



# I-75 Relief Task Force Recommendations Report



OCTOBER 1, 2016





## Task Force Members

<b>Florida Department of Transportation</b>	Tom Byron, Assistant Secretary for Intermodal Systems Development (Chair)
<b>Florida Department of Economic Opportunity</b>	Taylor Teepell, Director, Division of Community Development
<b>Florida Department of Environmental Protection</b>	Gary Clark, Deputy Secretary for Land and Recreation
<b>North Central Florida Regional Planning Council</b>	Scott Koons, Executive Director
<b>Northeast Florida Regional Council</b>	Brian Teeple, Executive Director
<b>Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council</b>	Sean Sullivan, Executive Director
<b>East Central Florida Regional Planning Council</b>	Hugh Harling, Executive Director
<b>Alachua County</b>	The Honorable Charles Chestnut, County Commissioner
<b>Citrus County</b>	The Honorable Scott Adams, County Commissioner
<b>Hernando County</b>	The Honorable Nick Nicholson, County Commissioner
<b>Levy County</b>	The Honorable John Meeks, County Commissioner
<b>Marion County</b>	The Honorable Stan McClain, County Commissioner
<b>Sumter County</b>	The Honorable Garry Breeden, County Commissioner
<b>Environmental/Conservation</b>	Charles Lee, Director of Advocacy, Audubon Florida
<b>Environmental/Conservation</b>	Janet Bowman, Director of Legislative Policy & Strategies, The Nature Conservancy
<b>Growth Management/Land Use</b>	Thomas Hawkins, Policy Director, 1000 Friends of Florida
<b>Business/Economic Development</b>	Rebecca Bays, Owner, Insurance Resources & Risk Management
<b>Business/Economic Development</b>	Kevin T. Sheilley, President & CEO, Ocala/Marion County Chamber and Economic Partnership
<b>Education/Research</b>	Jane Adams, Vice President for University Relations, University of Florida
<b>Citizen</b>	Mike Sizemore
<b>Florida Transportation Plan Steering Committee</b>	The Honorable Matt Surrency, Mayor, City of Hawthorne



September 30, 2016

Dear Secretary Boxold:

I am pleased to submit the final report of the I-75 Relief Task Force.

As requested when you established the Task Force in 2015, the Task Force developed consensus recommendations on maximizing existing and developing new high-capacity transportation corridors to serve the area between Tampa Bay and Northeast Florida, with initial emphasis on the counties along and to the west of I-75. The Task Force adopted this report unanimously at its final meeting on August 12, 2016.

The Task Force's primary focus was on developing strategies to provide relief to I-75, which serves as a critical gateway to Florida for both people and freight. I-75 faces significant safety, efficiency, and reliability issues today—all of which are anticipated to become more significant as our population, visitors, economy, and trade flows continue to grow. The Task Force also discussed the long-term goal of providing better connectivity between Tampa Bay and Northeast Florida.

The Task Force developed a framework of potential short, medium, and long-term solutions for further study. The primary and immediate strategy is to evaluate the transformation of I-75 from Hernando to Columbia counties through approaches such as express lanes and truck-only lanes.

Also recommended for study are preserving the function and, where needed, improving the capacity of U.S. 301 from Hernando to Duval counties and U.S. 41 from Hernando to Columbia counties; expanding freight rail capacity and connectivity, with emphasis on the S-line from Polk to Duval counties; and providing more choices for long-distance travel by residents and visitors. After the potential enhancements to I-75 and other existing corridors are evaluated and need is determined, the Task Force recommends further study of potential new multimodal, multiuse corridors to address long-term mobility and connectivity needs.

I would like to recognize the members of the Task Force for their service; the federal, state, regional, and local agencies who provided technical support for the work of the Task Force; and the members of the public who shared their ideas and concerns with the Task Force throughout this process. I also wish to thank the staff who worked so diligently and professionally to support this effort.

The Task Force appreciates the opportunity to advise you on the future transportation corridor needs in this region of the state. It has been an honor to serve you, and the citizens of the state of Florida, in this role.

Respectfully submitted,

Thomas Byron  
Chair



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## Highlights

The I-75 Relief Task Force recommends the following options for further evaluation to **provide relief to Interstate 75** and **improve mobility** in the counties along and to the west of I-75 and to **enhance regional connectivity** between Tampa Bay and Northeast Florida:

- As the primary and immediate strategy, **transform I-75** from Hernando to Columbia counties by expanding its capacity and improving its safety, efficiency, and reliability through approaches such as express lanes and truck-only lanes.
- **Preserve the function** and, where needed, improve the capacity of **U.S. 301** from Hernando to Duval counties and **U.S. 41** from Hernando to Columbia counties, in coordination with and compatible with the context, visions, and plans of local communities.
- Expand freight rail capacity and connectivity, with emphasis on the **S-line** from Polk to Duval counties.
- Provide **more choices** for long-distance travel by residents and visitors, including enhancing intercity bus services and creating passenger rail services.
- Evaluate potential areas of opportunity **for new multimodal, multiuse corridors** to relieve I-75 and to connect Tampa Bay and Northeast Florida after evaluation of enhancements to I-75 and other existing corridors and determination of need.



## Introduction and Background

### Future Corridor Planning Process

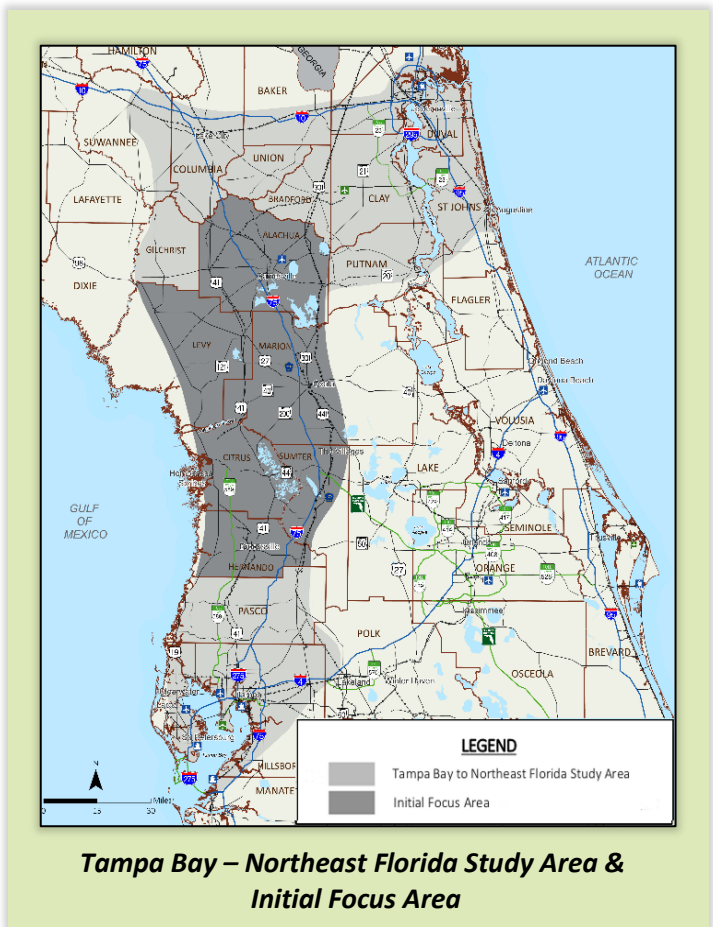
The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) initiated the Future Corridors planning process to envision and plan the future of Florida's major statewide transportation corridors over the next 50 years. This is a long-term, large-scale approach for planning major transportation corridors in the context of environmental stewardship, community development, and economic development decisions. This process focuses on high-speed, high-capacity transportation corridors, including both maximizing the use of existing corridors and developing new corridors. 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.

FDOT completed a [Concept Study](#) in 2013 to assess mobility needs in a 19-county area from Tampa Bay to Northeast Florida. The Concept Study identified steps to continue corridor planning activities in the study area with an early focus on increasing safety and congestion concerns along Interstate 75 (I-75) north of Wildwood. The Concept Study recommended FDOT conduct a more detailed Evaluation Study to assess the feasibility of developing a multimodal transportation corridor between the northern portion of the Tampa Bay region and I-75 between Wildwood and Lake City. The Concept Study also recommended this corridor be considered in the context of a long-term vision of improving connectivity between Tampa Bay and Northeast Florida.

## Task Force Purpose

Building on these recommendations, FDOT Secretary Jim Boxold established the I-75 Relief Task Force in October 2015 for 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 initial emphasis on the area along and to the west of I-75. The Task Force included 21 members representing state agencies, local governments, regional planning councils, environmental organizations, business and economic development interests, and the public (see page i). The Task Force charge included specific activities described in this report. Additional documentation on Task Force activities is provided on the [I-75 Relief website](#) (see page 17 for a list of resources available on the website). The Task Force was modeled after the [East Central Florida Corridor Task Force](#), which was created by Executive Order in 2014 to develop recommendations for future transportation corridors in Brevard, Orange, and Osceola counties.

The Task Force focused on mobility needs in six counties along and to the west of I-75: Alachua, Citrus, Hernando, Levy, Marion, and Sumter (the **Initial Focus Area**). Consistent with its charge, the Task Force considered these recommendations in the context of longer-term connectivity for the entire Tampa Bay to Northeast Florida study area.



## Summary of Task Force Activities

The Task Force met seven times between December 2015 and August 2016 in locations within the Initial Focus Area. Task Force meeting agendas included:

- Review of relevant federal, state, and local laws, policies, and plans;
- Review of previous and ongoing studies of I-75, U.S. 301, and other corridors in the study area;
- Panel discussions and presentations involving representatives of the six counties, the four metropolitan/transportation planning organizations (MPO/TPO) with jurisdiction in the Initial Focus Area, and the agricultural, trucking, rail, and seaport industries;
- Technical presentations by FDOT staff and consultants, including review of briefing books prepared by FDOT documenting trends and conditions in the Initial Focus Area;
- Consideration of public and agency input; and
- Task Force discussion and consensus-building on its recommendations.



## Public and Agency Involvement

*Task Force Charge: Solicit and consider input from government agencies, property owners, agricultural interests, business and economic development interests, environmental organizations, study area residents, and other interested individuals.*

The Task Force meetings were supplemented by multiple public involvement activities:

- One **Public Information Webinar** in late January 2016 shared information about the Task Force purpose, charge, and work plan and opportunities for public involvement. A total of 68 people participated in the webinar.
- **Community Open Houses** in Gainesville, Lecanto, and Ocala, in March 2016, provided an opportunity for the public to review background information and to provide input on the preliminary purpose and need and key environmental and community resources. A total of 102 people participated in the three Open Houses.
- A second round of **Community Open Houses**, in the same communities in June 2016, provided an update on the work of the Task Force and sought feedback on the preliminary options for enhanced and new transportation corridors. The June Open Houses involved a total of 410 participants.
- Three **Agency Coordination Meetings**, with outreach to more than 190 agency partners including local governments, MPOs/TPOs, regional planning councils (RPC), state agencies, environmental resource agencies, and water management districts, provided an opportunity for discussion of technical issues related to the Task Force's charge.
- An opportunity for **public comment** was provided at each Task Force and Agency Coordination Meeting. Public attendance at these meetings ranged from 34 to 153.
- Ongoing opportunity to comment was offered through the I-75 Relief **website** or by contacting the project manager.

At each meeting the Task Force was provided a summary of the comments and coordination from agencies and the public since the previous Task Force meeting. The comment and coordination summaries are posted on the [I-75 Relief website](#) under each corresponding meeting.

The Task Force also considered input from a range of local governments and local, regional, and state agencies, including letters and resolutions adopted by the Board of County Commissioners in Alachua, Citrus, Hernando, and Levy counties; the cities of Archer, Gainesville, Newberry and Williston; the Gainesville Metropolitan Transportation Planning Organization; Hernando/Citrus Metropolitan Planning Organization; and the North Central Florida Regional Planning Council. The letters and adopted resolutions are included in the Comments and Coordination Report under separate cover.



## Overview of the Initial Focus Area

*Task Force Charge: Identify opportunities and constraints related to environmental resources including natural lands and surface and groundwater resources, agriculture, land use and development, property rights, economic development, quality of life, and other statewide and regional issues that should be considered in planning for future transportation corridors in the study area.*

The I-75 Relief Task Force examined opportunities and constraints using a framework organized around four themes, known as the 4 Cs. Detailed briefing books on each topic prepared by FDOT are available on the [I-75 Relief website](#).

### Conservation

- **Opportunities:** Where planned in conjunction with environmental stewardship goals, enhanced or new transportation corridors provide opportunities to improve access to recreational lands; enhance water storage and stormwater treatment; and enhance or restore connectivity of natural systems. Retrofitting existing corridors such as I-75 through Payne’s Prairie or U.S. 301 through Orange Lake can create opportunities to improve wildlife corridor connectivity and reconnect water resources. Acquisition of right of way for new corridors can create opportunities for joint land development and land acquisition partnerships to protect parcels critical for improving connectivity of ecological corridors.
- **Constraints:** The study area connects many of Florida’s important and fragile natural systems, such as the Green Swamp, Payne’s Prairie, the Ocala and Osceola National Forests, and the Okefenokee Swamp. The Initial Focus Area includes two aquatic preserves (Rainbow Springs and Ocklawaha River/Silver Springs) and 170 mapped springs, five of which are first magnitude springs with high discharge rates. Large portions of the area are high recharge areas to the Floridan aquifer and/or have sensitive karst areas. Impacts to these resources from transportation corridors should be avoided or minimized, to the maximum extent possible.

### Countryside

- **Opportunities:** Agriculture, forestry, mining, and related industries account for nearly three out of every 10 jobs in the Initial Focus Area. In addition, the parks, recreational areas, small towns, historic resources, and the equestrian industry are attractions for visitors from other states and nations. Improved transportation connectivity can link these resources to markets in other states and nations, creating economic opportunities throughout the area.
- **Constraints:** Significant portions of Marion County’s land are designated as a Farmland Preservation Area, and all six counties have adopted policies to protect agricultural and other rural lands. Corridor development should preserve regionally significant agricultural lands, forests, and mines and avoid creating additional pressure for development of these lands.

### Centers and Communities

- **Opportunities:** Corridor development can support centers targeted for growth in regional and local plans. Sumter, Marion, and Hernando counties are all planning to develop intermodal logistics centers and distribution facilities close to I-75, U.S. 301, and the CSX S-line. Emerging technology-oriented industry clusters, particularly around Gainesville and Ocala, would benefit from enhanced access to businesses and talent in Central Florida, Tampa Bay, and Northeast Florida.





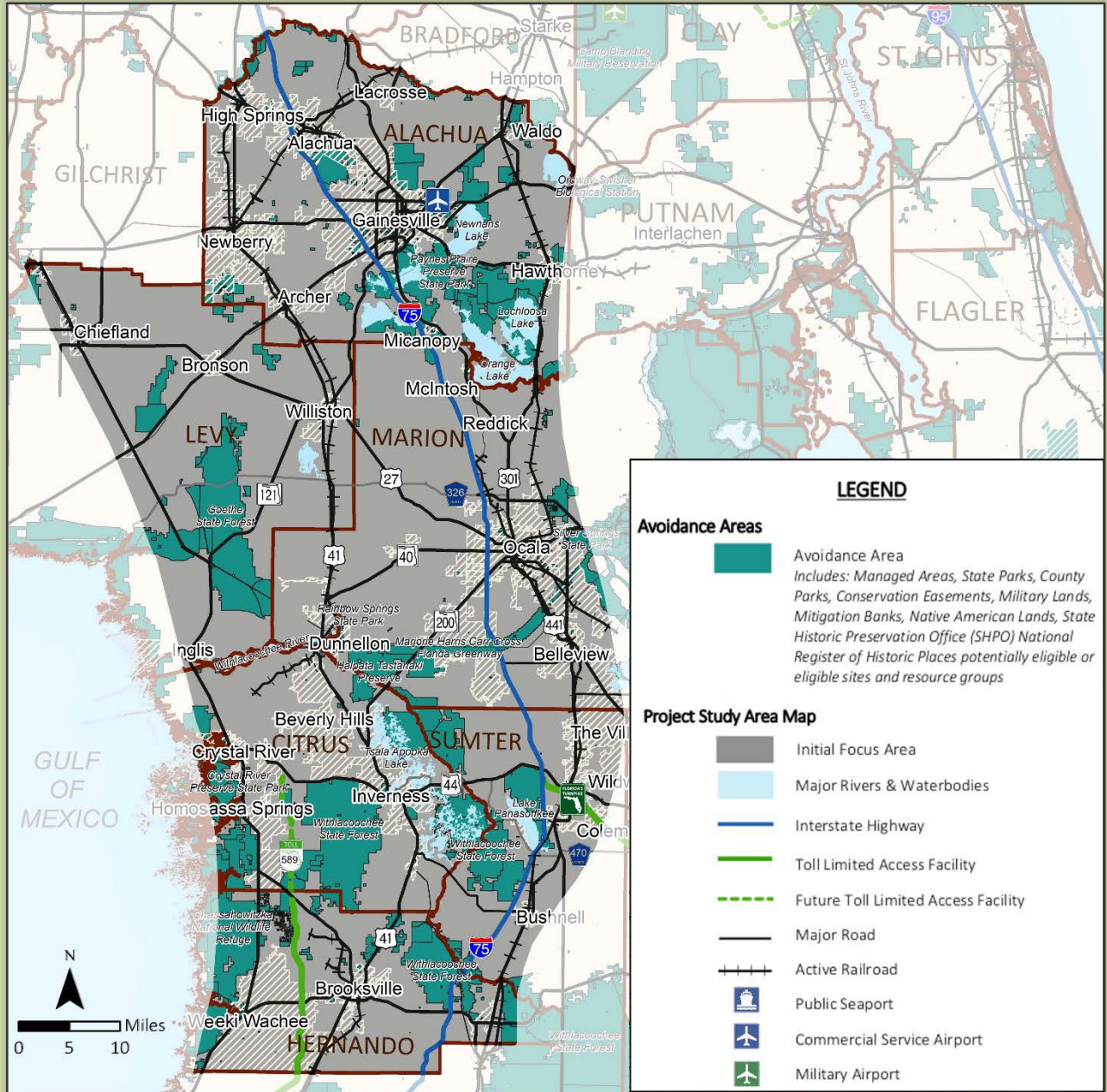
- **Constraints:** Five of the six counties have established urban or municipal growth or service boundaries as part of their comprehensive plans. About three out of every 10 residents live in a rural area, compared to one out of 10 statewide. Corridor development should preserve the quality and character of existing communities, including areas identified in local plans to maintain rural character.

## Corridors

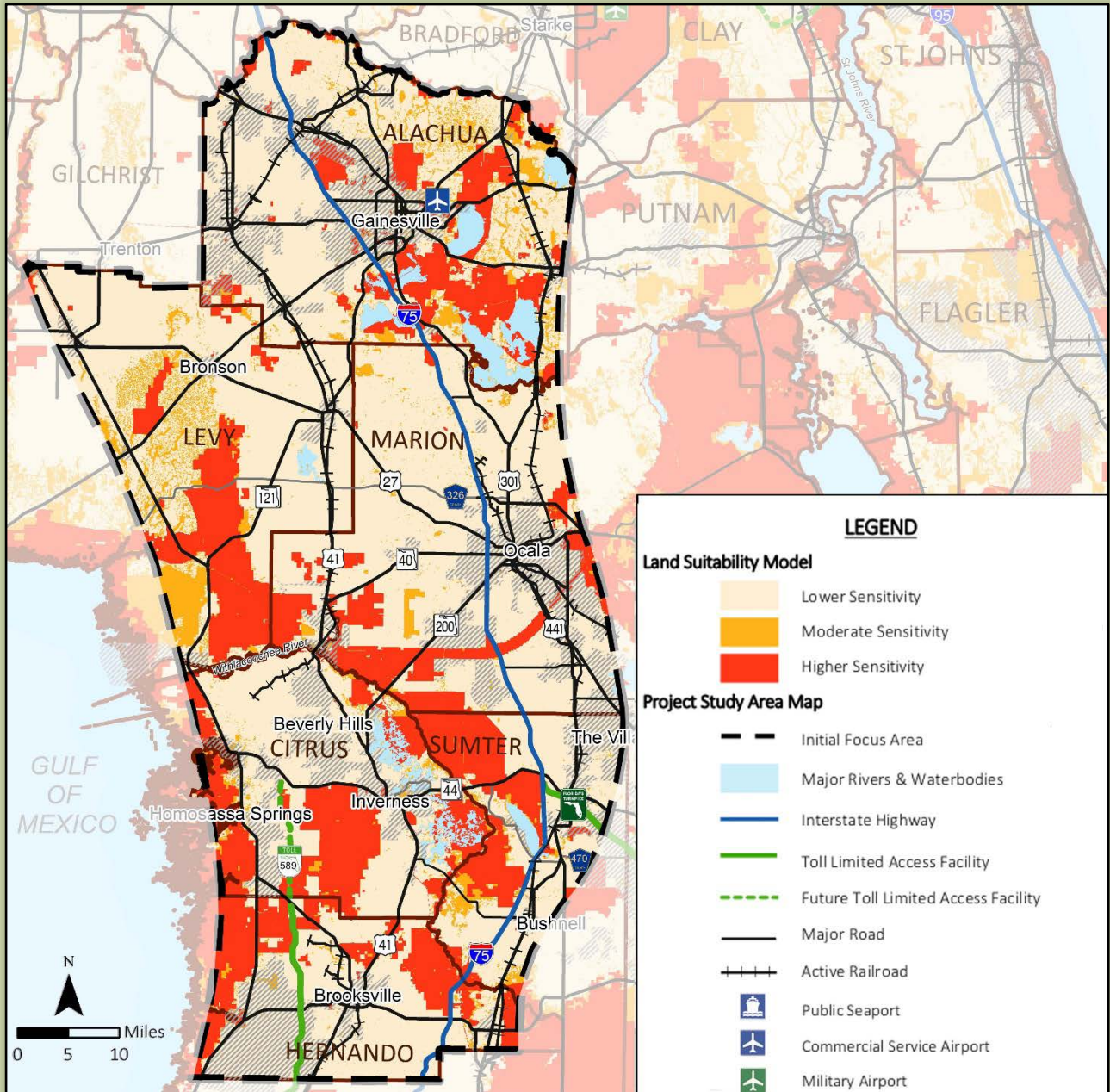
- **Opportunities:** The Initial Focus Area includes portions of three limited access highways – I-75, Florida’s Turnpike (S.R. 91), and the Suncoast Parkway (S.R. 589) – as well as other state highways such as U.S. 301, U.S. 27, U.S. 41, U.S. 19, S.R. 121, S.R. 50, S.R. 40, S.R. 200, and S.R. 26. The area is served by several intercity bus services and fixed-route transit systems in Alachua, Hernando, and Marion counties. Passenger rail service from Tampa through Orlando to Jacksonville skirts the area. CSX operates its major north-south freight corridor, the S-line, from Polk County to Duval County; CSX and the Florida Northern Railroad also operate shortlines and rail spurs in the six counties. The study area is bisected by the Marjorie Harris Carr Cross Florida Greenway and the Florida Coast to Coast Connector and is served by multiple regional trails.
- **Constraints:** I-75 is the only continuous, high-speed, limited access highway traversing the Initial Focus Area. The options for high-speed, high-capacity highway travel between Tampa Bay and Northeast Florida currently are I-75 and U.S. 301, I-4 and I-95, and I-75 and I-10. Long-term mobility and connectivity needs include growing demand for moving people and freight; increasing delay and decreasing reliability on I-75 and other existing highways; significant crash rates along portions of I-75, as well as other regional facilities; limited modal options; and limited connectivity to Rural Areas of Opportunity and other places targeted for economic development.

The Task Force, with input from state, regional, and local agencies and support from FDOT staff, identified a preliminary map of Avoidance Areas where direct impacts from enhanced or new corridors should be avoided to the maximum extent possible (map on page 6). These include existing national, state and county parks and forests, areas with conservation easements, and other managed lands; mitigation banks; military lands; Native American lands; and State Historic Preservation Officer National Register of Historic Places eligible or potentially eligible sites and resource groups.

In addition, FDOT worked with the Task Force and input from partner agencies to develop a Land Suitability Map (LSM) (map on page 7). This process considers concentrations of conservation, countryside, and center/community resources including multiple functions served by some resources. In addition to the Avoidance Areas, this map includes other resources such as springs, flood hazard zones, prime and unique farmland, and existing communities. The land areas were sorted into lower, moderate, and higher sensitivity areas. This approach helped identify potential constraints and areas of opportunity for further study of enhanced and new corridors. These analyses are documented on the [I-75 Relief website](#).



**Avoidance Areas Map**



**Land Suitability Map**



## Task Force Recommendations

### Guiding Principles

*Task Force Charge: Adapt previously developed guiding principles for planning the future of Florida's transportation corridors as needed to ensure that they are relevant to the study area.*

The Task Force recommends 20 **guiding principles** to balance considerations of conservation, countryside, and centers and communities when making decisions about the future of the study area's transportation corridors (see page 18). The principles were refined from the principles developed in 2014 by the East Central Florida Corridor Task Force.

### Preliminary Purpose and Need

*Task Force Charge: Recommend the **purpose and need** for high-capacity, high-speed transportation corridors in the study area with emphasis on providing relief to I-75, increasing safety, improving statewide and regional connectivity, and enhancing economic development opportunities.*

The Task Force recommends two primary purposes for planning high-capacity, high-speed transportation corridors in the study area:

#### **Provide relief to Interstate 75 and improve mobility in the Initial Focus Area**

- **Increase safety for I-75 users.** Most of the I-75 corridor experiences crash rates greater than the statewide average for similar facilities. This reflects the mix of customers using the facility including commuters, visitors, and a large percentage of trucks, as well as fog and other weather-related issues and other non-recurring events.
- **Improve reliability for I-75 users.** I-75 peak traffic typically occurs on weekends and during specific seasons rather than daily rush hours. On peak days, traffic can be double the annual average. Only 20 percent of existing delay is related to recurring daily congestion. The remaining 80 percent is non-recurring congestion, with time and day varying due to seasonal patterns, weekends, and special events; crashes and other incidents; weather; and construction. Between 2010 and 2015, the number of incidents closing at least one lane of I-75 increased steadily. On average, an incident closed at least one lane or ramp every 16 hours; all lanes in one direction were closed every nine days.
- **Reduce delay for trips using I-75.** Most of I-75 operates with acceptable levels of congestion on the typical weekday, but conditions often deteriorate on weekends and during peak seasons as traffic increases. If current trends continue, by 2040 most of I-75 will operate at or over capacity on typical weekdays, with heavy congestion in parts of Sumter and Marion counties. Weekend and peak season traffic will experience even greater congestion and delay.
- **Accommodate projected population and economic growth and demand for moving people and freight.** The population of the six counties is projected to grow from 1.1 million in 2014 to 1.8 million by 2060. The number of out-of-state visitors to Florida is projected to grow from 105 million in 2015 to 159 million by 2025, also increasing demand for travel. About half of visitors today enter Florida on a highway, with I-75 accounting for a large share of those trips. Freight tonnage between Florida and other states on the I-75 corridor is expected to increase 80 percent between 2011 and 2040, with I-75 in the Ocala area carrying the most tonnage of all highways in the state.
- **Enhance regional emergency evacuation and response.** I-75 is a critical route for evacuating and bringing response personnel and equipment to Tampa Bay, Central Florida, and South Florida during hurricanes and other disasters. Evacuation planning studies by the state's regional planning councils have identified the interchange between I-75 and Florida's Turnpike as a potentially significant bottleneck during evacuations.



## Enhance regional connectivity between Tampa Bay and Northeast Florida

- **Reduce travel time and improve reliability between Tampa Bay and Northeast Florida.** Florida's transportation corridors link the state's diverse regions together to form a globally competitive economy. A missing link today is an efficient, high-speed direct connection between Tampa and Jacksonville.
- **Support projected long-term growth in regional population, visitors, employment, trade, and freight.** Tampa Bay and Northeast Florida are projected to continue to have strong growth in population, visitors, and employment during the next 50 years. Freight activity will grow to support a larger population and economy, with potential for additional trade growth following the widening of the Panama and Suez Canals.
- **Provide transportation connectivity to support growth of regional industry clusters and other places targeted for economic development in regional and community visions and plans.** The study area's economy is shifting from natural resources, tourism, military, and basic manufacturing to also include technology, logistics, and services. These industry clusters rely on connections between businesses, suppliers, skilled labor, and universities.
- **Improve transportation connectivity between rural areas and regional employment centers as well as other regions and states.** Seven counties in the full study area are identified as Rural Areas of Opportunity due to historically high levels of poverty and unemployment. Tampa, Jacksonville, Gainesville, and Ocala play important roles as employment and service centers for these rural areas.
- **Enhance statewide emergency evacuation and response.** Because the regional transportation system has few alternative routes, a crash, incident, or even planned special event can result in severe delays. This issue increases in significance during emergency events.

## Framework for Enhanced and New High-Speed, High-Capacity Transportation Corridors

*Task Force Charge: Recommend a **range** of alternatives (**options**) for accomplishing the purpose and need, including maximizing the use of existing transportation facilities and developing new transportation facilities, with consideration of multiple modes (such as highways, passenger and freight rail, and trails) and multiple uses (such as utilities, pipelines, and other linear infrastructure). Recommend **corridors** to be incorporated into regional and local long-range plans and to be advanced to future phases of project development.*

The Task Force considered multiple options for accomplishing the purpose and need, drawing upon the results of prior and ongoing studies; available data and technical analyses provided by FDOT; input from local governments, MPOs/TPOs, regional planning councils, and other agencies; and public input. Based on this input, the Task Force recommends a framework of options for enhanced and new high-speed, high-capacity transportation corridors for **further study as part of FDOT's Future Corridor Planning Process** (summary on page 10). This framework is intended to identify potential regional and interregional transportation solutions. Future evaluation studies would refine and narrow these options and identify potential corridors ready to move forward into Project Development. The recommended options are organized into three categories. The highest priority options in the framework are the optimization and transformation of I-75 through a long-term buildout plan to meet future statewide and regional mobility needs.



## Framework for Enhanced and New High-Speed, High-Capacity Transportation Corridors

### Immediately optimize existing transportation corridors

- Improve the safety, efficiency, and reliability of I-75 and other transportation corridors through **operational solutions**
- Provide technical and financial support to assist local governments in improving **regional and local roads and transit systems** parallel or connecting to I-75 to provide alternatives for regional and local trips
- Coordinate with local governments to minimize **land use decisions** that adversely impact the reliability of I-75
- Improve the safety and efficiency of **freight operations**, such as expanding truck parking and staging areas or reducing the number of empty trucks and rail cars on the system
- Improve **intercity bus and rail connectivity and service**, such as working with local governments and the private sector to enhance connections with regional and local public transportation systems

### Evaluate potential enhancements to, or transformation of, existing transportation corridors

- Transform **I-75** from Hernando to Columbia counties by expanding its capacity and improving its safety, efficiency, and reliability through potential strategies such as express lanes and truck-only lanes
- Preserve the function and, where needed, improve the capacity of **U.S. 301** from Hernando to Duval counties, and the connectivity between U.S 301 and I-75, in coordination with and compatible with the context, visions, and plans of local communities
- Preserve the function, and, where needed, improve the capacity of **U.S. 41** from Hernando to Columbia counties, and the connectivity between U.S 41 and I-75, in coordination with and compatible with the context, visions, and plans of local communities
- Expand freight rail capacity and connectivity, with emphasis on the **S-line**
- Provide **more choices** for long-distance travel by residents and visitors, including enhancing intercity bus services and creating passenger rail services

### Evaluate potential areas of opportunity for new multimodal, multiuse corridors after evaluation of enhancements to I-75 and other I-75 connector roads and determination of need

- Evaluate long-term opportunities to create a **reliever corridor to the west of I-75**, considering use of existing regional roads and new limited access highway segments, as well as multiple modes and purposes
- Evaluate long-term opportunities for providing a high-speed, high-capacity **multimodal/multiuse corridor between Tampa Bay and Northeast Florida**, building on options identified in this framework

As the items from this framework of options move forward into future phases of planning or implementation, the following opportunities and constraints should be considered and incorporated into any future studies.

#### 1. Immediately optimize existing transportation corridors

This set of options focuses on optimizing existing north/south transportation facilities. These strategies currently are being implemented, or could be implemented in the near future, and typically do not require detailed planning or project development studies for implementation. The Task Force recommends FDOT continue to implement these strategies, recognizing their ability to provide immediate relief while medium- and long-term options are studied and implemented.



- **Improve the safety, efficiency, and reliability of I-75 and other transportation corridors through operational solutions.** Strategies for enhanced transportation system management and operations include service patrols, traveler information such as dynamic message signs and fog detection systems, and traffic signal optimization.
- **Provide technical and financial support to assist local governments in improving regional and local roads and transit systems parallel or connecting to I-75 to provide alternatives for regional and local trips.** While designed to accommodate long-distance travel, I-75 in areas such as Ocala and Gainesville also functions as a local road for commuters, residents, and delivery vehicles on short trips. Southwest (SW) 49<sup>th</sup> Avenue in Marion County and SW 62<sup>nd</sup> Boulevard in Alachua County are examples of projects in MPO/TPO plans that would provide an alternative to I-75 for local trips. The Task Force encourages FDOT to work with MPOs/TPOs and local governments to support innovative approaches for planning and funding these projects, such as the Transportation Regional Incentive Program.
- **Coordinate with local governments to minimize land use decisions that adversely impact the reliability of I-75.** Local government land use decisions should support the high-speed, high-capacity function of I-75 by limiting requests for additional interchanges or access points and encouraging compatible land uses along or near I-75.
- **Improve the safety and efficiency of freight operations.** Up to 35 percent of the trucks operating on I-75 are estimated to be empty – primarily trucks heading north after bringing consumer goods into Florida. There may be market-based opportunities to reduce the number of empty trucks through developing intermodal logistics centers including multiple shippers and carriers in a single location, using rail to reposition empty equipment, and using information technologies to facilitate load matching. There also may be opportunities to enhance existing facilities such as I-75 or U.S. 301 to better support trucking, such as expanding truck parking and staging areas.
- **Improve intercity bus and rail connectivity and service.** Intercity bus and rail connections from Tampa to Jacksonville today primarily occur through Orlando rather than the Initial Focus Area. Projected growth in population, jobs, and visitors is anticipated to increase demand for a range of transportation choices. FDOT should work with federal agencies, local governments, and the private sector to facilitate intercity bus and rail services, such as providing access for intercity bus operators at I-75 rest areas or Turnpike service plazas and supporting connectivity and interoperability between intercity bus, rail, and local public transportation systems to enable customers to complete end-to-end trips using a single ticket.

## 2. Evaluate potential enhancements to, or transformation of, existing transportation corridors

This set of options involves potential enhancements to existing transportation facilities, including potential transformation of these facilities to maximize their function, such as adding express lanes, truck-only lanes, or bus rapid transit systems to an existing highway, or adding passenger service to an existing freight rail line. These options would require detailed evaluation studies, followed by Project Development and Environment (PD&E) studies. These generally are medium-term strategies that could be implemented in the next 20 years. They focus on four existing north-south facilities, as well as expansion of intercity bus and rail services (see map on page 14).

- **Transform I-75 from Hernando to Columbia counties by expanding its capacity and improving its safety, efficiency, and reliability through potential strategies such as express lanes and truck-only lanes.** Enhancement and transformation of I-75 is viewed as the *primary strategy for I-75 relief*. Potential enhancements include: interchange improvements, auxiliary lanes to connect closely spaced interchanges, express lanes to separate through and local traffic and bypass congestion in general purpose lanes, and truck-only lanes in strategic locations. The Task Force recommends FDOT work with MPOs/TPOs and local governments to develop a long-term buildout concept for I-75 over the next 50 years and to prioritize these improvements for funding. This build out should assume projects currently underway or funded will move forward as planned, such as widening from Hernando County to Florida's Turnpike in Sumter County and interchange modifications on I-75 at Florida's Turnpike and S.R. 121 in Alachua County. FDOT's 20-year Strategic Intermodal System cost-feasible plan (2014 edition) includes no additional capacity improvements on I-75 from Sumter County north. Further study should identify the optimal combination of



improvements of short term improvements and ultimate build out; address potential impacts on the safety, efficiency, and reliability of I-75 and on regional mobility; consider right of way availability for additional roadway capacity and related needs such as stormwater management; and evaluate potential impacts on adjacent communities and environmental resources. The Task Force recommends FDOT immediately evaluate large scale capacity improvements to I-75, including express lanes and truck-only lanes, and identify specific projects for incorporation into the SIS Cost Feasible Plan and the Five Year Work Program.

- **Preserve the function, and, where needed, improve the capacity of U.S. 301 from Hernando to Duval counties, and the connectivity between U.S. 301 and I-75, in coordination with and compatible with the context, visions, and plans of local communities.** U.S. 301 provides an alternative to I-75 in Hernando, Sumter, and Marion counties, as well as a connection between the Initial Focus Area and Northeast Florida. A high-speed, direct connection between I-75 and U.S. 301 near Ocala could help improve overall connectivity between Tampa Bay and Northeast Florida. Additional potential improvements to U.S. 301 include grade separations at intersections, additional general purpose lanes, conversion of portions of U.S. 301 to limited access with frontage lanes to accommodate local traffic, and implementation of vehicle-to-infrastructure communications and additional connected vehicle technologies. Building on the *U.S. 301 Transportation Alternatives Study* completed by FDOT in 2015, a future evaluation study should evaluate the ability to transform U.S. 301 to accommodate both short- and long-distance trips, including additional traffic that may shift from I-75 due to non-recurring congestion. This study should consider the function U.S. 441 plays as part of the overall U.S. 301 corridor, as well as impacts on communities and environmental resources.
- **Preserve the function and, where needed, improve the capacity of U.S. 41 from Hernando to Columbia counties, and the connectivity between U.S. 41 and I-75, in coordination with and compatible with the context, visions, and plans of local communities.** U.S. 41, a two-lane north-south corridor to the west of I-75, provides an alternate connection between north Florida and Tampa Bay. The Task Force discussed whether it would be possible to add capacity to portions of U.S. 41, or improve connectivity from U.S. 41 to I-75, to support trucking or long-distance travel. However, public and agency input highlighted significant challenges to improving U.S. 41, including potential impacts on existing communities, farms and other rural lands, and environmental resources. The Task Force recommends FDOT work with local governments to preserve the function of U.S. 41 for intercounty travel, and determine if capacity or connectivity improvements are feasible and compatible with the context, vision, and plans of existing communities.
- **Expand freight rail capacity and connectivity, with emphasis on the S-line.** CSX Transportation invested in improvements during the past decade to add capacity to the S-line, and estimates the S-line has sufficient capacity to accommodate anticipated growth in freight demand for the foreseeable future. In view of planned seaport expansions and intermodal logistics centers, the Task Force encourages FDOT to work with CSX to identify future S-line capacity needs both within and outside of the Initial Focus Area, including additional sidings or spot improvements, improved intermodal terminal capacity, and enhanced connectivity to seaports and industrial sites. The Task Force also encourages FDOT to work with CSX and the Florida Northern Railroad to explore opportunities for the use of existing and abandoned rail right of way for freight service, while maintaining prior investments in converting rail to trails. FDOT also should work with local governments and railroads to minimize potential impacts of expanded freight rail operations on existing communities by improving rail/highway intersections and by ensuring compatible land uses around rail corridors and terminals.
- **Provide more choices for long-distance travel by residents and visitors, including enhancing intercity bus services and creating passenger rail services.** FDOT should work with the rail industry to evaluate opportunities for linking cities such as Gainesville and Ocala to the statewide and national passenger rail network. These options could build on existing corridors such as the S-line, reuse of shortline and abandoned rail right of way, and/or development of new rail corridors.





### 3. Evaluate potential areas of opportunity for new multimodal, multipurpose corridors after evaluation of enhancements to I-75 and other I-75 connector roads and determination of need

This set of options are long-term opportunities to develop new multimodal, multiuse corridors that could provide relief to I-75 and enhance regional connectivity. These options would require detailed evaluation studies, followed by Project Development and Environment studies. The Task Force recommends FDOT initiate evaluation of these options after the evaluations of I-75 transformation and other existing facilities advance.<sup>1</sup>

- **Evaluate long-term opportunities to create a reliever corridor to the west of I-75, considering use of existing regional roads and new limited access highway segments, as well as multiple modes and purposes.** A reliever corridor to the west of I-75 could bypass existing congested areas and/or provide a more direct connection from Tampa Bay to Ocala, Gainesville, and other parts of north Florida. The Task Force reviewed three potential “areas of opportunity” for future study of a reliever corridor, running from the northern terminus of the Suncoast Parkway 2 at S.R. 44 in Citrus County to I-75 in southern Marion, central Marion, and northern Alachua County.<sup>2</sup> The Task Force recommended the southern area of opportunity not be advanced for future study at this time due to the potential for impacts on conservation lands and existing communities and the location of the connection south of the most congested portions of I-75 in Marion County. Public and agency input on the central and northern areas raised concerns about potential impacts on existing communities, farms and other rural lands, and environmental resources such as conservation lands, springs, and aquifer recharge areas. The Task Force did not have a unified point of view regarding these areas of opportunity. Task Force discussions affirmed the need for more detailed analysis of purpose and need, traffic demand, and environmental and community issues through future comprehensive evaluation studies. Any study of a new reliever corridor will require careful consideration of the concerns and challenges raised during the Task Force process.
- **Evaluate long-term opportunities for providing a high-speed, high-capacity multimodal/multiuse corridor between Tampa Bay and Northeast Florida, building on options identified in this framework.** The Task Force also recommends FDOT consider long-term opportunities to the east of I-75 that could build on existing north/south corridors and any future I-75 western reliever corridors to ultimately provide a high-speed, high-capacity multimodal/multiuse corridor between Tampa Bay and Northeast Florida.

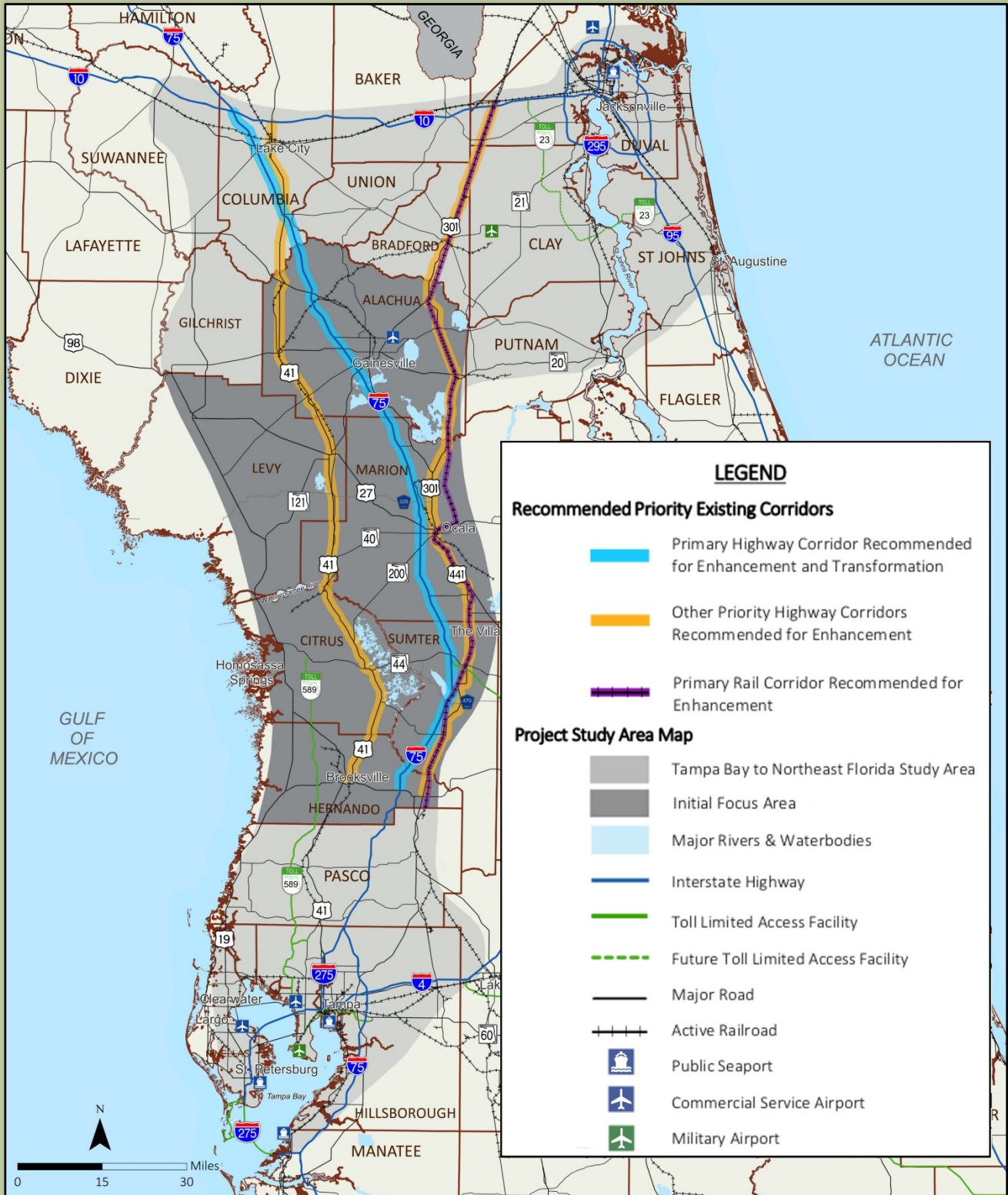
#### Additional supporting recommendations

The Task Force also recommends FDOT work with local governments and MPOs/TPOs to identify needs for improving the safety, efficiency, and reliability of existing east-west facilities that provide connectivity between the major north/south corridors. It is not anticipated that these facilities would be transformed into high-speed, high-capacity corridors. Examples include:

- S.R. 50 from U.S. 301 to the Suncoast Parkway (S.R. 589) in Hernando County;
- S.R. 44 from U.S. 301 in Sumter County to the Suncoast Parkway (S.R. 589) in Citrus County;
- S.R. 200 from U.S. 301 in Marion County to U.S. 41 in Citrus County;
- S.R. 40 from U.S. 301 to U.S. 41 in Marion County;
- S.R. 121 from I-75 in Alachua County to U.S. 41 in Levy County
- S.R. 24 from I-75 in Alachua County to U.S. 19 in Alachua County;
- S.R. 26 from I-75 in Alachua County to U.S. 19 in Levy County; and
- County roads providing short connections between I-75 and the Florida’s Turnpike (e.g., Sumter County Road 468/470) or I-75 and U.S. 301 (e.g., Marion County Road 326).

<sup>1</sup> Alachua County Commissioner Charles Chestnut read into the record a letter submitted to the Task Force chair by the Chair of the Board of County Commissioners opposing further evaluation of the areas of opportunity.

<sup>2</sup> See documentation on Task Force website – [www.i75relief.com](http://www.i75relief.com).



**Potential Areas of Opportunity for Enhancements to Existing Corridors**



## Evaluation Approach

*Task Force Charge: Recommend the **approach** that should be used to evaluate and narrow these alternatives.*

FDOT has developed a three-stage process for planning the future of statewide, multimodal transportation corridors:

1. Prepare a high-level **Concept Study** to identify anticipated statewide connectivity and mobility needs in the study area; identify key community and environmental issues to be considered in future stages; and identify a framework for moving forward in this study area (completed for the full study area in 2013).
2. Conduct one or more **Evaluation Studies** to identify and assess potential alternative modes and solutions to the anticipated mobility and connectivity needs; work with agencies and the public to build consensus around purpose and need statements and potential solutions; and develop an action plan for future work on viable corridors.
3. Use FDOT's established **Project Development** processes to conduct more detailed analyses of specific alternative corridor improvements compared to no-build alternatives, continue coordination with partners, and advance specific projects into implementation.

The Task Force process represents the transition from the Concept to the Evaluation stage in the Tampa Bay to Northeast Florida study area. Many of the options identified by the Task Force could move into evaluation studies in the next few years. The scope for the evaluation studies should include the following activities:

- Develop a **structured process** that begins with evaluation of potential enhancements to and transformation of I-75; incorporates evaluation of potential enhancements to U.S. 301, U.S. 41, and existing intercity bus and rail services; and evaluates potential new multimodal, multipurpose corridors based on assessment of the impacts of the existing corridor improvements and a determination of the remaining transportation needs. This structured process would allow for updating the purpose and need based on updated demographic, economic, and travel data, including impacts of widening I-75 from Hernando to Sumter county, extending the Suncoast Parkway to S.R. 44, and planned seaport expansion and intermodal logistics center development.
- Develop and implement a robust **public involvement process** to share information with and gather input from study area residents, visitors, and businesses, as well as local governments and other state and regional agencies.
- Evaluate the consistency of options for potential enhanced and new corridors with the preliminary **purpose and need**, considering forecasts of future demand for moving people and freight, as well as potential economic development impacts.
- Evaluate the consistency of options for potential enhanced and new corridors with the **Guiding Principles**, including consideration of potential strategies to avoid, minimize, or mitigate potential impacts on conservation, countryside, and center/community resources. This analysis should assess consistency with adopted local government comprehensive plans, long-range transportation plans, and strategic regional policy plans. It also should build upon the preliminary Avoidance Areas identified by the Task Force such as existing conservation lands, aquifer recharge areas, farmland preservation areas, and areas intended to maintain rural character. This analysis also should consider innovative approaches for regional mitigation, stormwater management, land use coordination, and context-sensitive solutions to help accomplish multiple transportation, environmental stewardship, and community development goals.
- Refine the general options for enhanced and new corridors identified into more specific corridors, including consideration of specific **modes and purposes** for these corridors, including "no build" options.
- Conduct initial analyses of the **engineering and financial feasibility** of the potential enhanced and new corridors, including the comparative costs of alternative options and initial identification of potential funding strategies.



- Identify potential **projects or segments** within these corridors, including potential sequencing of these projects over time, and advance projects as appropriate into the SIS Cost Feasible Plan and FDOT's Five Year Work Program.
- Recommend projects/segments to move forward into **Project Development and Environment** studies.

## Preliminary Implementation Plan

*Task Force Charge: Recommend a proposed implementation plan for moving forward with the recommended corridors, including potential actions by FDOT, other state agencies, local governments, and other partners.*

1. **Take immediate action to identify and implement strategies to optimize I-75** from Hernando to Columbia County, as well as to evaluate the potential to **transform I-75** such as the development of dedicated truck lanes and/or express lanes. Developing a long-term buildout plan for I-75 should be the highest priority for long-range transportation planning in the study area.
2. Coordinate with metropolitan planning organizations and local governments to identify and implement strategies for **preserving the function of U.S. 301** from U.S. 50 in Hernando County to I-10 in Duval County and **U.S. 41** from S.R. 50 in Hernando County to I-10 in Columbia County. Evaluate potential capacity and connectivity enhancements to these corridors that address anticipated mobility needs while also supporting regional and local visions and land use plans.
3. Coordinate with rail and intercity bus operators and local governments to evaluate potential enhancements to existing or creation of new **intercity bus, passenger rail, and freight rail services** to, from, and through the Initial Focus Area.
4. Based on further evaluation of the purpose and need and consideration of the assessment of the existing corridor options, conduct evaluation studies of potential areas of opportunity for **new multimodal, multipurpose corridors** that would provide additional relief to I-75, if needed, and improve long-term connectivity between Tampa Bay and Northeast Florida.
5. In parallel with the evaluation studies, provide technical support to local governments for development of strategies to protect **sensitive rural land uses and critical environmental resources** in areas potentially impacted by transformation of existing or development of new transportation corridors.
6. In parallel with the evaluation studies, work with federal, state, and local resource agencies and nongovernmental organizations to explore innovative, **regional approaches for mitigation** of potential corridor improvements that could help enhance or restore natural systems connectivity, improve water resources management, and accomplish other environmental stewardship goals.
7. Coordinate with local governments, MPOs/TPOs, regional planning councils, and other agencies to incorporate the recommendations of the evaluation studies, as well as the Guiding Principles, into **local and regional plans**.
8. Continue to support a robust **public involvement and interagency coordination** process to ensure the evaluation studies and other corridor development activities are conducted in an open, transparent manner and the study recommendations reflect the values and needs of study area residents, visitors, and businesses.
9. Continue to **evaluate the effectiveness** of implemented corridor improvements in addressing the recommended purpose and need, and refine future corridor development plans as needed to reflect changing conditions.



## Additional Resources

These background documents summarize additional detailed information reviewed and considered during the Task Force process. The technical documents are intended to serve as support documentation to the Task Force Report. The documents are available on the [I-75 Relief website](#).

- **Task Force Purpose and Charge** – Guidance document to the Task Force prepared by the Secretary.
- **Comments and Coordination Report** – 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.
- **4Cs Briefing Books** – Series of four individual Briefing Books providing an overview of the 4C themes of Conservation, Countryside, Centers and Communities, and Corridors. The Briefing Books were developed to identify opportunities and constraints to support the Task Force deliberations as well as to support the Task Force’s efforts to consider input on existing and planned resources in the Initial Focus Area.
- **Identification of Avoidance Areas and Land Suitability Mapping and Areas of Opportunity Technical Memorandum** – Technical memorandum summarizing the preliminary environmental analyses conducted to identify Avoidance Areas, complete initial Land Suitability Mapping, and identify potential areas of opportunity for Task Force review. This memorandum documents the methodology and analyses presented at Task Force meetings for further review in any future evaluation studies.



## Recommended Guiding Principles for Planning Future Transportation Corridors

### **Conservation**

- Identify regionally significant land and water resources prior to determining locations for future corridor investments; implement coordinated land acquisition and/or protection measures prior to or in parallel with implementation of future corridor investments.
- Avoid, to the extent feasible, existing lands currently managed for conservation purposes; where avoidance is not feasible, minimize and mitigate impacts on these lands.
- Maintain and, where possible, restore and enhance the integrity and connectivity of regionally significant environmental lands.

### **Countryside**

- Maintain and improve transportation connectivity to, from, and between working farms, forests, mines, eco-tourism attractions, and other economically valuable rural lands.
- Plan and develop transportation corridors in a manner that protects regionally significant agricultural lands and other rural lands with economic or environmental significance.
- Plan and develop transportation corridors in a manner that is compatible with areas identified in local plans to maintain their rural character as a choice for residents.

### **Centers and Communities**

- Improve connectivity for transportation and other infrastructure to established and emerging regional population and employment centers.
- Locate major transportation corridor improvements and, if needed, new facilities in areas targeted for growth in regional and local plans. When planning enhanced or new transportation corridors that are intended to support new population and employment centers, ensure that these new centers support regional and community visions including: compact development in both urban centers and adjacent areas; mixed-use development with integration of residential and commercial uses; open space, parks, greenways, agricultural areas, and buffers between centers; and “green” community designs that support a reduced urban and environmental footprint, such as reduced water consumption.
- Plan and develop transportation corridors in a manner that improves connectivity to and enhances the quality of existing communities and previously approved developments, while avoiding or minimizing adverse impacts on these communities and developments. When a corridor and a center or community intersect, plan and design the corridor so that its purpose and scale is compatible with that of the center or community.

### **Corridors**

- Make optimal use of existing transportation facilities before adding new capacity to existing facilities or developing new facilities.
- Where possible, give preference to enhancing existing corridors, recognizing that new corridors may be needed to meet current or future mobility and connectivity needs.
- Direct strategic investments to transportation corridors that will provide better access to regional employment centers and other economic assets or provide better connectivity to global markets.
- Make early decisions about the location of enhanced or new corridors to ensure effective coordination with conservation and land use decisions and to enable timely preservation, management, or acquisition of property necessary to accommodate existing and planned transportation facilities
- Plan enhanced or new transportation corridors, where appropriate, to accommodate multiple modes of transportation, including opportunities for active transportation, and to accommodate multiple uses, including utility infrastructure.
- Plan highway elements of future transportation corridors to be limited access, with interchange locations identified to provide access to economic development activities dependent on long-distance transportation, and to support growth in areas targeted for economic development. Plan rail and transit elements of future transportation corridors to support compact development locations and to encourage public transportation ridership.
- Protect the integrity of statewide and interregional corridors by developing and maintaining strong regional and local transportation networks to accommodate demand for regional and local trips.
- Plan, design, construct, and operate transportation corridors to reflect the context of the communities and environment through which the corridors pass to the fullest extent possible.
- Use state-of-the-art and energy-efficient infrastructure, vehicles, materials, technologies, and methodologies, where economically feasible, to develop and operate transportation corridors.
- Plan, design, construct, and operate transportation corridors to be safe and secure for all users.
- Plan, design, construct, and operate transportation corridors to support emergency evacuation, emergency response, and post-disaster recovery activities; ensure that corridor improvements intended to enhance emergency evacuation and response are not used to promote additional development in hazardous areas or areas not planned for growth.



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