

SOUTHWEST-CENTRAL FLORIDA CONNECTOR TASK FORCE FINAL REPORT

November 15, 2020

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Section 338.2278, F.S. created the Multi-use Corridors of Regional Economic Significance (M-CORES) Program. The purpose of the program is to revitalize rural communities, encourage job creation, and provide regional connectivity while leveraging technology, enhancing the quality of life and public safety, and protecting the environment and natural resources.

The statute directs the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) to advance the construction of regional corridors intended to accommodate multiple modes of transportation and multiple types of infrastructure in three defined study areas:

- Suncoast Corridor, extending from Citrus County to Jefferson County;
- Northern Turnpike Corridor, extending from the northern terminus of the Florida Turnpike northwest to the Suncoast Parkway; and
- Southwest-Central Florida Corridor, extending from Collier County to Polk County.

The statute specifies these corridors as part of a broader program to address the complete statutory purpose of M-CORES, including revitalizing rural communities and enhancing economic development. The statute also provides FDOT with direction and tools to help advance other regional goals related to the statutory purpose, including enhancing quality of life and protecting the environment. The breadth of the program's purpose, the scale of the identified corridors, and the additional tools provided to FDOT all point to the need for a thoughtful, collaborative approach to implementing the M-CORES program, analyzing corridor needs and alternatives, and building consensus around future actions among FDOT and a wide range of partners.

The statute directed FDOT to convene a Task Force for each corridor as an inclusive, consensus-building mechanism comprised of representatives from state agencies, regional planning councils, metropolitan planning organizations, water management districts, local governments, environmental groups, and the community. Members of each Task Force were appointed by the FDOT Secretary.

The statute charged each Task Force with:

- coordinating with FDOT on pertinent aspects of corridor analysis, including accommodation or colocation of multiple types of infrastructure;
- evaluating the need for, and the economic, environmental, hurricane evacuation, and land use impacts of, the specific corridor;
- considering and recommending innovative concepts to combine right of way acquisition with the acquisition of lands or easements to facilitate environmental mitigation or ecosystem, wildlife habitat, or water quality protection or restoration;
- addressing specific issues related to specific environmental resources and land uses identified in each study area;
- holding public meetings in each local government jurisdiction in which a project in the identified corridor is being considered; and

- 1 • issuing its evaluations in a final report to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the
2 Speaker of the House of Representatives.

3 This report summarizes the activities and recommendations of the Southwest Central Florida Corridor
4 Task Force.

5 Due to the early stage of planning for this corridor and the limited data and analysis on potential need
6 and impacts available at this time, the Task Force was not able to fully address its charge of
7 evaluating the need for and impacts of the Southwest Central Florida Corridor. The Task Force
8 identified a series of potential high-level needs for future evaluation by FDOT and developed
9 recommendations for how FDOT should assess the need for a corridor of the scale specified in
10 statute. The Task Force did not reach a conclusion based on the information available at this time
11 that there is a specific need for a completely new greenfield corridor on land through the study area to
12 achieve the statutory purpose. The Task Force expressed a preference for improvement or expansion
13 of major existing highway corridors. The Task Force acknowledged the process for FDOT to consider
14 a “no build” alternative in future project development activities until a final recommendation about
15 each specific project is made. The Task Force also recommended guiding principles, instructions,
16 and an action plan as a set of directions to FDOT and other partners for future planning, project
17 development, and implementation activities related to the M-CORES Program.

18 In completing this report, the Task Force’s intent is to provide consensus recommendations for how
19 FDOT can work with local governments and other agencies and partners to carry out the M-CORES
20 Program as specified in s. 338.2278, F.S. Consensus on the report does not constitute agreement by
21 all Task Force members that at this phase in program delivery, project-specific needs or
22 environmental and economic feasibility are fully developed. Rather, the report is intended to provide
23 consensus recommendations for how needs should be evaluated and how corridor development and
24 related activities should move forward to implement the statute and support the environment, quality
25 of life, and prosperity of the study area and the state.

26 The statute charges FDOT, to the maximum extent feasible, to adhere to the recommendations of
27 each Task Force in the design of the multiple modes of transportation and multiple types of
28 infrastructure associated with the corridor. The Task Force recommended, and FDOT committed to,
29 an action plan for future activities in this study area consistent with the guiding principles and
30 instructions.

31

TASK FORCE OVERVIEW

Membership

In August 2019, FDOT convened the Southwest-Central Florida Corridor Task Force with 47 members representing state agencies, water management districts, local governments, metropolitan planning organizations, regional planning councils, environmental groups, and community organizations (see **Appendix A** for Membership List).

Meetings

The Task Force met 13 times between August 2019 and October 2020 through nine Task Force meetings and four webinars or virtual meetings. Over the course of 15 months, the Task Force reviewed data, trends, and issues; discussed key considerations for planning transportation corridors, including specific issues as identified in Florida Statute (see box); and received and reviewed public input. Subject matter experts joined the Task Force meetings to provide information related to specific aspects of the Task Force’s charge, including community planning, economic and workforce development, agriculture, environmental resources, broadband and utilities, emerging technology, and emergency management. The Task Force developed specific recommendations related to identifying and evaluating high-level needs associated to the statutory purpose, as well as guiding principles and instructions for advancing corridor development and related activities to help accomplish these needs, as documented in subsequent sections of this report. The Task Force also recommended an action plan for moving forward.

In March 2020, some unique challenges arose resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The Task Force adapted meeting formats to comply with the Governor’s Executive Order Number 20-122. The subsequent Task Force meetings were designed with a combination of virtual and in-person methods for both Task Force members and the public to participate (see **Appendix B** for Work Plan and **Appendix C** for Meeting Locations).

Issues for Consideration by All M-CORES Task Forces

s. 338.2278 (1), Florida Statute

- Hurricane evacuation.
- Congestion mitigation.
- Trade and logistics.
- Broadband, water, and sewer connectivity.
- Energy distribution.
- Autonomous, connected, shared, and electric vehicle technology.
- Other transportation modes, such as shared-use nonmotorized trails, freight and passenger rail, and public transit.
- Mobility as a service.
- Availability of a trained workforce skilled in traditional and emerging technologies.
- Protection or enhancement of wildlife corridors or environmentally sensitive areas.
- Protection or enhancement of primary springs protection zones and farmland preservation areas designated within local comprehensive plans adopted under Chapter 163.

Issues for Consideration by Southwest-Central Florida Corridor Task Force

s. 338.2278 (3) (c) 7, Florida Statute

- Address the impacts of the construction of a project within the corridor on panther and other critical wildlife habitat and evaluate in its final report the need for acquisition of lands for state conservation or as mitigation for project construction.
- Evaluate wildlife crossing design features to protect panther and other critical wildlife habitat corridor connections.

1 A facilitator and staff supported the Task Force meetings to assist with discussion, provide technical
2 support, and document the Task Force’s deliberations and recommendations. Additional
3 documentation of the Task Force activities including meeting agendas, materials, and summaries can
4 be found on the project website (www.FloridaMCORES.com).

5 **Data and Mapping Tools**

6 FDOT staff developed and maintained a Geographic Information System (GIS) tool to provide the
7 Task Force with access to a wide variety of data on existing demographic, economic, land use,
8 environmental, infrastructure, and other resources in the study area. This tool specifically was used to
9 help identify areas where direct impacts from corridors should be avoided, as well as areas where a
10 connection to a corridor may be appropriate for future evaluation. FDOT staff conducted one-on-one
11 technical briefings to provide Task Force members with a tutorial of the GIS tool and to discuss data-
12 related questions. The Task Force used the GIS tool to help understand the linkage between draft
13 guiding principles and potential corridor location decisions. Task Force members suggested other
14 data sources related to topics such as conservation lands, water resources, and wildlife habitat that
15 were included in the tool as GIS layers for Task Force discussion to consider for inclusion in the
16 guiding principles and instructions for project development and beyond.

17 The GIS tool served as a living tool and was updated based on feedback and suggestions from the
18 Task Force members. The GIS tool remains publicly accessible at all times on the project website
19 (www.FloridaMCORES.com) including through a mobile-friendly format.

20 **Public Engagement**

21 Public engagement was a critical component of the Task Force process. The public engagement
22 process was designed to allow residents and visitors to comment on all Task Force deliberations,
23 reports, and products 24/7 through the 15-month process using a variety of mediums from in-person
24 to online.

25 Opportunities for public engagement were included at each Task Force meeting through a dedicated
26 public comment period and comment stations were set up to receive written comments. Meetings
27 were broadcast live and recordings were posted on the project website for members of the public who
28 could not attend in person. The public also could attend the webinars and hybrid meetings virtually
29 through the GoToWebinar platform. Overall, a total of # people attended the in-person meetings and
30 # people attended the webinars and meetings virtually. A total of # people offered public comment at
31 Task Force meetings.

32 To further public engagement, Community Open Houses were held in Wauchula, Naples (twice),
33 Bartow, Arcadia, LaBelle, Winter Haven, and Punta Gorda to share information about the process
34 and receive public input. *[Includes future Community Open Houses tentatively scheduled in
35 September and October]* At the Community Open Houses, members of the public were able to
36 directly ask questions of FDOT staff, view informational material, and experience hands-on use of the
37 GIS tool. A total of # people participated in the eight open houses *[attendance numbers will be
38 updated after the October Community Open House]*.

39 Additionally, FDOT received communication through the project website, FDOT Listens email
40 address, phone, social media, letters, newsletters, and more. In total, FDOT received # unique and #
41 form letter comments through these communication methods.

1 These comments varied from significant concerns over the development of these corridors due to
2 their potential environmental, community, and financial impacts to strong support for the corridors due
3 to their potential transportation, economic development, and quality of life benefits. Comments
4 related to corridor considerations included: improving existing highways and interstates as a priority,
5 co-locating with existing highways and adding capacity when needed, thoughtfully designing
6 connections, end-points and interchanges, including the no-build option, providing congestion relief
7 during hurricane evacuations, supporting sheltering during hurricanes, improving evacuation routes in
8 the center of the state, assisting communities in securing high-speed internet, supporting
9 opportunities for water and sewer connections and considerations for alternative modes of
10 transportation and impacts of connected and autonomous vehicles. In addition, there was significant
11 concern about the timing of this process given the COVID-19 pandemic. The Task Force was
12 provided with periodic summaries of the comments received as well as copies of all comments, so
13 this public input could be considered in the development and refinement of the Task Force's
14 recommendations. The majority of the comments submitted through the various forms expressed
15 opposition or concern about the corridor. Specific comments received on the Southwest-Central
16 Florida corridor received include:

- 17 • Support economic development
- 18 • Protect the Florida panther habitat
- 19 • Avoid impacts to the Everglades
- 20 • Protect Lake Wales Ridge species, which are extremely rare
- 21 • Co-locate along U.S. 27
- 22 • Fund the Central Polk Parkway

23 The draft Task Force report was posted for a 15-day public comment period from September 29-
24 October 14, 2020. A total of # members of the public submitted a total of # comments during that
25 period. A copy of these comments and a summary of the key themes was provided to the Task Force
26 at its final meeting. Common themes of this round of comments included (to be provided at meeting
27 #9).

28 In addition to engaging the public, FDOT conducted active engagement with partners. FDOT
29 provided # presentations to interested agencies and organizations at their workshops, meetings, and
30 conferences. FDOT staff also attended metropolitan planning organization, regional planning council,
31 and local government board meetings to share updates on the Task Force's process and answer any
32 questions. The following local government organizations provided resolutions in support of the
33 corridor:

- 34 • Hardee County, Board of County Commissioners
- 35 • Highlands County, Board of County Commissioners
- 36 • Polk County, Board of County Commissioners
- 37 • City of Bowling Green, City Commission
- 38 • City of Wauchula, City Commission
- 39 • Town of Lake Placid, Town Council
- 40 • Town of Zolfo Springs, Town Council
- 41 • Sebring Airport Authority

42 The Task Force did not receive any local government resolutions in opposition to the corridor.

STUDY AREA OVERVIEW

The Southwest-Central Florida Corridor study area extends from Collier County to Polk County. This nine-county area spans more than 10,500 square miles shown on **Figure 1**.

ENVIRONMENT

The study area is well known for its scenic beauty and natural environment that includes connected rural landscapes and wildlife corridors, water, and habitat of statewide, and in some cases, international significance:

- The eastern portion of the region includes the Kissimmee River and Lake Okeechobee, which flow into the Everglades, a system of tropical wetlands found nowhere else on earth.
- The Green Swamp, at the northern edge of the region, is the heart of the Floridan aquifer and the headwaters of four rivers.
- The Lake Wales Ridge, near the center of the region, supports biodiversity of international significance with distinctive plant and wildlife species endemic to Florida, including the highest concentration of listed plant species in the study area.
- The southwestern coastal portion of the region is home to world renowned beaches, barrier islands, and one of the world's largest marine estuaries, Charlotte Harbor Estuary. It also is home to Babcock Ranch Preserve, nearly 68,000 acres that includes diverse natural habitats, water resources and scenic landscapes.
- The study area south of the Caloosahatchee River is home to the Big Cypress National Preserve and key habitat for the Florida panther, a federally and state listed endangered species. The Florida panther habitat is almost entirely within the study area and is dependent on large blocks of functionally connected habitat. The southern portion of the study area is home to several important wildlife management areas and wildlife corridors connecting the Big Cypress National Preserve to the Caloosahatchee and Kissimmee Rivers.

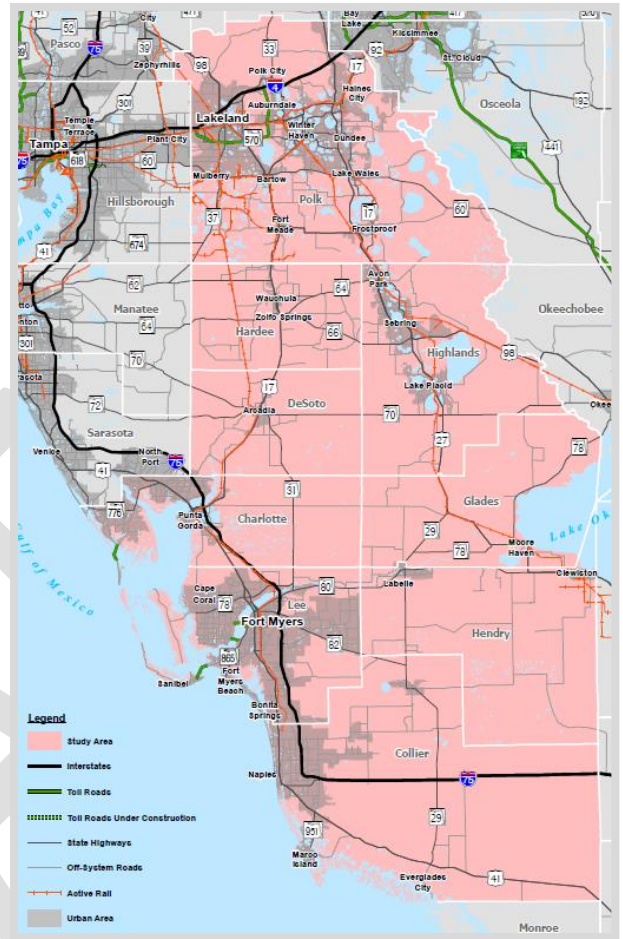


Figure 1. Southwest-Central Florida Corridor Study Area

About 32% of the study area's acreage is held in conservation.¹ Three National Wildlife Refuge complexes are in the study area: the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge in the southwest and the Lake Wales Ridge National Wildlife Refuge and the Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge in the central portion. The region is currently home to 12 threatened and endangered animal

¹ Florida Natural Areas Inventory, 2019

1 species, the most notable of which is the Florida panther. Much of the area has been identified as a
 2 high-priority critical linkage as part of the Florida Ecological Greenways Network, illustrating both the
 3 significance of the natural environment to achieve wildlife and water conservation goals and the
 4 challenges involved in improving transportation and other connectivity in this region. Water resources
 5 include various rivers, lakes, wetlands, aquatic preserves, and designated Outstanding Florida
 6 Waters, such as Highlands Hammock State Park, Myakka River, and Cape Romano-Ten Thousand
 7 Islands Aquatic Preserve.

8 The study area’s natural environment is a key foundation of its quality of life and its economy,
 9 attracting millions of visitors each year to enjoy beaches, rivers, lakes, and opportunities for hunting,
 10 fishing, and eco-tourism.

11 **COMMUNITY**

12 The study area is home to nearly 2.3
 13 million residents in 37 municipalities and
 14 many unincorporated areas. About 90% of
 15 the population is along the coastline and
 16 near the Interstate 4 (I-4) corridor. These
 17 urbanized portions of the region have
 18 exceeded statewide population growth
 19 during the past decade and are expected
 20 to be the areas of highest growth over the
 21 next 25 years. Previous and projected
 22 population growth in the nine-county area
 23 is shown in **Table 1**.

County	Population (2019)	Growth (2010 - 2019)	Projected Growth (2019 – 2045)
Lee	770,577	19.5%	37.1%
Polk	724,777	16.8%	27.6%
Collier	384,902	16.2%	34.4%
Charlotte	188,910	15.4%	23.1%
Highlands	106,221	7.1%	10.7%
Hendry	42,022	7.2%	10.4%
DeSoto	38,001	8.1%	5.0%
Hardee	26,937	-2.9%	3.6%
Glades	13,811	6.8%	2.8%

Table 1. Projected Population Growth (Medium Series)

Sources: Census Bureau, 2019; Bureau of Economic and Business Research (BEBR), University of Florida, 2019

24 The inland counties generally have lagged
 25 behind statewide growth rates with Hardee
 26 County experiencing a population decline
 27 over the past ten years.² All six inland counties
 28 have poverty rates above the statewide
 29 average, with the rate exceeding one out of
 30 every five residents in DeSoto, Hendry, and Hardee Counties.³ Median household income is below
 31 the statewide level in every county except Lee and Collier.⁴

32 The study area includes some of the most historic parts of Florida, including cities like Arcadia and
 33 Bartow that were established in the late 1800s. The study area also includes newer communities
 34 such as the town of Ave Maria established in 2005, and, most recently, the planned community of
 35 Babcock Ranch, which welcomed its first residents in January 2018.

² U.S. Census Bureau, 2019

³ U.S. Census Bureau, *Small Area Income & Poverty Estimates, Model-Based Estimates for States, Counties, & School Districts, 2017*, released November 30, 2018

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, *American Community Survey, 2013-2017*

1 Agricultural lands account for about 43% of the study area land uses. Institutional and public lands,
2 including publicly held conservation and recreation lands as well as the large military presence at
3 Avon Park in Polk and Highlands Counties, comprise about 29% of the land acreage.^{5 6 7}
4 Local government comprehensive plans, as well as regional initiatives such as the Heartland 2060
5 visioning process, establish the framework for future land use, conservation, and development of the
6 region. Each county identifies conservation areas; six counties are planning for new activity centers to
7 accommodate population and economic growth; and all counties have policies discouraging sprawl.

8 **ECONOMY**

9 The study area's job count stood at just under 600,000 in 2019.⁸ Like other parts of Florida, the
10 region's economy historically has emphasized the "three-legged stool" of agriculture and related
11 natural resources such as forestry, fishing, and mining; tourism; and industries related to population
12 growth such as construction, retail trade, and healthcare. These industries are anticipated to remain
13 the foundation for the economy in the future. The large base of agricultural activity is diversifying crop
14 bases, shifting toward more inland locations, and incorporating new technologies and production
15 practices. The tourism sector also is diversifying, with more growth anticipated in eco-tourism, agri-
16 tourism, and heritage tourism.

17 Significant job growth is needed by the year 2030 to support anticipated population growth as well as
18 to recover from the economic shock of 2020. The Florida Chamber Foundation estimates the study
19 area will need to create more than 139,000 net new jobs by 2030.⁹ To diversify the economy and
20 grow job opportunities, regional and local economic development plans are focusing on targeted
21 industries such as advanced manufacturing, logistics and distribution, and life sciences and
22 healthcare. Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies (CEDs) created by the regional
23 planning councils identify targeted opportunity and investment areas, including business and
24 technology parks, logistics centers, and airports. Many of these industries and sites require enhanced
25 transportation and communications connectivity to markets in other regions, states, and nations.

26 **INFRASTRUCTURE**

27 The region is currently served by 4,860 lane miles of State Highway System. I-4 in Polk County and
28 I-75 in Charlotte, Lee, and Collier Counties are the major limited-access highways in the region. Major
29 state roads such as US 27, US 17, SR 29, SR 31, SR 60, SR 64, SR 66, SR 70, and SR 80 form the
30 core elements of the regional roadway network connecting existing communities. During peak times,
31 traffic congestion is experienced along portions of I-4, I-75, and US 27.

32 The study area has over 600 miles of active rail lines including one freight rail terminal and three
33 Amtrak stations. The freight terminal is part of an intermodal logistics center in Winter Haven
34 operated by CSX.

35 Only three counties have fixed-route transit providers: Collier, Lee, and Polk. However, transit
36 remains a critical way for many residents to access jobs, healthcare, and other services. The study
37 area is also served by 12 Greyhound intercity bus stations.

⁵ Florida Department of Revenue

⁶ County Property Appraisers

⁷ University of Florida GeoPlan Center

⁸ www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045219

⁹ Florida Chamber Foundation, Florida 2030 Blueprint

1 There are two commercial airports (Southwest Florida International and Punta Gorda Airport), two
2 receiver airports (Lakeland Linder International Airport and Page Field) and 12 general aviation
3 facilities. Many residents and visitors use commercial service airports in surrounding regions. The
4 region has no deep-water seaports, requiring international and domestic waterborne freight to access
5 the region through seaports in South Florida, Tampa Bay, or other areas of the state.

6 Unlike the most populated areas, rural areas suffer from lack of broadband access including nearly
7 40% of DeSoto County residents and more than 40% for those in Hendry and Glades.¹⁰ Outside of
8 the major service providers in the more populated areas, the City of Winter Haven and Hardee
9 County have invested in their own broadband networks to support both business and resident needs.

10 Like broadband, access to public water services is limited to some of the inland rural counties.
11 DeSoto, Highlands, and Glades Counties, for example, have known septic systems percentages of
12 39%, 42% and 63%, respectively. Additionally, more than one-third of Highlands and Hardee
13 Counties are known to be utilizing well water for drinking water, with DeSoto County nearing 50%.¹¹

14 The status of infrastructure networks is an important consideration to support the region's anticipated
15 and desired business diversification and growth, as well as the quality of life for the growing number
16 of residents.

¹⁰ *Federal Communications Commission, % of population living in areas with access to Fixed 25 Mbps/3Mbps, Dec 31, 2017*

¹¹ *The Florida Water Management Inventory (FDOH: 2017-2018)*

1 RECOMMENDATIONS

3 APPROACH AND FRAMEWORK

4 The Task Force recognized the scope of the M-CORES purpose and program, as well as the scale of
5 the corridors authorized in statute, called for thoughtful decision making supported by the best
6 available data, analysis, and subject matter expertise and extensive public input. The Task Force
7 recognized decisions about where these corridors should be located and how they should be
8 developed, particularly in relation to environmental resources and existing communities, could have
9 transformational impacts not only on the study area but also on the state as a whole.

10 Since the Task Force process was designed to occur prior to the corridor planning process, the Task
11 Force was not able to review data on nor discuss every potential impact of the corridor in detail. The
12 Task Force focused on developing recommendations for how FDOT and other agencies should
13 implement the M-CORES program in this study area in three areas:

- 14 • **High-Level Needs** – The Task Force identified key regional opportunities and challenges
15 related to the six statutory purposes for M-CORES that should be priorities for the M-CORES
16 program in the study area. The Task Force also developed guidance for how FDOT should
17 work with partners to evaluate these potential needs and form more specific purpose and
18 need statements for corridor improvements moving forward. The high-level needs, along with
19 the purpose, answer the question “*why?*”.
- 20 • **Guiding Principles** – The Task Force recommended a set of core values to guide decision-
21 making related to the M-CORES program in the study area throughout the planning,
22 development, and implementation process. These answer the question “*how?*”.
- 23 • **Instructions for Project Development and Beyond** – The Task Force recommended
24 specific directions for future project development and implementation activities to ensure the
25 Task Force’s guiding principles are applied to subsequent activities as intended. These
26 answer the question “*what’s next?*”.

27 In completing this report, the Task Force’s intent is to provide these consensus recommendations for
28 how FDOT can work with other agencies and partners to effectively carry out the M-CORES program
29 as specified in s. 338.2278, F.S. Consensus on the report does not constitute agreement by all Task
30 Force members that at this phase in program delivery, project specific needs or environmental and
31 economic feasibility are fully developed. Rather, the report is intended to provide consensus
32 recommendations for how needs should be evaluated and how corridor development and related
33 activities should move forward to implement the statute and support the environment, quality of life,
34 and prosperity of the study area and the state.

35 Section 338.2278 (3) (c) 6, F.S. states “To the maximum extent feasible, the department shall adhere
36 to the recommendations of the task force created for each corridor in the design of the multiple
37 modes of transportation and multiple types of infrastructure associated with the corridor.” The Task
38 Force viewed this statement as inclusive of all the recommendations contained in this report and
39 applicable to all activities associated with the M-CORES program. The Task Force also recognized
40 that as future work continues in the study area, additional information or changing conditions may
41 provide insight about the feasibility and value of specific implementation steps that could warrant

1 refinements to specific recommendations; in these situations, the guiding principle and intent of the
2 Task Force will guide any such refinements.

3 **HIGH-LEVEL NEEDS**

4 Development of major transportation projects typically begins with definition of a purpose and need
5 for the project. The purpose identifies the primary goals of the project, and the need establishes the
6 rationale for the project based on deficiencies, issues, and/or concerns that currently exist or are
7 expected to occur within the study area. A need typically is a factual, objective description of the
8 specific transportation problem supported by data and analysis.

9 Section 338.2278 (3) (c) 4, F.S., charged the Task Force to “evaluate the need for, and the economic
10 and environmental impacts of, hurricane evacuation impacts of, and land use impacts of” the corridor
11 on which the Task Force is focusing. The Task Force reviewed partner and public input, existing
12 plans and studies, and available data and forecasts on trends and conditions in the study area. FDOT
13 provided preliminary baseline forecasts for future population, employment, and traffic, but the amount
14 and precision of the information provided was not sufficient to define specific corridor needs at a level
15 of detail necessary to initiate project development. Based on the information provided, the Task Force
16 identified potential high-level needs for the corridor and developed recommendations for how FDOT
17 should assess the needs for a corridor of the scale specified in statute as part of future planning and
18 project development.

19 High-level needs are key regional opportunities and challenges that the M-CORES program,
20 including corridor investments and related actions, are intended to address. The high-level needs
21 build on the six purposes and 13 potential benefits in s. 338.2278 (1), F.S. The potential high-level
22 needs include conventional transportation needs such as safety, mobility, and connectivity, as well as
23 broader regional needs that could be supported through a transportation corridor, such as economic
24 development, environmental stewardship, and quality of life.

25 In general, the Task Force found significant needs in the study area related to the six statutory
26 purposes, including revitalizing rural communities, supporting economic development, enhancing
27 quality of life, and protecting the environment. The Task Force recognized general needs to enhance
28 transportation safety, mobility, and connectivity in the study area. but did not identify a specific need
29 for a completely new greenfield corridor across the entire study area based on the available
30 information at this time. The Federal Highway Administration defines a greenfield corridor as
31 designed from the beginning with no constraints from the existence of prior facilities that need to be
32 modified or removed. The Task Force identified a series of potential high-level needs for future
33 evaluation by FDOT:

- 34 • **Support anticipated population growth in coastal communities and urban areas.** Lee,
35 Collier, and Charlotte Counties (along the coastline) and Polk County (near I-4) represent 90% of
36 the population and are projected to be the areas of highest growth over the next 25 years with an
37 average of 32% per county.¹² This growth will increase travel within the urban areas and to/from
38 inland and urban areas within the region where employment and services are prevalent.

39 FDOT conducted a preliminary analysis of future traffic in the study area based on population
40 growth projections from local government comprehensive plans. Based on improvements

¹² Bureau of Economic and Business Research (BEBR), University of Florida, 2019

1 currently in the FDOT Work Program and existing cost-feasible plans for the Strategic Intermodal
2 System (SIS) and metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) in the study area, this traffic
3 growth could produce significant congestion along much of I-4 and I-75, portions of US 27 and SR
4 29, and several east-west routes by the year 2050. The Task Force recommended further
5 refinement of these traffic projections, including evaluation of potential corridor improvements that
6 could accommodate this growth in traffic.

7 The Task Force recommended FDOT use population and economic growth projected in local
8 government comprehensive plans and/or the MPO long-range transportation plans, and the
9 Florida Transportation Plan as the baseline for estimating future travel demand in the study area.
10 These projections generally are consistent with the mid-range projections developed annually by
11 the University of Florida Bureau of Economic and Business Research, which could serve as a
12 proxy for those counties who have not updated their comprehensive plans in recent years.

13 The Task Force recommended the traffic analysis consider future demand for moving both people
14 and freight, as well as both local/regional travel originating and terminating within the study area
15 and statewide/interregional travel to, from, and through the study area. The traffic analysis also
16 should consider potential changes in travel demand related to the state's recovery from COVID-
17 19 and potential long-term changes in travel behavior, such as greater propensity for working
18 from home and increased home delivery of goods and services. The analysis should also
19 consider potential changes in travel demand and transportation system capacity related to
20 increased use of emerging technologies such as automated and connected vehicles. Finally, the
21 analysis should consider potential shifts in economic activity that could be related to a significant
22 industry expansion or recession in the study area during the analysis period.

- 23 • **Improve safety and mobility.** Maintaining and improving safety and travel reliability are
24 continuous concerns. The annual cost of congestion per driver in the U.S. is \$1,348.¹³ FDOT's
25 preliminary traffic analysis suggested congestion by the year 2050 could expand to more
26 roadways including US 17, SR 29, SR 60, SR 64, SR 66, SR 70, and SR 80. The Task Force
27 recommended that US 27 will also need safety and mobility improvements. Additionally, the
28 study area experienced more than 35,000 crashes in 2018 with 358 fatalities. Although the
29 number of crashes was highly concentrated in the coastal counties and Polk County, the highest
30 fatality rates are in the rural counties such as Glades, DeSoto, and Hendry. The respective fatality
31 rates of 6.5%, 3.6%, and 3.2% were higher than Florida's average of less than 1%.¹⁴ With 94% of
32 crashes due to human error, safety is a promising benefit of connected and automated vehicles.¹⁵
33 The Task Force recommended guiding principles and instructions to maximize the use of existing
34 transportation facilities to address shifting mobility needs for people and freight and to evaluate
35 the potential benefits from connected and automated vehicles in the region. The Task Force
36 recommended that FDOT evaluate how specific transportation corridor improvements could
37 support safety and mobility opportunities in the region.
- 38 • **Help rural and underserved areas improve infrastructure for people, freight, and**
39 **technology.** For the inland portion of the study area, the infrastructure was largely developed to
40 serve the rural and agrarian communities that historically were the emphasis of this study area.
41 To support a more diverse economy and technologies now available for agriculture and resource-

¹³ INRIX 2018 Global Traffic Scorecard

¹⁴ Florida Crash Dashboard, FHSMV, 2018

¹⁵ <https://www.nhtsa.gov/technology-innovation/automated-vehicles-safety>

1 based businesses, this infrastructure must evolve. For instance, lack of broadband availability in
2 these rural areas makes access to agricultural technologies, remote education, employment, and
3 telehealth difficult. Additionally, rural residents seek public amenities like potable water. The
4 amount of land area varies with public water supply serving a high of 64% in Glades County to
5 just under 11% for Hardee and Hendry Counties.¹⁶ With regard to freight, more than 651 million
6 tons of cargo were transported via truck within, into, and out of Florida in 2017.¹⁷ The truck traffic
7 on key roadways in the inland portion of the study area ranges from 19% to 31% of the total
8 traffic. The growth of nationwide e-commerce has increased by 13% to 16% annually over the
9 past five years, and this trend is expected to increase, thereby contributing to additional cargo
10 tonnage to be transported.¹⁸ Accommodations to efficiently handle this level of increase is an area
11 for consideration. The Task Force recommended FDOT evaluate opportunities to improve
12 infrastructure connections between communities and regional roadway networks and support the
13 expansion of rural utility infrastructure, including broadband, water, and sewer to enhance quality
14 of life for rural and underserved areas. The Task Force recommended that FDOT evaluate how
15 the M-CORES program could help improve infrastructure in rural and underserved areas.

- 16 • **Improve access and interregional connectivity for residents, freight, and visitors between**
17 **communities and markets.** Access to high capacity transportation corridors that provide
18 interregional connectivity is a key factor for business recruitment and retention. Currently, only
19 four counties in the study area are served by a limited access highway: Polk, Charlotte, Lee, and
20 Collier. These access points are important for business attraction and expansion. Additionally,
21 Winter Haven is home to an Intermodal Logistics Center located near the region's only rail
22 terminal, which highlights the importance of freight flows into and out of the region including flows
23 to seaports located outside the study area. Tourism, including eco- and agri-tourism, continues to
24 grow within the region in areas such as the Babcock Ranch Preserve as people seek outdoor
25 recreation and activities. Rural economic prosperity is a major concern tied to interregional access
26 and connectivity.
- 27 • **Expand transportation options, such as shared-use nonmotorized trails, freight and**
28 **passenger rail, and public transit.** Transportation options that provide opportunities for
29 residents to access services have also been identified for further exploration. Only three counties
30 have fixed-route transit providers: Collier, Lee, and Polk. However, transit remains a critical mode
31 for many residents to access jobs, healthcare, and other services. There are 175 miles of existing
32 paved multi-use trails in the SUN Trail network throughout the area, and as residents desire
33 modes for recreation, expansion of trails is a consideration.¹⁹ There is also a shift of truckload
34 carriers transporting containers and trailers via rail for long hauls over 400 miles in order to
35 accommodate growth in cargo traffic with increasing shortages in truck drivers.²⁰ Options to
36 improve travel while protecting existing communities and green/blue spaces are also
37 considerations when identifying modal options.
- 38 • **Help increase economic activity and economic diversity throughout the region with**
39 **emphasis on inland and rural areas.** The region is building on its traditional industry base:

¹⁶ Florida Water Management Inventory (FDOH: 2017-2018)

¹⁷ FDOT Freight Mobility and Trade Plan, Technical Memorandum 4, Trends, April 2020

¹⁸ FDOT Freight Mobility and Trade Plan, Technical Memorandum 4, Trends, April 2020

¹⁹ <http://floridasuntrail.com/>

²⁰ FDOT Freight Mobility and Trade Plan, Technical Memorandum 4, Trends, April 2020

1 agriculture, natural resources, and related industries; tourism, arts, entertainment, and recreation;
2 and construction. At the same time, emerging industries with different transportation needs
3 include education and health services; transportation, warehousing, and wholesale trade; and
4 manufacturing. To promote economic activity, multiple opportunity and investment areas have
5 been identified in CEDS, economic development elements of local government comprehensive
6 plans, and similar plans. With the challenges faced by the inland counties related to lack of
7 economic diversity and limited availability of higher wage job opportunities for residents, the Task
8 Force recommended continued collaboration on the region's economic development. The Task
9 Force recommended FDOT evaluate how the M-CORES program could support regional and
10 local economic development opportunities. This evaluation should consider the positive and
11 negative mobility, economic, and fiscal impacts of potential shifts in economic activity from
12 existing communities and corridors to enhanced or new corridors, as well as potential net
13 economic benefits to the region and state.

- 14 • **Create employment opportunities, particularly to assist lower-income residents and help**
15 **retain younger residents in the area.** A major concern is providing children in the study area
16 with opportunities to remain in the area as adults. DeSoto, Glades, Hardee, Hendry, and
17 Highlands Counties - as well as the community of Immokalee in Collier County - have been
18 designated as Rural Areas of Opportunity. Further, Hardee and Hendry Counties have the highest
19 percentages of 25 and under population (35% and 36%, respectively). These two counties also
20 have experienced a net loss of residents to other states and nations.²¹ The nine counties need to
21 create more than 139,000 net new jobs by 2030 to accommodate population growth and keep
22 unemployment rates low.²²
- 23 • **Enhance access to jobs, workforce training, education, healthcare, and goods and**
24 **services.** Access to critical quality of life services and employment are growing concerns within
25 the region. About 16% of residents in the study area have access to fresh food within half a mile,
26 compared to a statewide average of 31%.²³ Hendry, Hardee, DeSoto, and Glades Counties each
27 have fewer than 20 licensed physicians and 50 hospital beds.²⁴ Education attainment in most of
28 the study area counties lags the statewide average. For example, more than one in four residents
29 have not completed a high school diploma in Hendry, DeSoto, Hardee and Glades Counties.²⁵
30 Also, given the region's targeted industry growth in areas such as advanced manufacturing,
31 logistics, and distribution, it is necessary to provide better access to these emerging jobs and the
32 related education and training opportunities. Without convenient access to goods and services,
33 many residents must drive to surrounding counties for medical care, groceries, training, and
34 education.
- 35 • **Support agriculture and resource-based industries as major economic drivers and areas of**
36 **environmental sensitivity.** Agriculture and natural resource-based businesses are major
37 economic drivers. The availability of connectivity between working farms, other resource-based
38 businesses, and their associated supply chains and markets is a growing concern among industry
39 members. Agricultural areas also provide open spaces for large wildlife, smaller areas for

²¹ U.S. Census Bureau, 2020

²² Florida Chamber Foundation, *Florida 2030 Blueprint*

²³ Florida Department of Health, 2016

²⁴ Florida Department of Health, 2018

²⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, *American Community Survey 2013-2017*

1 endemic species, and water and wetland stewardship while at the same time providing for
2 recreation and agricultural tourism. These lands tend to be in private ownership and collaboration
3 is important to achieve economic, social, and environmental objectives.

- 4 • **Protect, connect, and enhance environmentally sensitive areas, ecosystems, water**
5 **resources, and wildlife, including the Florida panther.** Fostering the study area's unique
6 natural characteristics and water resources are important considerations. About 32% of the study
7 area's acreage is held in conservation, compared to 28% statewide.²⁶ Much of the study area,
8 approximately 50%, has been identified as Priorities 1 and 2 of the Florida Ecological Greenways
9 Network, and nearly 34% are designated as Florida panther primary zone, secondary zone,
10 dispersal zone, and primary dispersal/expansion areas.^{27 28} The Task Force recommended
11 guiding principles and instructions for how the M-CORES program could help achieve
12 environmental goals, including proactive opportunities to restore, connect, and enhance
13 resources. The Task Force recommended that FDOT give particular attention to these resources
14 through application of the guiding principles in addition to standard project development and
15 environmental review processes.
- 16 • **Strengthen disaster mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery.** Large portions of the
17 study area - particularly along the coast, Lake Okeechobee, and the Peace River - are designated
18 evacuation zones during emergencies. Stronger building codes and practices make it possible for
19 some residents to shelter in place during some storms, and public shelter provide an opportunity
20 for some residents to remain in their community during storms. However, stronger storms and
21 emergency events increase pressure for evacuation, increase recovery challenges, and put
22 additional pressure on major north-south routes like I-75. Other factors related to COVID-19 and
23 social distancing practices may reduce sheltering capacities and may reduce the likelihood the
24 public will choose shelters during emergencies. The Task Force recommended FDOT evaluate
25 how specific multi-use transportation corridor improvements would help strengthen mitigation,
26 preparedness, response, and recovery efforts in the region. The Task Force recommended
27 FDOT closely tie the development of the M-CORES program to the forthcoming updates of the
28 Statewide Regional Evacuation Studies underway by the Division of Emergency Management
29 and the regional planning councils, which will include information regarding travel behavior and
30 sheltering needs.

31 **Needs Evaluation Process**

32 As input to project development, FDOT will work with partners to conduct a robust evaluation of the
33 potential high-level needs in the study area, building on the recommendations of the Task Force. This
34 process will evaluate and distinguish between conventional safety, mobility, and connectivity needs,
35 and broader regional needs related to transportation that also are included in the statutory purpose in
36 s. 338.2278, F.S. Additional details on the needs evaluation process as well as the steps involved in
37 identifying and evaluating alternatives are specified in the Action Plan on page 24 of this report.

38 The Task Force did not reach a conclusion based on the information available at this time that there
39 is a specific need for a completely new greenfield corridor through the study area to achieve the

²⁶ *Florida Natural Areas Inventory, 2019*

²⁷ *FDEP: 2016 and Florida Panther Recovery Plan*

²⁸ *US Fish and Wildlife Service, November 21, 2008*

1 purposes required by s. 338.2278, F.S. The Task Force expressed a preference for improvement or
2 expansion of major existing highway corridors that already have disturbed right of way.

3 The Task Force emphasized the formal determination of need pursuant to statutory requirements and
4 consistent with accepted statewide processes is an important milestone in corridor planning and
5 development. The Task Force developed a series of guiding principles and instructions for future
6 planning and development of corridors for which high-level needs have been identified, including
7 analysis of the “no build” option. While these determinations will be made after the Task Force has
8 completed its deliberations, the guidance provided by the Task Force will instruct the evaluation
9 process and FDOT will create ongoing opportunities for partners and the public to be engaged during
10 the process.

11 **GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND INSTRUCTIONS**

12 The Task Force recommended guiding principles and instructions that are intended to function as a
13 set of directions to FDOT and other partners as they carry out future planning, project development,
14 and implementation activities related to the M-CORES program in s. 338.2278, F.S. These guiding
15 principles and instructions are of equal importance and are intended to supplement the requirements
16 of current FDOT processes during planning, project development, design, and other implementation
17 phases.

18 The Task Force developed a series of 16 guiding principles and associated instructions. The text
19 below lists the specific guiding principles and instructions with supporting text to document the intent
20 of the Task Force. The guiding principles function as an integrated set and are not presented in a
21 specific priority order.

22 **1. CONSISTENCY WITH STATEWIDE, REGIONAL, AND LOCAL PLANS**

23 This first guiding principle is a cross-cutting principle to address all high-level needs and support all
24 other guiding principles in this report. The emphasis of the principle is on consistency with local,
25 regional, and statewide plans specifically called out in statute; these include the local government
26 comprehensive plans, metropolitan long-range transportation plans, strategic regional policy plans,
27 and the statewide Florida Transportation Plan.

28 **Guiding Principle:** Be consistent with statutorily required statewide, regional, and local plans.

29 **Instructions:**

- 30 • Be consistent with the goals, objectives, policies, and resources identified in local government
31 comprehensive plans (s. 163.3177, F.S. and s. 163.3178, F.S.), metropolitan long-range
32 transportation plans (s. 339.175, F.S.), and strategic regional policy plans (s. 186.507, F.S.),
33 placing emphasis on future land use maps and growth projections, as well as regional and
34 community visions as adopted into strategic regional policy plans and/or local government
35 comprehensive plans.
- 36 • Be consistent with the vision, goals, and strategies of the Florida Transportation Plan (s.
37 339.155, F.S.).
- 38 • Be consistent with the Heartland 2060 regional vision developed and maintained by the
39 Central Florida Regional Planning Council in collaboration with the local governments in inland
40 counties.
- 41 • Coordinate among agencies to address differences among statutorily required state, regional,
42 and local plans related to transportation corridors and future growth and development

1 projections, including differences related to the timing and horizon years of plan updates as
2 well as the geographical areas covered by regional plans.

- 3 • Identify needs to update statutorily required plans to address Task Force recommendations,
4 such as designation and management of transportation corridors (s. 337.273, F.S.) and
5 consideration of whether areas around potential interchange locations contain appropriate
6 land use and environmental resource protections (s. 338.2278, F.S.). Coordinate among local
7 governments, regional planning councils, metropolitan planning organizations, Florida
8 Department of Economic Opportunity, and FDOT on plan updates.

9 **2. MAXIMIZING USE OF EXISTING FACILITIES**

10 This guiding principle is a cross-cutting principle addressing all high-level needs and supporting all
11 other guiding principles in this report. This principle reflects the Task Force's strong preference for
12 using existing transportation facilities and right-of-way to address the M-CORES purposes and high-
13 level needs.

14 **Guiding Principle:** Evaluate potential alternatives for addressing statewide and interregional
15 mobility and connectivity needs in this priority order:

- 16 1. Make safety, operational, and capacity improvements to existing transportation facilities and
17 right-of-way.
- 18 2. Develop new transportation facilities.

19 **Instructions:**

- 20 • Identify and advance safety and operational improvements to existing transportation facilities.
- 21 • Evaluate potential capacity improvements to existing transportation facilities, including their
22 impact on the surrounding environmental resources, land uses, and communities.
- 23 • Evaluate opportunities for co-location of transportation and utility facilities within or adjacent to
24 existing disturbed right-of-way, and other approaches to transforming existing facilities and
25 right-of-way to accommodate additional modes, uses, and functions, including their impact on
26 the surrounding environmental resources, land uses, and communities.
- 27 • Assess connectivity gaps between existing transportation facilities and areas identified as
28 priorities for attraction, and potential opportunities for closing those gaps.
- 29 • Advance specific improvements that support a system meeting the long-term needs of
30 statewide and interregional flows of people and freight.

31 **3. SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY CONTEXT**

32 The Task Force developed the following guiding principle and instructions to address four high-level
33 needs:

- 34 • Support anticipated population growth in coastal communities and urban areas.
- 35 • Help increase economic activity and economic diversity throughout the region with emphasis
36 on inland and rural areas.
- 37 • Enhance access to jobs, workforce training, education, healthcare, and goods and services.
- 38 • Create employment opportunities, particularly to assist lower-income residents and help retain
39 younger residents in the area.

40 **Guiding Principle:** Maintain and enhance community character and quality of life consistent with
41 local and regional plans.

1 **Instructions:**

- 2 • Do not impact known cemeteries.
- 3 • Do not impact Avon Park Air Force Range and its mission critical lands.
- 4 • Do not impact lands owned by known Native American Tribes and associated historical sites
- 5 not owned by Native American Tribes.
- 6 • Do not place new corridor through National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) listed sites.
- 7 • Plan and develop transportation corridors in a manner that improves connectivity to and
- 8 enhances the quality of existing communities, while avoiding or minimizing adverse impacts
- 9 on these communities and developments.
- 10 • Plan and design transportation corridors so that their purpose and scale is compatible with the
- 11 communities that they serve.
- 12 • Consult with Native American Tribes to understand future plans and identify opportunities for
- 13 enhanced connectivity.
- 14 • Consult with the military to understand future plans and identify opportunities for enhanced
- 15 connectivity.
- 16 • Plan transportation corridors to avoid safety impacts to K-12 schools.

17 **4. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

18 The Task Force developed the following guiding principle and instructions to address four high-level
19 needs:

- 20 • Help increase economic activity and economic diversity throughout the region with emphasis
- 21 on inland and rural areas.
- 22 • Enhance access to jobs, workforce training, education, healthcare, and goods and services.
- 23 • Create employment opportunities, particularly to assist lower-income residents and help retain
- 24 younger residents in the area.
- 25 • Improve access and interregional connectivity for residents, freight, and visitors between
- 26 communities and markets.

27 While the agriculture industry is included within the industries referenced in this guiding principle and
28 instructions, it is also the focus of the Agricultural Land Uses guiding principle and instructions that
29 follow.

30 **Guiding Principle:** Advance economic development, business retention and expansion, job
31 creation, and community development, with emphasis on rural areas of opportunity.

32 **Instructions:**

- 33 • Work with economic development organizations for opportunities to focus on retention and
- 34 expansion of existing industries, including ecotourism and recreation industries.
- 35 • Work with economic development organizations on opportunities to attract emerging
- 36 industries.
- 37 • Work with workforce development organizations on opportunities to enhance access to jobs
- 38 and workforce training.
- 39 • Plan limited access transportation facilities to serve economic activities dependent on
- 40 interregional travel.
- 41 • Provide connectivity to medical facilities, colleges, universities, and workforce training sites.

1 **5. AGRICULTURAL LAND USES**

2 The Task Force developed the following guiding principle and instructions to address the below high-
3 level need:

- 4 • Support agriculture and resource-based industries as major economic drivers and areas of
5 environmental sensitivity.

6 The environmental sensitivity aspects of this need are aligned with the guiding principles and
7 instructions for Conservation Land, Wildlife and Plant Habitats, and Water Resources.

8 **Guiding Principle:** Enhance and minimize impacts to productive agricultural lands and other
9 productive lands with economic significance; and improve connectivity and maintain access between
10 working farms, other resource-based industries, their supply chains, and their market destinations.

11 **Instructions:**

- 12 • Apply the guiding principle to prime farmlands (U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural
13 Resources Conservation Service designation), ranch lands, timber lands, Florida Rural and
14 Family Lands Protection Program lands, and Farmland/Agricultural Preservation Areas
15 designated in local government comprehensive plans.
- 16 • Work with owners/operators of agricultural farms, including those with the honorary
17 designation of Century Farm, along with other resource-based industries to understand their
18 needs and plans to address access and fragmentation and to support effective management
19 of agricultural properties.
- 20 • Work with economic development organizations and owners/operators of agricultural farms to
21 understand needs and opportunities to support the agritourism industry.
- 22 • Improve transportation connectivity between working farms, other resource-based industries,
23 and their supply chains.
- 24 • Improve broadband connectivity to promote and support efficiency, new and emerging
25 technologies, and best practices.

26 **6. CONSERVATION LANDS**

27 Among the six statutory purposes for M-CORES, protecting the environment and natural resources
28 was the focus of the greatest portion of the Task Force’s discussion time. The Task Force
29 recognized the potential impacts of corridor development on significant environmental resources in
30 the study area from both direct impacts from corridor development as well as indirect impacts from
31 future population and economic growth and land development that could occur in areas with greater
32 transportation connectivity, particularly around interchanges.

33 The Task Force developed a series of four interrelated guiding principles to address environmental
34 resources including conservation lands, the Florida panther, wildlife and plant habitat, and water
35 resources. Each of these four principles reflect a common priority order of first, avoiding negative
36 impacts to resources; second, restoring, connecting, and enhancing resources; and third, minimizing
37 the mitigating negative impacts. This order reflects the Task Force’s consensus that the optimal
38 approach should be to avoid negative impacts to environmental resources, but that if an impact
39 cannot be avoided, proactive efforts should be taken to provide net positive benefits to the resource.

40 To help implement this principle, FDOT identified and committed to specific environmental resources
41 that will not be impacted by a corridor or where no new corridor will be placed through the resource,

1 such as existing conservation lands or habitat already fragmented by existing transportation facilities.
2 In these cases, the existing facilities or right-of-way could be improved, but steps should be taken to
3 restore or enhance the environmental resource at the same time. In addition, the Task Force
4 identified other important resources where avoidance is not explicitly defined at this time, but where
5 great care should be taken to evaluate potential corridors and their impacts moving forward.

6 In addition, the Task Force recognized the opportunities to contribute toward broader regional and
7 statewide environmental goals though the decisions made about corridor development as well as the
8 abilities the statute provides to FDOT regarding right-of-way acquisition and other mitigation activities.
9 The Task Force recommended that FDOT commit to working closely with other local, regional, state,
10 and federal agencies and nongovernmental organizations to advance key priorities such as
11 Everglades restoration and high priority land conservation, habitat and water resource protection, and
12 ecosystem connectivity initiatives developed by other partners.

13 The Task Force developed the following guiding principle and instructions to address the below high-
14 level need:

- 15 • Protect, connect, and enhance environmentally sensitive areas, ecosystems, water resources,
16 and wildlife, including the Florida panther.

17 **Guiding Principle:** Apply the following priority order for existing conservation lands (including
18 conservation easements and mitigation lands):

- 19 1. Avoid negative impacts to them;
- 20 2. Restore, connect, and enhance these lands while continuing to avoid negative impacts to
21 them; and
- 22 3. Minimize and mitigate negative impacts to them.

23 **Instructions:**

- 24 • Do not place new corridor through Preservation 2000 Lands, National Parks, State Parks,
25 State Forests, State-owned Mitigation Banks, National Wildlife Refuges, and Florida Forever
26 Acquired Lands.
- 27 • Leverage s.338.2278 (3)(c) 6, F.S. acquisition authority and other conservation programs to
28 identify opportunities to advance and fund land acquisition to accomplish multiple purposes,
29 with the intent of acquiring property near or adjacent to the corridor prior to or parallel to corridor
30 development.
- 31 • Coordinate with other entities to identify and prioritize targeted acquisitions such as those on
32 the Florida Forever targeted list, other state recognized planned conservation land lists, and
33 other locally recognized conservation land lists.
- 34 • Coordinate with landowners to apply the guiding principle to non-state-owned conservation
35 easements and mitigation lands to serve multiple purposes.
- 36 • Coordinate with landowners and operators of agricultural lands that also serve an
37 environmental purpose.
- 38 • Work with management agencies to obtain funding and to implement Best Management
39 Practices (BMP).
- 40 • Coordinate with the Division of Forestry, Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer
41 Services to preserve the ability to use prescribed fire on public and private managed lands.

- 1 • Identify and prioritize opportunities to restore the purpose of existing conservation lands by
2 reversing the negative impacts of existing transportation facilities.

3 7. THE FLORIDA PANTHER

4 Section 338.2278 (3) (c) 7, F.S. includes specific requirements for the Southwest-Central Florida
5 Connector:

- 6 a. Address the impacts of the construction of a project within the corridor on panther and other
7 critical wildlife habitat and evaluate in its final report the need for acquisition of lands for state
8 conservation or as mitigation for project construction; and
- 9 b. Evaluate wildlife crossing design features to protect panther and other critical wildlife habitat
10 corridor connections.

11 The Task Force recommended that in developing M-CORES corridors, FDOT have a goal of its
12 infrastructure creating improvements to Panther habitat and connectivity. To address the impacts of
13 corridor construction, the Task Force recognized that the acquisition of lands for state conservation or
14 as mitigation may be required. The Task Force recommended a three-step process for developing a
15 broad list of target conservation lands for the Florida panther:

- 16 1. FDOT would identify conservation targets in coordination with a corridor advisory group to be
17 appointed following completion of the Task Force process (see discussion in Action Plan).
- 18 2. FDOT, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
19 and other Florida panther experts would then evaluate each of these targets, and prioritize,
20 based on benefits to the panther, project impacts, proximity to the impacts, availability, and
21 cost projections.
- 22 3. FDOT would seek concurrence from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Florida Fish
23 and Wildlife Conservation Commission that these target conservation projects would satisfy
24 the requirements of the U.S. Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531
25 et seq.).

26 The Task Force also recognized the importance of wildlife corridors and reviewed various crossing
27 alternatives and other design features in the development of instructions for project development and
28 beyond. The Task Force recognized some wildlife crossings and other design features may serve
29 multiple species in addition to the panther. The Task Force recommended that to minimize negative
30 impacts to the Florida panther and other wildlife, FDOT should evaluate existing wildlife corridors
31 during the corridor development process. These corridors would be candidates for wildlife crossing
32 features such as bridges, bridges with shelves, culverts, and fencing to protect wildlife movements.

33 The Task Force developed a guiding principle and instructions in alignment with the statute, as well
34 as the above outlined process. They also address the following high-level need:

- 35 • Protect, connect, and enhance environmentally sensitive areas, ecosystems, water resources,
36 and wildlife, including the Florida panther.

37 **Guiding Principle:** Apply the following priority order to protect the federally endangered Florida
38 panther and its habitat:

- 39 1. Avoid negative impacts to Florida panther habitats, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife
40 Service Florida Panther Focus Area;
- 41 2. Restore, connect, and enhance existing and adjacent habitats (or habitats within close
42 proximity to the corridor); and

1 3. Minimize and mitigate negative impacts to panther habitat.

2 **Instructions:**

- 3 • Coordinate with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FFWCC), the U.S.
- 4 Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and other Florida panther experts to place a high priority
- 5 on acquiring lands that protect panther habitats and connect existing conservation lands and
- 6 wildlife management areas important to improving and sustaining the Florida panther both
- 7 north and south of the Caloosahatchee River.
- 8 • Coordinate with the USFWS and FFWCC to prioritize wildlife corridor connections and
- 9 implement design features to protect the panther and other critical species.
- 10 • Consult the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regarding potential impacts within the most updated
- 11 panther habitat, including the USFWS Florida Panther Focus Area.
- 12 • Enhance existing transportation corridors to address negative impacts of prior projects.
- 13 • Place a high priority on not placing interchanges in panther habitat.

14 **8. WILDLIFE AND PLANT HABITATS**

15 The Task Force developed the following guiding principle and instructions to address the below high-

16 level need as it pertains to wildlife and plant habitats:

- 17 • Protect, connect, and enhance environmentally sensitive areas, ecosystems, water resources,
- 18 and wildlife, including the Florida panther.

19 **Guiding Principle:** Encourage biodiversity by applying the following priority order to habitats for all

20 federally and state protected species, including wildlife and endemic plants:

- 21 1. Avoid negative impacts to these habitats;
- 22 2. Restore, connect, and enhance these habitats while continuing to avoid negative impacts; and
- 23 3. Minimize/mitigate negative impacts to these habitats.

24 **Instructions:**

- 25 • Leverage s.338.2278 (3)(c) 6, F.S. acquisition authority and other programs to identify
- 26 opportunities to advance and fund land acquisition to achieve multiple purposes including
- 27 improving wildlife connectivity with the intent of acquiring property near or adjacent to the
- 28 corridor prior to or parallel to corridor development. Place a high priority on connectivity gaps
- 29 and bottlenecks in the latest Florida Ecological Greenways Network model. Place a high priority
- 30 on increasing the width of riparian conservation holdings that are currently too narrow to serve
- 31 as wildlife corridors.
- 32 • Design transportation corridors to restore and provide wildlife and plant habitat connectivity
- 33 through adding new design elements, such as elevated roadway segments, wildlife crossings
- 34 (such as bridge and bridges with shelves and fencing), and properly placed wildlife corridors
- 35 sited based upon the best available data concerning wildlife movement.
- 36 • Design transportation corridors to consider improvements on proximate roadways anticipating
- 37 increased traffic due to the corridor, such as interchange locations, to minimize fragmenting
- 38 habitat or creating gaps in habitat.
- 39 • Coordinate with landowners and operators of agricultural lands that also serve as critical
- 40 wildlife habitat.
- 41 • Enhance existing transportation corridors to address negative impacts of prior projects.

- 1 • Minimize fragmentation of large contiguous properties that function as wildlife corridors.
- 2 • Minimize corridor lighting impacts on nearby wildlife habitats and communities.
- 3 • Place a high priority on avoiding adverse impacts to Wildlife Management Areas and Florida
- 4 Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission managed lands not covered by other instructions.
- 5 • Place a high priority on avoiding new adverse impacts to remaining high quality habitat in
- 6 Lake Wales Ridge.
- 7 • Place a high priority on continuing to reduce invasive plant species along the transportation
- 8 corridor.

9 **9. WATER RESOURCES**

10 The Task Force developed the following guiding principle and instructions to address the below high-
 11 level need as it pertains to water resources:

- 12 • Protect, connect, and enhance environmentally sensitive areas, ecosystems, water resources,
 13 and wildlife, including the Florida panther.

14 **Guiding Principle:** Apply the following priority order for water resources:

- 15 1. Avoid negative impacts to them;
- 16 2. Restore, connect, and enhance them while continuing to avoid negative impacts; and
- 17 3. Minimize and mitigate negative impacts to them.

18 **Instructions:**

- 19 • Do not impact springheads, lakes, and Everglades National Park.
- 20 • Be consistent with regional water supply plans (s. 373.709, F.S.).
- 21 • Be consistent with the most updated Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan Projects,
 22 the Kissimmee River Restoration Project, and any other water quality or hydrologic restoration
 23 project in the Water Management Districts.
- 24 • Consider Florida Department Environmental Protection Basin Management Action Plans.
- 25 • Leverage s.338.2278 (3)(c) 6, F.S. acquisition authority and other programs to identify
 26 opportunities to advance and fund acquisition of additional land to restore and enhance water
 27 quality, quantity, and flow, including through and to the Big Cypress National Preserve, with
 28 the intent of acquiring property near or adjacent to the corridor prior to or parallel to corridor
 29 development.
- 30 • Design transportation corridors utilizing BMPs to restore and enhance water quality, quantity,
 31 and flow including nutrient load reduction and possible design elements such as segments of
 32 elevated roadways and longer structures.
- 33 • Design transportation corridors utilizing BMPs to restore watershed integrity and minimize
 34 fragmentation of large contiguous properties that function as hydrologic watersheds.
- 35 • Place a high priority on avoiding adverse impacts to freshwater resources, aquifer recharge
 36 areas, Outstanding Florida Waters, wetlands, floodplains, existing conservation easements,
 37 wetland restoration project areas, and other surface waters.
- 38 • Pursue regional or landscape-scale water resource management approaches.
- 39 • Coordinate with Water Management Districts with a high priority of avoiding adverse impacts
 40 to monitoring site locations and water quality and restoration plan projects.
- 41 • Develop efficient water distribution plans that align with expected population locations.

1 **10. FREIGHT MOBILITY AND SAFETY**

2 The Task Force developed the following guiding principle and instructions to address two high-level
3 needs:

- 4 • Improve access and interregional connectivity for residents, freight, and visitors between
5 communities and markets.
- 6 • Improve safety and mobility.

7 **Guiding Principle:** Improve connectivity and safety for major freight flows to support economic
8 development.

9 **Instructions:**

- 10 • Do not place new corridor in locations that would impact airport operations.
- 11 • Improve connectivity to seaports, airports, and rail terminals.
- 12 • Implement solutions to improve safety, relieve congestion, and address shifts in freight
13 movements.

14 **11. TRANSPORTATION MODES**

15 The Task Force developed the following guiding principle and instructions to address the below high-
16 level need:

- 17 • Expand transportation options, such as shared-use nonmotorized trails, freight and passenger
18 rail, and public transit.

19 **Guiding Principle:** Support safe, efficient, and accessible transportation options and/or modes for
20 people and goods.

21 **Instructions:**

- 22 • Enhance transportation corridors by supporting multiple modes, including trails, through
23 maximizing co-location within existing and new facilities.
- 24 • Incorporate any trails included in these corridors as a part of SUN Trail system marketing.
- 25 • Coordinate with local governments, metropolitan planning organizations, and freight and
26 transit industry operators on opportunities to expand transportation options.

27 **12. CONNECTIVITY TO REGIONAL AND LOCAL TRANSPORTATION NETWORK**

28 The Task Force developed the following guiding principle and instructions to address three high-level
29 needs:

- 30 • Improve access and interregional connectivity for residents, freight, and visitors between
31 communities and markets.
- 32 • Help rural and underserved areas improve infrastructure for people, freight, and technology.
- 33 • Improve safety and mobility.

34 **Guiding Principle:** Identify opportunities and improve transportation connections between
35 communities and the regional roadway network.

36 **Instructions:**

- 37 • Prioritize interchange locations for the State Highway System and then the regional roadway
38 network.

- 1 • Work with local and regional governments to identify opportunities to improve or create
2 connections to communities focusing on the regional roadway networks, areas with
3 compatible land uses, and areas targeted for growth in regional and local government
4 comprehensive plans and economic development plans.
- 5 • Develop interchange management plans including appropriate land use and environmental
6 resource protections for areas around proposed interchange locations, and encourage their
7 adoption into local government comprehensive plans.

8 **13. RESILIENCE**

9 This guiding principle and associated instructions were developed by the Task Force as a cross-
10 cutting principle to address all high-level needs and support all other guiding principles in this report.

11 **Guiding Principle:** Plan and coordinate community development and infrastructure asset creation
12 and management that improves and maintains resiliency, sustainability, and adaptability.

13 **Instructions:**

- 14 • Do not impact high risk coastal zones (Coastal Barrier Resources System).
- 15 • Build on the vision, goals, and strategies of the Florida Transportation Plan in addressing
16 resilience, including sea-level rise.
- 17 • Develop local and regional plans that address sea-level rise and potential population
18 migration/growth.
- 19 • Consider hazards such as flooding, fire, and sea-level rise when designing corridors.

20 **14. EMERGENCY EVACUATION AND RESPONSE**

21 The Task Force developed the following guiding principle and instructions to address the below high-
22 level need:

- 23 • Strengthen disaster mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery.

24 **Guiding Principle:** Strengthen local, regional, and statewide emergency management plans and
25 actions.

26 **Instructions:**

- 27 • Do not place new corridor through Cat2 Storm Surge zones.
- 28 • Provide staging areas as part of the program consistent with s.338.236, F.S.
- 29 • Strengthen statewide approach regarding the need to maintain or improve evacuation times.
- 30 • Strengthen statewide, regional, and local plans for sheltering as appropriate.
- 31 • Coordinate with state, regional, and local emergency management agencies including the
32 Statewide Regional Evacuation Studies update that is in process by the Florida Division of
33 Emerging Management and the regional planning councils.
- 34 • Develop the corridor to lessen congestion through small rural communities during evacuation.
- 35 • Develop the corridor to support efficient and safe delivery of supplies and recovery services.
- 36 • Evaluate effects of innovative approaches, including technological advancements and
37 autonomous vehicle adoption, on emergency evacuation clearance times.

38 **15. BROADBAND AND OTHER UTILITIES**

39 The Task Force developed the following guiding principle and instructions to address three high-level
40 needs:

- 1 • Help rural and underserved areas improve infrastructure for people, freight, and technology.
- 2 • Enhance access to jobs, workforce training, education, healthcare, and goods and services.
- 3 • Help increase economic activity and economic diversity throughout the region with emphasis
- 4 on inland and rural areas.

5 **Guiding Principle:** Support expansion of rural utility infrastructure, including broadband, water, and
6 sewer to enhance quality of life; and plan and design enhanced or new corridors to enable co-location
7 of utility and broadband infrastructure in right-of-way.

8 **Instructions:**

- 9 • Enhance and integrate transportation and infrastructure planning processes.
- 10 • Maximize co-location opportunities (e.g. add conduit or “dig once”) while still allowing flexibility
- 11 for service providers to separately install their own conduit and fiber.
- 12 • Ensure utility provider access to FDOT right-of-way is non-discriminatory and competitively
- 13 neutral.
- 14 • Explore partnerships with utility providers and government entities at the federal, state,
- 15 regional, and local levels.
- 16 • Encourage connections to community anchor institutions such as colleges and hospitals.

17 **16. TECHNOLOGY**

18 This guiding principle and associated instructions were developed by the Task Force as a cross-
19 cutting principle to address all high-level needs and support all other guiding principles in this report.

20 **Guiding Principle:** Implement infrastructure that supports current and emerging state-of-the-art
21 vehicles, materials, data, and methodologies.

22 **Instructions:**

- 23 • Design in anticipation of connected and autonomous vehicles, transit, and other modes.
- 24 • Provide access to electric vehicle charging stations.
- 25 • Consider innovative uses of right-of-way for transportation, energy, and community purposes.
- 26 • Employ technologies that enhance infrastructure maintenance and repair efficiencies.
- 27 • Design, construct, and maintain the corridor utilizing resilient and energy efficient materials
- 28 and methods of construction.
- 29 • Evaluate technologies for effective corridor management, such as avoiding wildlife collisions.

30 **ACTION PLAN**

31 In addition to the high-level needs, guiding principles, and instructions, FDOT will commit to the
32 following actions to move forward with implementation of the recommendations of the Task Force’s
33 report in developing the M-CORES program in this study area, consistent with
34 s. 338.2278, F.S.:

- 35 1. **Evaluate potential needs.** FDOT will work with partners to conduct a robust evaluation of
36 potential corridor needs, building on the Task Force’s recommendations on high-level needs.
37 This process will evaluate and distinguish between conventional safety, mobility, and
38 connectivity needs, and broader regional needs or co-benefits related to transportation, such
39 as economic development or environmental stewardship benefits. The needs evaluation will
40 include a detailed technical analysis of current and future traffic conditions in the study area
41 building on the guidance provided by the Task Force in this report. The needs evaluation will

1 include the best available data and most recent projections on travel demand and underlying
2 population and economic growth. This needs analysis will support development of a Purpose
3 and Need statement for potential corridor improvements.

- 4 2. **Identify and evaluate alternatives.** FDOT will conduct additional corridor planning activities,
5 including the Alternative Corridor Evaluation process, and initiate the Project Development
6 and Environment (PD&E) process to identify and evaluate a range of potential alternatives for
7 corridor improvements in or near the study area that could accomplish the Purpose and Need.

8 These alternatives will consider operational and capacity improvements, existing and new
9 facilities including co-location options, and a “no build” option. Consideration will be given to
10 multiple transportation modes and to application of emerging technologies. The alternatives
11 will be consistent with the guiding principles and instructions developed by the Task Force.

12 The alternatives evaluation will include the specific economic, environmental, land use, and
13 emergency management impacts required by s. 338.2278(3)(c)4, F.S. and the standard
14 processes outlined in FDOT’s PD&E manual. The evaluation will be consistent with the
15 guiding principles and instructions recommended by the Task Force. The evaluation will
16 consider the best available data on the full range of potential impacts.

17 The Task Force discussed the importance of considering a “no build” option during all stages
18 of PD&E. FDOT confirmed that, according to both state and federal law and established
19 procedures, a “no build” is always an option in the planning and PD&E processes. In this
20 context, “no build” would mean no major capacity investments beyond those already
21 committed in FDOT’s Five Year Work Program, as well as no associated investments related
22 to land acquisition, broadband and other utilities, and other statutory capabilities specific to M-
23 CORES. FDOT would continue to maintain the safety and operation of the existing
24 transportation system in this study area. During later phases as specific projects and
25 segments are identified, “no build” would mean no capacity investments for that specific
26 project area. The “no build” would remain an option throughout the PD&E process and be
27 analyzed at the same level of detail as all “build” options, including consideration of economic,
28 environmental, land use, and emergency management impacts and consistency with the
29 guiding principles and instructions. The analysis of the “no build” also must include impacts
30 on the study area such as the potential for increased traffic on existing facilities, impacts to
31 multimodal facilities, and impacts on emergency response times.

32 The planning process also will include initial, high-level consideration of potential costs and
33 funding approaches based on reasonable assumptions at this early stage. It is not likely that
34 any alternatives would be sufficiently defined at this stage to conduct detailed analysis of
35 economic feasibility, but early identification of the order of magnitude of potential costs and
36 funding sources can be used to support decision-making on the range of alternatives including
37 the “no build” option.

38 The planning and PD&E processes combined will narrow the range of alternatives and identify
39 opportunities to segment corridor development into multiple projects. These processes also
40 will produce more specific information about potential alignments, interchange locations, and
41 other project features.

42 After the PD&E Study is completed, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection will
43 review the environmental feasibility of any projects proposed as part of Florida’s Turnpike

1 system and submit a statement of environmental feasibility to FDOT, consistent with s.
2 338.223, F.S.

- 3 **3. Support consistency review and update of local and regional plans.** FDOT will coordinate
4 early and often with local governments, metropolitan planning organizations (MPO), and
5 regional planning councils (RPC) to ensure consistency with applicable local and regional
6 plans throughout all activities. Consistent with s. 338.223, F.S. and with the Task Force's
7 guiding principles, proposed corridor projects must be consistent, to the maximum extent
8 feasible, with applicable approved local government comprehensive plans, included in the
9 transportation improvement plan (TIP) of any affected MPOs, and developed in accordance
10 with the Florida Transportation Plan and FDOT's Five Year Work Program.

11 As required by s. 338.2278(3)(c)10, F.S., FDOT will provide affected local governments with a
12 copy of the Task Force report and project alignments identified through the PD&E process so
13 each local government with one or more planned interchanges within its jurisdiction can meet
14 the statutory requirement to review the Task Force report and local government
15 comprehensive plan no later than December 31, 2023. Each local government will consider
16 whether the area in and around the interchange contains appropriate land uses and
17 environmental protections and whether its comprehensive plan should be amended to provide
18 appropriate uses and protections. FDOT will coordinate with the local governments, RPCs,
19 and Florida Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) to assist with plan updates, including
20 consideration of technical and financial support needs.

- 21 **4. Assess economic feasibility and identify potential funding sources.** Following PD&E,
22 FDOT will evaluate the economic feasibility of the corridor at the 30 percent design phase,
23 when sufficient information is available to assess the ability to meet statutory requirements for
24 projects as part of Florida's Turnpike system consistent with s. 338.223, F.S. The economic
25 feasibility will account for required costs to develop and implement the corridor, such as
26 engineering, right-of-way, construction, mitigation, enhancement, and utility costs. These
27 would include typical corridor costs plus FDOT's contribution toward the additional corridor
28 elements related to environmental enhancements or multi-use opportunities as envisioned in
29 statute. This economic feasibility test will focus on specific corridor projects; additional
30 analyses may be needed to examine the cost and funding of all M-CORES program initiatives.

31 FDOT also will identify potential funding sources for preferred corridor alternatives identified
32 during PD&E, including a combination of the specific sources allocated to the M-CORES
33 program in s. 338.2278, F.S.; toll revenues and associated Turnpike revenue bonds; right of
34 way and bridge construction bonds or financing by the FDOT Financing Corporation;
35 advances from the State Transportation Trust Fund; funds obtained through the creation of
36 public-private partnerships; and other applicable state, local, and private revenue sources.
37 FDOT has committed that projects currently in its Five-Year Work Program for Fiscal Years
38 2021-2025 will not be impacted by M-CORES funding needs. M-CORES program costs that
39 are not covered through the dedicated funding sources identified in statute or through toll
40 revenues and associated Turnpike revenue bonds and other financing and partnerships would
41 need to be prioritized along with other needs for future Five Year Work Programs, working
42 through the standard process including the applicable MPO (TIPs) and rural transportation
43 planning processes. All M-CORES projects, regardless of funding source, will be included in

1 applicable MPO TIPs and long-range transportation plans, consistent with federal guidance for
2 projects of regional significance.

- 3 5. **Advance innovative land acquisition concepts.** FDOT, in consultation with the Florida
4 Department of Environmental Protection, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission,
5 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, and
6 relevant state and federal agencies, will advance the Task Force's recommendations for
7 combining right-of-way acquisition with the acquisition of lands or conservation easements to
8 facilitate environmental mitigation or ecosystem, panther and other wildlife habitat, or water
9 quality protection or restoration. A key focus will be on how M-CORES program decisions can
10 support broader regional or statewide conservation and environmental stewardship goals,
11 such as priorities in the Florida Ecological Greenway Network. This process will identify
12 opportunities to advance specific land acquisition and related recommendations prior to or in
13 parallel with corridor construction. FDOT will determine how to provide funding, in whole or
14 part, for land acquisition projects consistent with its statutory authority in s. 338.2278(3)(c) 6,
15 with the expectation that FDOT funding supplements and leverages other state, federal, local,
16 private, and nonprofit sources. FDOT will work with FDEP, FFWC, water management
17 districts, and nongovernmental organizations to explore potential indicators for setting and
18 tracking progress toward land conservation goals.
- 19 6. **Advance multi-use opportunities.** FDOT will coordinate with local governments, RPCs,
20 other state agencies, and industry organizations to advance multi-use opportunities for the
21 corridor as provided for in statute. An early emphasis will be on broadband and other utility
22 co-location opportunities, including coordination with DEO on the development of the
23 statewide broadband strategic plan. FDOT will determine how to provide funding, in whole or
24 part, for broadband consistent with its statutory authority in s. 339.0801, F.S., with the
25 expectation that FDOT funding supplements and leverages other state, federal, local, private,
26 and nonprofit funding sources.
- 27 7. **Continue robust partner and public engagement.** FDOT will continue robust coordination
28 with local governments; local, regional, state, and federal agencies and environmental,
29 community, economic development, and other interest groups, with an intent of exceeding the
30 requirements of the PD&E process. FDOT will use the Efficient Transportation Decision
31 Making process to facilitate early and ongoing coordination with resource agencies. FDOT will
32 create a **corridor advisory group** to enable the range of organizations involved in the Task
33 Force to periodically meet to receive updates on and provide guidance for corridor planning
34 and development activities. FDOT also will create multiple ongoing opportunities for members
35 of the public to be aware of and provide input to this process, with emphasis on direct
36 engagement of the public in local communities.
- 37 8. **Commit to transparency and process improvement.** Because of the scale and scope of
38 the M-CORES program, FDOT will continue to place public engagement as a priority and will
39 continue to engage all stakeholders during M-CORES planning, project development, and
40 implementation, including key decision points. FDOT also will report on how decisions are
41 made, including a periodic report on the status of the specific guiding principles and
42 instructions committed to in this document. An annual M-CORES budget update will be made
43 publicly available as part of FDOT's annual work program presentation to the Legislature and
44 the Florida Transportation Commission.

1 FDOT also recognizes the need for continued improvements to its planning, project
2 development, and related processes to fully implement the M-CORES purpose and objective
3 as identified in statute and the guiding principles and instructions as recommended by the
4 Task Force. This may include the need for additional technical and financial support for the
5 activities identified in this report for enhanced planning, collaboration, and public engagement.

6 The specific commitments in this Action Plan indicate how FDOT will work with local governments
7 and other agencies and partners to carry out the Task Force's recommendations for the M-CORES
8 program in the full study area, augmenting established statutory requirements and FDOT procedures.
9 Specific corridor projects identified through this process will advance based on determination of need,
10 environmental feasibility, economic feasibility, and consistency with applicable local government
11 comprehensive plans and MPO TIPs.

DRAFT

APPENDIX A – TASK FORCE MEMBERS

STATE AGENCIES/COMMISSIONS/PARTNERSHIPS

Organization	Member / Title Name
Florida Department of Transportation	L.K. Nandam, District One Secretary
Florida Department of Transportation	Tracy Hood, District Seven Consultant Project Management Engineer
Florida Department of Environmental Protection	Jennifer Carpenter, South District Assistant Director
Florida Department of Economic Opportunity	Pam Johnson, Deputy Director of Workforce Services
Florida Department of Education	Robert Richards, Supervisor, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
Florida Department of Health	Stephanie Vick, Administrator, Collier County
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission	Tom Graef, Southwest Regional Director
Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services	Janet Taylor, Former Commissioner, Hendry County
Florida Public Service Commission	Mark Futrell, Deputy Executive Director - Technical
Enterprise Florida	Eric Anderson, Director of Rural and Agriculture Development
Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation	Tim McGrath, Field Office Manager – Central Florida
CareerSource Florida	Donna Doubleday, President and Chief Executive Officer, CareerSource Heartland
Volunteer Florida	Rechell Johnson, Financial Analyst

WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICTS

South Florida Water Management District	Melissa M. Roberts, Regulatory Service Center Administrator
Southwest Florida Water Management District	Brian Starford, Operations, Lands and Resource Monitoring Division Director

METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATIONS

Collier Metropolitan Planning Organization	The Hon. Mike McCabe, Board Member <i>Council Member, Naples City Council</i>
Lee County Metropolitan Planning Organization	Donald Scott, Executive Director
Charlotte County-Punta Gorda Metropolitan Planning Organization	The Hon. Chris Constance, Chair <i>Commissioner, Charlotte County Board of County Commissioners</i>
Heartland Regional Transportation Planning Organization	The Hon. Colon Lambert, Board Member <i>Commissioner, Hardee County Board of County Commissioners</i>
Polk Transportation Planning Organization	The Hon. Nat Birdsong, Chair <i>Mayor Pro-Tem, City of Winter Haven</i>

REGIONAL PLANNING COUNCILS

Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council	The Hon. Bill McDaniel, Board Member <i>Chair, Collier County Board of County Commissioners</i>
Central Florida Regional Planning Council	Patricia Steed, Executive Director

COMMUNITY INDIVIDUAL OR MEMBER OF A NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION

Organization	Member / Title Name
Florida Chamber of Commerce	Katie Worthington Decker, President / CEO, Greater Winter Haven Chamber of Commerce
Florida Trucking Association	Dave Rawicz, Safety and Risk Director, Cheney Brothers, Inc.
Florida Rural Water Association	Gerald Buhr, Attorney
Florida Internet & Television Association	Bill Ferry, Senior Director of External Affairs – Florida Region, Comcast
Florida Economic Development Council	Sherry Ambrose, Manager of Economic Development, Florida Power & Light Company
Florida Farm Bureau Federation	Gary Ritter, Assistant Director of Government & Community Affairs
Florida SouthWestern State College	Dr. Jeff Allbritten, President
South Florida State College	Glenn Little, Vice President for Administrative Services
Polk State College	Dr. Angela M. Garcia Falconetti, President
Maxwell, Hendry & Simmons, LLC	Matt Caldwell, Associate

ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS

1000 Friends of Florida	Andrew Dickman, Member, Board of Directors
Audubon Florida	Dr. Paul Gray, Okeechobee Science Coordinator
Defenders of Wildlife	Elizabeth Fleming, Senior Florida Representative
The Everglades Foundation	Shannon Estenoz, Chief Operating Officer
Florida Wildlife Corridor	Jason Lauritsen, Executive Director
The Nature Conservancy	Wendy Mathews, Conservation Projects Manager

LOCAL GOVERNMENTS OFFICIALS

Local governments in Collier County	The Hon. Penny Taylor, Commissioner, Collier County Board of County Commissioners
Local governments in Lee County	The Hon. Cecil Pendergrass, Commissioner, Lee County Board of County Commissioners
Local governments in Charlotte County	The Hon. Ken Doherty, Chair, Charlotte County Board of County Commissioners
Local governments in Hendry County	The Hon. Mitchell Wills, Chair, Hendry County Board of County Commissioners
Local governments in Glades County	The Hon. John Ahern, Commissioner, Glades County Board of County Commissioners
Local governments in DeSoto County	The Hon. Elton Langford, Commissioner, DeSoto County Board of County Commissioners
Local governments in Hardee County	The Hon. Mike Thompson, Chair, Hardee County Board of County Commissioners
Local governments in Highlands County	The Hon. Ron Handley, Commissioner, Highlands County Board of County Commissioners
Local governments in Polk County	The Hon. Rick Wilson, Commissioner, Polk County Board of County Commissioners

APPENDIX B – TASK FORCE WORK PLAN

Meeting	Objectives
<p>Task Force Meeting #1 August 27, 2019 Plenary session with breakouts for each Task Force</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide overview of legislation and M-CORES program • Review Task Force role and responsibilities • Provide briefing on Florida’s Government in the Sunshine Law and Public Records laws • Share background information on corridor planning and Task Force products • Identify potential considerations for future discussion at Task Force meetings • Develop Task Force consensus on work plan, meeting schedule, and overall outcomes
<p>Task Force Meeting #2 and Community Open House October 2019</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce approach for identifying Avoidance, Minimization, Mitigation, and Enhancement (AMME) considerations • Discuss avoidance and minimization considerations for developing corridor opportunities • Discuss potential guiding principles for avoidance and minimization • Receive public comment
<p>Task Force Meeting #3 and Community Open House December 2019</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review M-CORES vision and Task Force goals • Highlight the data/fact sheets by various public agencies and organizational partners • Review corridor planning and project development process • Discuss purpose of the corridor • Discuss regional and local needs • Discuss the AMME considerations for community and economic resources • Receive public comment
<p>Community Open Houses January 2020</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community open houses in each study area to share information about the process and gather public input about AMME considerations
<p>Task Force Meeting #4 February 2020</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receive public comment summary to date • Review economic and workforce development opportunities • Review regional and local plans and visions to identify considerations for corridor planning • Review corridor planning process • Discuss draft AMME guiding principles and identify avoidance areas • Receive public comment

Meeting	Objectives
Task Force Meeting #5 March-April 2020 Note: Task Force Meeting #5 conducted in person for Southwest-Central Florida Corridor Task Force and as a “virtual task force meeting” (distribution of presentations and materials) for Suncoast Corridor and Northern Turnpike Corridor Task Forces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss corridor utility needs and opportunities • Discuss draft high-level needs summary • Review public engagement activities and public input received to date • Review additional data requested by Task Force and proposed Task Force avoidance comments • Discuss existing corridor enhancement opportunities • Refine draft AMME guiding principles • Receive public comment
Task Force Webinar #1 April 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receive update on Task Force activities • Receive briefing on process for identifying avoidance and attraction areas as input to Task Force recommendations • Describe “homework” process for receiving Task Force member input prior to next in-person meeting • Receive public comment
Task Force Webinar #2 May 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receive briefing on emerging technology trends and opportunities • Discuss implications of emerging technologies for corridor development • Receive public comment
Task Force Webinar #3 June 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receive briefing on opportunities for coordination of broadband deployment with corridor development • Obtain Task Force member input on implications for high-level needs and guiding principles • Receive public comment
Task Force Virtual Meeting #4 June 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receive update on Task Force work plan and recommendations framework • Receive update on avoidance and attraction layers • Refine high-level needs and guiding principles and identify potential instructions for project development and beyond • Receive public comment
By June 30, 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FDOT submits report on Construction Workforce Development Program to Governor and Legislature
Task Force Meeting #6 July 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review public engagement activities • Establish initial consensus on high-level needs • Discuss and refine draft guiding principles • Discuss draft instructions for project development and beyond • Review draft report outline and report drafting process • Review corridor planning activities • Receive public comment
July 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Florida Transportation Commission presentation

Meeting	Objectives
Task Force Meeting #7 and Community Open House August 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss how Task Force recommendations will be used to identify and narrow paths/courses • Provide update on recommendations framework and work plan • Establish initial consensus on guiding principles • Discuss draft instructions for project development and beyond • Review draft Task Force report sections with focus on high-level needs • Receive public comment
Task Force Meeting #8 and Community Open House September 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide update on public comments received to date • Discuss how Task Force recommendations will carry forward into planning and project development • Review draft Task Force recommendations and draft final report • Discuss draft plan for future FDOT activities • Discuss plans for task force and public comment on draft report • Receive public comment
September 29, 2020 to October 14, 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public comment period on draft Task Force recommendations
Task Force Meeting #9 and Community Open House October 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receive public comment • Discuss revisions to final draft Task Force report • Adopt final Task Force report
By November 15, 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit Task Force report to Governor and Legislature

Rev. 9/27/2020

APPENDIX C – MEETING LOCATIONS

TASK FORCE MEETINGS

Date	Meeting Title	Location	City	County
August 27, 2019	Plenary Session	Tampa Convention Center	Tampa	Hillsborough
August 27, 2019	Task Force Meeting #1	Tampa Convention Center	Tampa	Hillsborough
October 30, 2019	Task Force Meeting #2	Polk State College – Lakeland Campus	Lakeland	Polk
December 9, 2019	Task Force Meeting #3	LaBelle Civic Center	LaBelle	Hendry
February 13, 2020	Task Force Meeting #4	Doyle Conner Building	Moore Haven	Glades
March 4, 2020	Task Force Meeting #5	Bert Harris Agricultural Center Auditorium	Sebring	Highlands
April 28, 2020	Webinar	Virtual	Virtual	Virtual
May 13, 2020	Webinar #2	Virtual	Virtual	Virtual
June 11, 2020	Webinar #3	Virtual	Virtual	Virtual
June 24, 2020	Virtual Meeting #4	Virtual	Virtual	Virtual
July 23, 2020	Task Force Meeting #6	Virtual Public Viewing: 1) Whaley Hall at Lee County CivicCenter 2) Jack Stroup Civic Center	Virtual Public Viewing: 1) North Fort Myers 2) Sebring	Virtual Public Viewing: 1) Lee 2) Highlands
August 25, 2020	Task Force Meeting #7	Virtual Public Viewing 1) Charlotte Harbor Event and Conference Center 2) Bert Harris Agricultural Center	Virtual Public Viewing: 1) Punta Gorda 2) Sebring	Virtual Public Viewing: 1) Charlotte 2) Highlands
September 23, 2020	Task Force Meeting #8	Virtual Public Viewing 1) Whaley Hall at Lee County CivicCenter 2) UF / IFAS Extension Office	Virtual Public Viewing: 1) North Fort Myers 2) Bartow	Virtual Public Viewing: 1) Lee 2) Polk
October 19, 2020	Task Force Meeting #9	Virtual Public Viewing 1) AdventHealth Fieldhouse & Conference Center 2) Bonita Springs / Estero ELKS Lodge #2753	Virtual Public Viewing: 1) Winter Haven 2) Bonita Springs	Virtual Public Viewing: 1) Polk 2) Lee

COMMUNITY OPEN HOUSES

Date	Meeting Title	Location	City	County
November 12, 2019	Community Open House	Wauchula Train Depot	Wauchula	Hardee
December 12, 2019	Community Open House	North Collier Park – Exhibit Hall	Naples	Collier
January 9, 2020	Community Open House	W.H. Stuart Conference Center	Bartow	Polk
January 30, 2020	Community Open House	Turner Agri-Civic Center Exhibit Hall	Arcadia	DeSoto
August 27, 2020	Community Open House	LaBelle Civic Center (in-person) <i>With Virtual Community Open House Presentation</i>	LaBelle	Hendry
September 24, 2020	Community Open House	North Collier Park – Exhibit Hall (in-person) <i>With Virtual Community Open House Presentation</i>	Naples	Collier
September 29, 2020	Community Open House	Nora Mayo Hall (in-person) <i>With Virtual Community Open House Presentation</i>	Winter Haven	Polk
October 20, 2020	Community Open House	Charlotte Harbor Event and Conference Center (in-person) <i>With Virtual Community Open House Presentation</i>	Punta Gorda	Charlotte