusbocc.com	
Cunill, Buddy	Federal Highway Administration	Benito.Cunill@dot.gov	





Name	Affiliation	Email	
Davis, Susan	St. Johns River Water Management District	sdavis@sjrwmd.com	
Dawson, Chris	Alachua County	cdawson@alachuacounty.us	
Dean, Wilbur	Levy County	Dean-wilbur@levycounty.org	
Dewey, David	St. Johns River Water Management District	ddewey@sjrwmd.com	
Diez, Steve	Hernando- Citrus MPO	stevend@co.hernando.fl.us	
DiGiovanni, Frank	Inverness	administration@Inverness-FL.Gov	
Dix, Dennis	Hernando -Citrus MPO	DennisD@co.hernando.fl.us	
Dopp, Steven 500	Gainesville MTPO	dopp@ncfrpc.org	
Dunford, Jimmy	Bronson	jdunford@bellsouth.net	
Eastmond, Walt	Citrus County	walt.eastmond@citrusbocc.com	
Ebner, Susan	TBARTA	susan.ebner@tbarta.com	
Ellington, Donnie	Florida Transportation Commission	donellington@cox.net	
Elizey, Mary	Chiefland	CityManager@chieflandfla.com	
Esch, Eddie	Dunnellon	eesch@dunnellon.org	
Fang, Chou	St. Johns River Water Management District	cfang@sjrwmd.com	
Farah, Waddah	FDOT	waddah.farah@dot.state.fl.us	
Farnsworth, Sue		sfarnsworth@belleviewfl.org	
Faulkner, Jim	Citrus County	jim.faulkner@citrusbocc.com	
Fish, T.J.	Lake-Sumter MPO	tjfish@lakesumtermpo.com	
Forzly, Lee	La Crosse	lacrosse386@windstream.net	
Frink, Ken	Southwest Florida Water Management District	Ken.Frink@swfwmd.state.fl.us	
Fusco, Derek	Federal Highway Administration	derek.fusco@dot.gov	
Gaboardi, Melanie Wuld	Ocala	mgaboardi@ocalafl.org	
Gates, Kim	US Environmental Protection Agency	gates.kim@epa.gov	
Glanzer, John	Archer	citymanager@cityofarcher.com	
Goff, Jennifer	FL Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission	jennifer.goff@MyFWC.com	
Gonano, Debbie	Micanopy	townhall@micanopytown.com	
Gresham, Traci	Alachua	cntrhill@embarqmail.com	





Name	Affiliation	Email
Hall, Greg	Federal Highway Administration	GregoryL.Hall@dot.gov
Harriot, Jim	Alachua	jHarriott@alachuacounty.us
Harvey, Larry	Putnam County	larry.harvey@putnam-fl.com
Hatim, Khaleda	FIHS Central Office	khaleda.hatim@dot.state.fl.us
Hays, Jeff	Alachua County	jhays@alachuacounty.us
Henderson, Bill	FDOT	bill.henderson@dot.state.fl.us
Herd, Carlos	Suwannee River Water Management District	CDH@srwmd.org
Hernandez, Hannah	St. Johns River Water Management District	hhernandez@sjrwmd.com
Hibbert, Jennifer	Federal Transit Administration	Jennifer.Hibbert@dot.gov
Hickle, Bruce	Bushnell	bhickle@cityofbushnellfl.com
Howard, Brandon	National Marine Fisheries Service	Brandon.Howard@noaa.gov
Hunter, Brian	FDOT	brian.hunter@dot.state.fl.us
Hutchinson, Robert	Alachua County	bocc@alachuacounty.us
Jacobs, Lee Ann	Federal Highway Administration	leeann.jacobs@dot.gov
Jones, Ginny Leigh ${\cal U}$	FL Department of State	ginny.jones@dos.myflorida.com
Joyner, Tom	Town of Reddick	townofreddick@windstream.net
Juilianna, John	St. Johns River Water Management District	jjuilianna@sjrwmd.com
Kendall, Cathy	Federal Highway Administration	cathy.kendall@dot.gov
Kissick, Lee	St. Johns River Water Management District	lkissick@sjrwmd.com
Kitchen, Ronald	Citrus County	ronald.kitchen@bocc.citrus.fl.us
Lajmiri, Manny	Pasco County MPO	mlajmiri@pascocountyfl.net
LaRiche, Chastity	Southwest Florida Water Management District	chaz.lariche@swfwmd.state.fl.us
Layman, Laura	South Florida Water Management District	lmontes@sfwmd.gov
Lewis, Ken	St. Johns River Water Management District	klewis@sjrwmd.com
Lippmann, Scott	Williston	scott.lippmann@ci.williston.fl.us
Lyons, Anthony	Gainesville	citymgr@cityofgainesville.org
Maholtz, Mike	Sarasota/Manatee MPO	Mike@MyMPO.org
Marable, Lori	District 7 SIS Coordinator	lori.marable@dot.state.fl.us





Name	Affiliation	Email	
Marks, Ryan	FDOT	ryan.marks@dot.state.fl.us	
McBride, Cabot	City of Inverness	fmcbride@tampabay.rr.com	
McClarnon, Daniel	FL Department of State	daniel.mcclarnon@dos.myflorida.com	
McCranie, Sally	Inglis	smccranieinglistownclerk@gmail.com	
McGilvray, Peter	FL Department of Transportation	peter.mcgilvray@dot.state.fl.us	
McKamey, Sandi	Belleview	smckamey@belleviewfl.org	
McKinney, Ed	FDOT	Edward.McKinney@dot.state.fl.us	
McManus, Alyssa	FL Department of State	alyssa.mcmanus@dos.myflorida.com	
McNeese, Patricia	Hernando County	pmcneese@hernandocounty.us	
Mecklenborg, Todd	US Fish and Wildlife Service	todd_mecklenborg@fws.gov	
Miracle, David	St. Johns River Water Management District	dmiracle@sjrwmd.com	
Mirza, Masood W	Marion County	masood.mirza@marioncountyfl.org	
Mitchell, Stan	Federal Transit Administration	stanley.a.mitchell@dot.gov	
Monroy, Carmen	FDOT	carmen.monroy@dot.state.fl.us	
Moody, Fred	Levy County	moody-fred@levycounty.org	
Morris, Vincent	FL Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services	vincent.morris@freshfromflorida.com	
Muldowney, Eric	St. Johns River Water Management District	emuldowney@sjrwmd.com	
Nelson, Beth	McIntosh	townofmcintosh@windstream.net	
New, Mike	Newberry	mike.new@ci.newberry.fl.us	
Niblock, Lee	Alachua County	lniblock@alachuacounty.us	
Norman-Vacha, T. Jennene	Brooksville	jnvacha@cityofbrooksville.us	
Oliver, Randy	Citrus County	randy.oliver@citrusbocc.com	
Ottoson, Nathan	St. Johns River Water Management District	nottoson@sjrwmd.com	
Overton, Randall	US Coast Guard	randall.d.overton@uscg.mil	
Parrott, Mindy	South Florida Water Management District	mparrott@sfwmd.gov	
Parsons, Timothy	FL Department of State	Timothy.Parsons@dos.myflorida.com	
Pedersen, Charlie	FL Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services	charles.pedersen@freshfromflorida.com	
Pianta, Ron	Hernando County	rpianta@hernandocounty.us	





Name	Affiliation	Email
Preston, Matt	FL Department of Economic Opportunity	matt.preston@deo.myflorida.com
Purcell, Brad	St. Johns River Water Management District	bpurcell@sjrwmd.com
Ramirez, Andres	Federal Transit Administration	andres.ramirez@dot.gov
Reiber, Michelle	St. Johns River Water Management District	mreiber@sjrwmd.com
Reichert, Mark	Assistant Executive Director, Florida Transportation Commisssion	mark.reichert@dot.state.fl.us
Richmond, Pamela	Lake-Sumter MPO	prichmond@lakesumtermpo.com
Richmond, Ana	Florida Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO)	Ana.Richmond@deo.myflorida.com
Ritter, Monte	Southwest Florida Water Management District	Monte.Ritter@swfwmd.state.fl.us
Robbins, Rick Allen	Natural Resources Conservation Service	rick.a.robbins@fl.usda.gov
Rockwell, Tim	Alachua	trockwell@edafl.com
Rogers, Jeff	Citrus County	jeffrey.rogers@citrusbocc.com
Rydene, David	National Marine Fisheries Service	David.Rydene@noaa.gov
Sanchez, Madolyn	US Environmental Protection Agency	sanchez.madolyn@epa.gov
Sanders, Scott	FL Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission	scott.sanders@myfwc.com
Sanderson, Marlie	Gainesville MTPO (North Central Florida RPC)	sanderson@ncfrpc.org
Schnetzler, Steven	US Forest Service	sschnetzler@fs.fed.us
Scott, Carol	Florida's Turnpike	carol.scott@dot.state.fl.us
Serena, Vivi	Marion Soil and Water Conservation District	vivipserena@yahoo.com
Shortelle, Ann	St. Johns River Water Management District	ashortelle@sjrwmd.com
Slay, Greg	Ocala/Marion TPO	gslay@ocalamariontpo.org
Smith, Kellie	MPO Liason (Marion County)	kellie.smith@dot.state.fl.us
Smith, Kevin	Strategic Resources Project Manager	Kevin.Smith@marioncountyfl.org
Smith, PJ	ECFRPC	pjsmith@ecfrpc.org
Sossamon, Leonard	Hernando County	LSossamon@hernandocounty.us
Spohn, Ryan	St. Johns River Water Management District	rspohn@sjrwmd.com
Sramek, Mark	National Marine Fisheries Service	mark.sramek@noaa.gov
Stahl, Chris	FL Department of Environmental Protection	Chris.Stahl@dep.state.fl.us
Stanger, Brian	FDOT	brian.stanger@dot.state.fl.us





Name	Affiliation	Email
Stenstream, Colleen	Marion Soil and Water Conservation District	tuckedawayfarm1@gmail.com
Stenstream, Robert	Marion Soil and Water Conservation District	ras19@embarqmail.com
Straub, Tracy	Marion County	tracy.straub@marioncountyfl.org
Stroup, Marjorie	Reddick	townofreddick@windstream.net
Sullivan, Joseph	Federal Highway Administration	joseph.sullivan@dot.gov
Swing, Alison	Seminole Tribe of Florida	alisonswing@semtribe.com
Tate, William	US Coast Guard	William.G.Tate@uscg.mil
Thompson, Mark	National Marine Fisheries Service	mark.thompson@noaa.gov
Turner, Randy	US Army Corps of Engineers	Randy.L.Turner@usace.army.mil
Unger, Kelly	US Army Corps of Engineers	Kelly.E.Unger@usace.army.mil
Vause, Ellen	Hawthorne	evause@cityofhawthorne.net
von Canal, Marc	St. Johns River Water Management District	mvoncanal@sjrwmd.com
Walls, Beth	US Environmental Protection Agency	walls.beth@epa.gov
Ward, Fred	Marion Soil and Water Conservation District	frward.swcd@yahoo.com
Watson, Sheila	Fanning Springs	info@fanningspringsflorida.org
Webster, Patrick	Suwannee River Water Management District	PJW@srwmd.org
Weidman, Andrew	Tribal Historic Preservation Office - Seminole Tribe of Florida	andrewweidman@semtribe.com
Weston, Michael	FL Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services	michael.weston@freshfromflorida.com
Williams, Marvin Leon	Federal Highway Administration	marvin.williams@dot.gov
Willis, fred	Town of Reddick	townofreddick@windstream.net
Worley, Kim	Waldo	kim@waldo-fl.com
Wrublik, John	US Fish and Wildlife Service	john_wrublik@fws.gov
Wyche, Vickie	MPO Liason (Lake/Sumter)	vickie.wyche@dot.state.fl.us
Wynne, Avera	TBRPC	avera@tbrpc.org
Zielinski, John	FDOT	john.zielinski@dot.state.fl.us
Zobler, John	Ocala	cmo@ocalafl.org

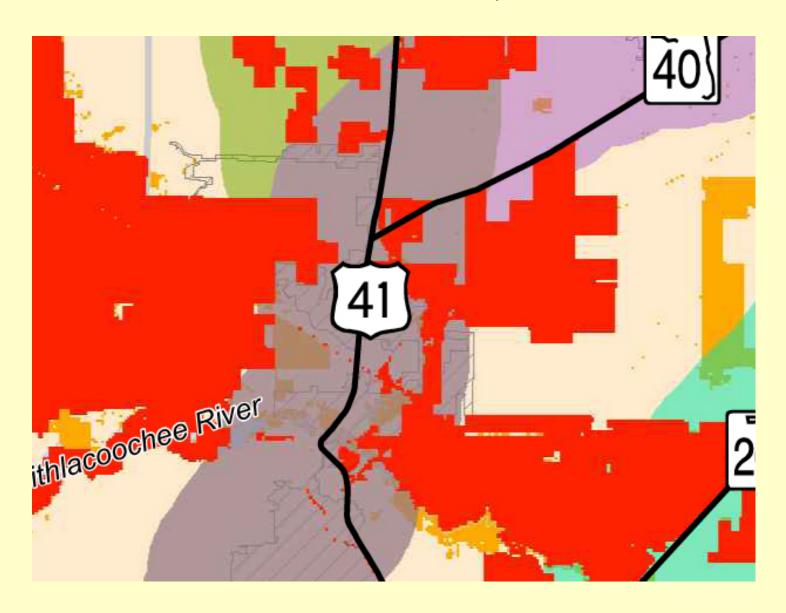


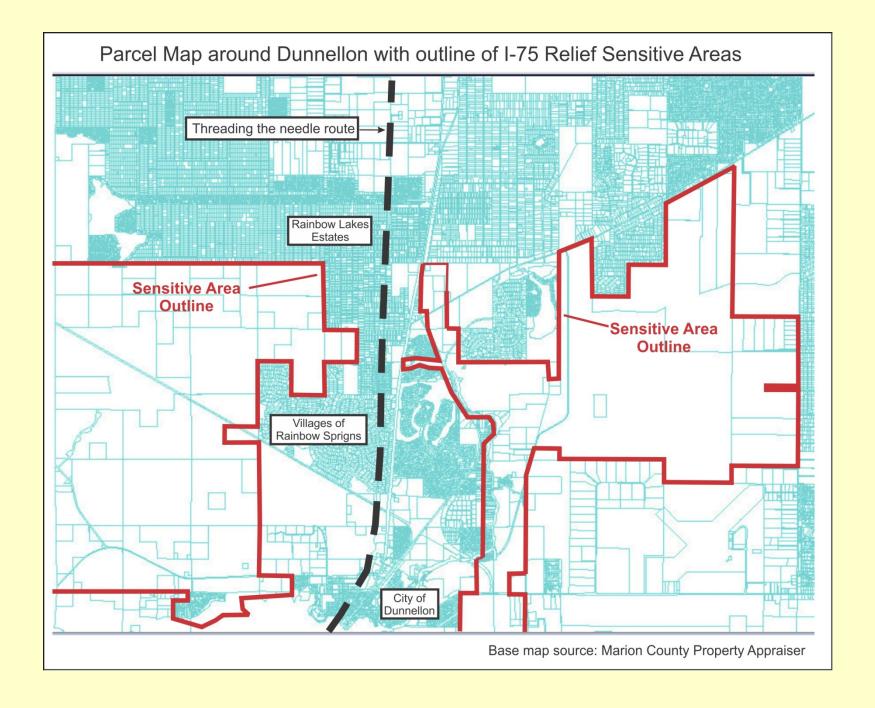


How did you about this m	i hear leeting?	Name (PLEASE PRINT)	Title / Organization	Email Address/Phone Number (PLEASE PRINT)	Mailing Address (PLEASE PRINT)
Newspaper Website	☐ Mailing ☐ Other	Michael Sherman	FHWA	Michael Sherman@dot.gov	
Newspaper Website	☐ Mailing ☐ Other	Michael Escalanty	NCFRPC/Geinesuelle MITT	o escalante enctración	
Newspaper Website	Mailing Other	George Boyle Term Gilbert	NCFRPC/Geinesuille MTP. FDOT District 7	george. bayle Qdot. state. Fl. us terry. gilbert@ myt	
Newspaper Website	Mailing Other	Termy Gilbert	FWC	terry silbert@myt	vc. com
Newspaper Website	Mailing Other	/		, - , ,	
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North and Central Swath Gap at Dunnellon





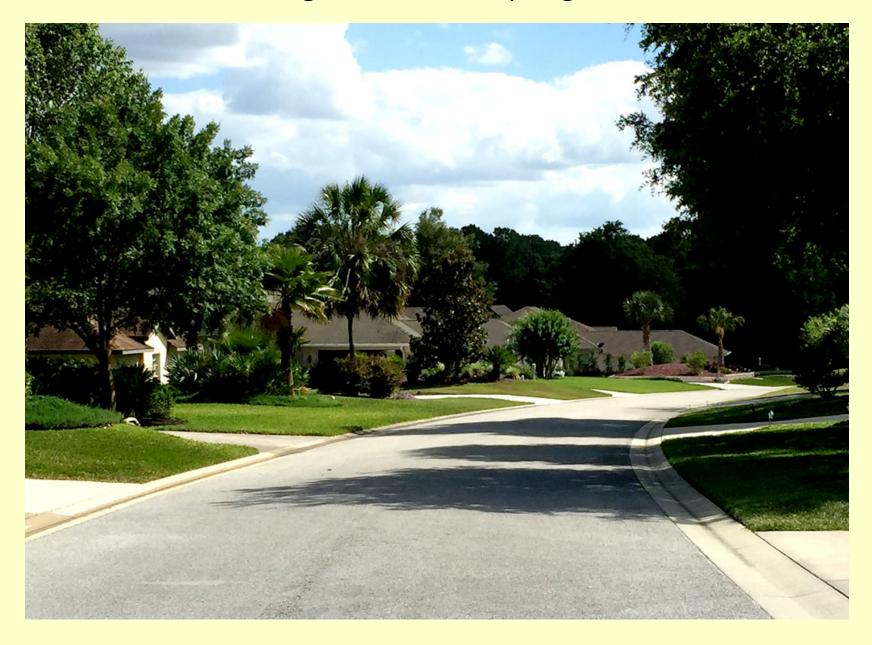
Dunnellon Historic District

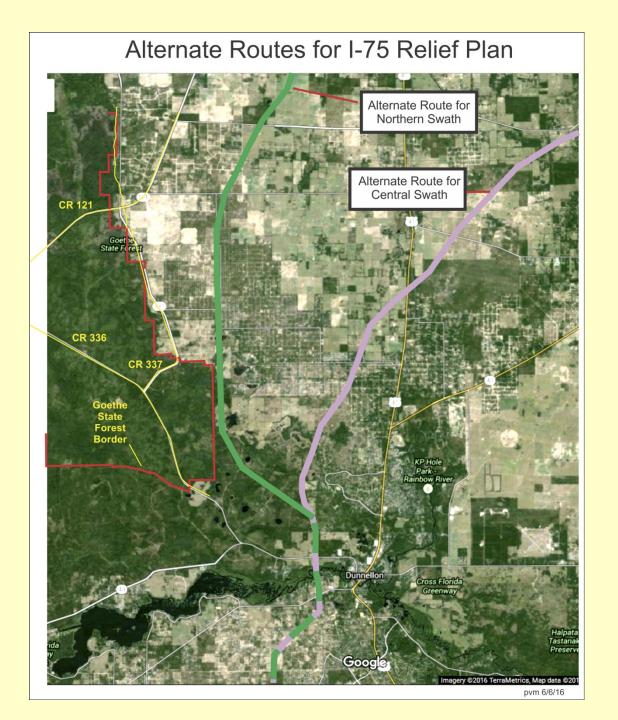


Dunnellon Commercial District



Village of Rainbow Springs





Comments at I-75 Relief Meeting on June 8, 2016

At a previous I-75 Task Force Meeting a map with two swaths or corridors was presented showing potential opportunities for extension of the Suncoast Parkway to I-75. The map showed Higher Sensitivity areas colored in red that the final highway alignment should avoid. The corridors overlapped until they passed north of the City of Dunnellon and then split, one connecting to I-75 between Ocala and Gainesville and the other connecting to I-75 north of Gainesville.

At this Task Force meeting a suggestion was made that the alignment of the route should "thread the needle" between the two sensitive areas on the map. The overlapping swaths in this area were shown with the color gray (a combination of the purple swath and the green swath) as shown on the first chart. Routing a road through a nondescript gray area would seem very tempting. (Chart 1) If one pushed deeper showing the details of parcels on the Marion County Property Appraiser's Map it becomes apparent that this is a highly developed area. The second chart shows a potential alignment through this area and the density of properties that would be impacted. The red line on this map shows the boundary of the high sensitivity areas from the series of I-75 Relief maps. (Chart 2)

To "thread the needle", any highway route would have to cross the Withlacoochee River close to the core of the City of Dunnellon and pass through the Historic District, the Commercial District and the central portion of the Village of Rainbow Springs. Such a route would split the City of Dunnellon and the Village of Rainbow Springs in half and destroy the cohesion of these communities. A few charts will add a little color to these communities. (Charts 3, 4, 5)

Fortunately there is a better choice for such a highway route. The last chart shows potential highway alignments for both the purple and green corridors. The overlapping alignments would cross the Withlacoochee River slightly to the west of the developed portion of the City of Dunnellon and travel north of the developed portion of the City and the Village of Rainbow Springs. Depending on which corridor the Task Force prefers, selection of either route could minimize the impact on homes, businesses and the viability of the community. The green northern route would just skirt the edge of the Goethe State Forest boundary. (Chart 6)

I would request that as you weigh the choices of alternate routes for a Suncoast Parkway connection to I-75, the "threading the needle" choice through the core of City of Dunnellon and Village of Rainbow Springs be eliminated from the selection matrix.

Paul Marraffino

19544 SW 82nd Place Road, Dunnellon FL 34432 352 465 4120 <u>paulm@westnet.com</u>