



Special Report

Transportation Policy, Planning and Implementation in Florida

By Vivian Young, AICP

1000 Friends of Florida Communications Director

January 2022



Transportation Policy, Planning and Implementation in Florida

January 2022

This primer provides a brief overview of major components of Florida's transportation policy, planning and implementation process. Policy planning typically involves developing high level plans to address needs for and appropriate means of transportation within a given geographic area. Project plans entail evaluation, planning, design and implementation for a specific corridor, roadway, bike trail or other means of transportation. Many transportation processes and projects rely on an amalgam of federal, state and local public funding so multiple review processes may apply and include opportunities for public input. As is always the case, the earlier citizens engage in the process the greater the chance of making a difference in the outcome.

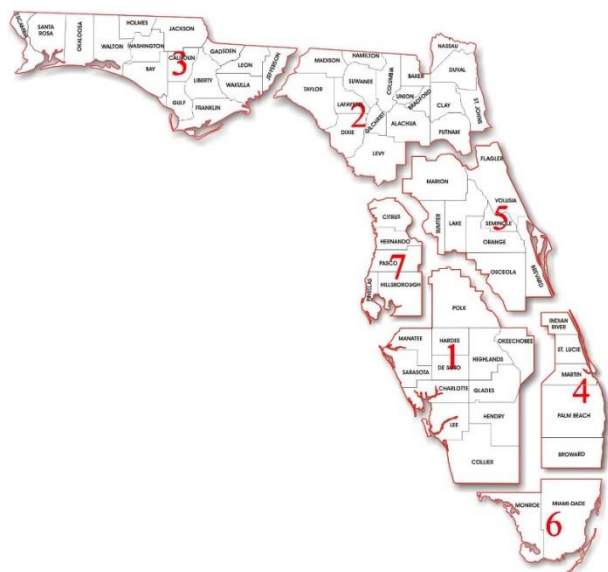
TRANSPORTATION AGENCIES AND PLANS

At the state level, the Florida Department of Transportation (with its seven district offices) takes the lead on planning for non-tolled corridors and roadways, with the Florida Turnpike Enterprise overseeing tolled facilities. Florida's 27 Metropolitan Planning Organizations coordinate transportation planning in urbanized areas of the state while Regional Planning Councils often take the lead on transportation planning for rural areas (typically counties with a population of less than 50,000). County and municipal governments also develop plans and undertake transportation projects within their jurisdictions. These local plans and projects often depend heavily on federal and/or state funding. This section focuses on the Department of Transportation, Metropolitan Planning Organizations and local governments, with other agencies involved in transportation planning covered later.

The **Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT)** is established under the provisions of **Chapter 20.23, F.S.** and is responsible for planning, operating and maintaining the State Highway System (**Chapter 335, F.S.**) and assisting local and regional governments with other transportation systems.

The FDOT Secretary leads the agency and reports directly to the Governor. FDOT is decentralized with seven regions each having a **District Office** managed by its own District Secretary who answers to the FDOT Secretary.

FDOT has a series of plans that govern transportation initiatives in this state. Some, such as the Florida Transportation Plan, establish policy, while others, including the Strategic Intermodal Systems Plan, focus on implementation:

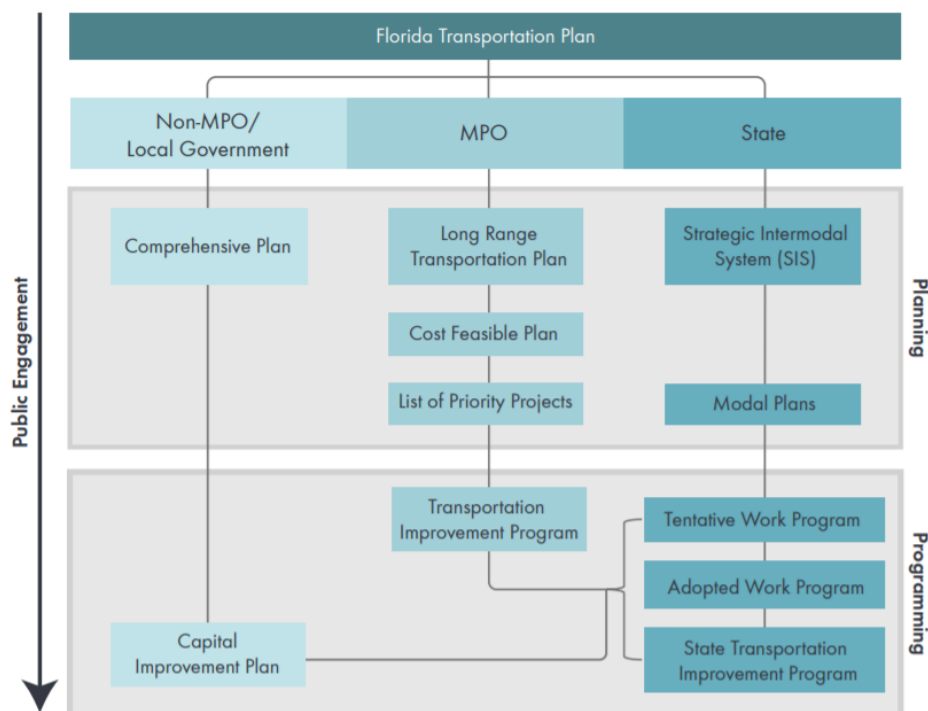


FDOT Districts

Source: Florida Department of Transportation

- **Florida Transportation Plan (FTP)** – This plan is updated at least every 5 years and includes long-range goals, objectives and strategies to meet the needs of Florida’s “entire transportation system.”
- **Strategic Intermodal Systems Plan (SIS)** – Also updated every 5 years, the SIS includes corridors, facilities and services of statewide and multi-regional significance, and guides future state investments in and management of the SIS.
- **FDOT Work Program** – Each year FDOT develops and adopts a five-year work program which includes all projects planned by the department for that period. FDOT holds at least one public hearing in each district, followed by a statewide public hearing by the Florida Transportation Commission. The program is then submitted to the Governor and Legislature. Once adopted, it takes effect July 1 of each year. FDOT may propose an amendment to the Governor, who has the right to approve or deny it.
- **State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP)** – Required by the federal government, the STIP incorporates the first four years of FDOT’s Work Program.
- **Florida Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP)** – The SHSP is the statewide plan focusing on how to accomplish the vision of eliminating fatalities and reducing serious injuries on all public roads. The SHSP is updated at least every five years by FDOT in coordination with statewide, regional, and local safety partners.

FDOT, MPOs, and Local Governments Roles in Transportation Planning and Programming



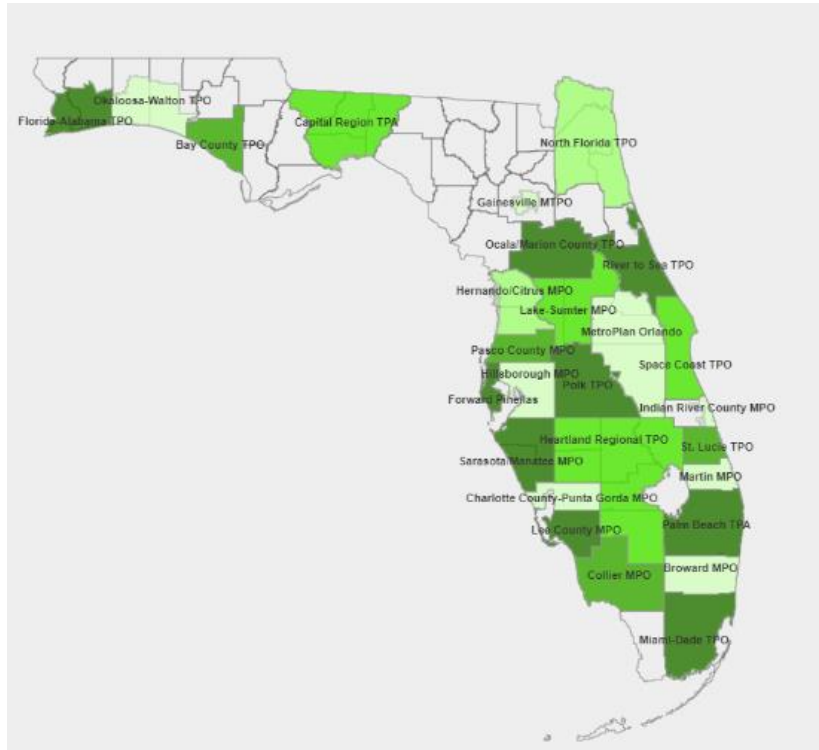
Source: Florida Department of Transportation

To find out more see [*Partnering with FDOT: A Resource Guide for Local Governments*](#)

Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs),

established under **Chapter 339.175, F.S.**, are federally mandated transportation planning organizations comprised of representatives from local governments and transportation authorities. MPOs develop and maintain federally required transportation plans to ensure that federal funds are used to support local priorities. Federal law requires that MPOs involve the public in the planning process.

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



Florida's Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs)

Source: Florida MPOAC

Information on each of Florida's MPOs can be found at the website of the **Florida Metropolitan Planning Organization Advisory Council**. The MPOAC Governing Board makes decisions on behalf of the MPOAC and consists of one representative from each MPO in the State.

The Florida Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) engages in transportation planning as well. To ensure consistency between state, regional and local plans, each year DEO reviews the FDOT Work Program and MPO transportation improvement programs to ensure that projects are consistent with the appropriate local comprehensive plans. If a project is inconsistent, an explanation on why the inconsistency should be undertaken is included.

THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Local governments play an important role in determining that a transportation project is a local need and priority. According to FDOT, "MPOs and local governments prioritize projects, while the FDOT programs or budgets projects." Each should identify the need as early as possible. This entails the local government identifying the need and its priority in the community's comprehensive plan and capital improvements plan (CIP), and the MPO including it in its Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). If it is a high-priority, near-term need it should be "prioritized through the MPO's Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), which contains a cost feasible plan (CFP) component. The highest priority, near-term needs are identified through the List of Priority Projects (LOPP), which feeds projects into the FDOT Work Program, the

Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), and the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP)."

As noted, transportation is an integral component of a community's comprehensive plan, which can play a powerful role in shaping the future of that community. Florida law (**Chapter 163.3177, F.S.**) requires each county and municipal government to adopt and maintain a local comprehensive plan consistent with state and regional plans. Each plan "...shall provide the principles, guidelines, standards, and strategies for the orderly and balanced future economic, social, physical, environmental, and fiscal development of the area that reflects community commitments to implement the plan and its elements. These principles and strategies shall guide future decisions in a consistent manner and shall contain programs and activities to ensure comprehensive plans are implemented."

The comprehensive plan must include certain subsections called "elements," which provide specifics on how the plan is to be implemented. A **transportation element** is required for each comprehensive plan, the purpose of which is:

...to plan for a multimodal transportation system that places emphasis on public transportation systems, where feasible. The element shall provide for a safe, convenient multimodal transportation system, coordinated with the future land use map or map series and designed to support all elements of the comprehensive plan....

The element shall be coordinated with the plans and programs of any applicable metropolitan planning organization, transportation authority, Florida Transportation Plan, and Department of Transportation adopted work program....

Each local government's transportation element shall address traffic circulation, including the types, locations, and extent of existing and proposed major thoroughfares and transportation routes, including bicycle and pedestrian ways.

Municipalities with a population greater than 50,000 and counties greater than 75,000 in population must also include mass transit in their transportation elements.

Local governments may **designate transportation corridors** that meet certain requirements in **Chapter 337.273, F.S.** and adopt a management ordinance. The transportation element "...shall include a map or map series showing the general location of the existing and proposed transportation system features and shall be coordinated with the future land use map or map series."

Each comprehensive plan is also required to have a **capital improvements element** to "...consider the need for and the location of public facilities in order to encourage the efficient use of such facilities...." including, of course, transportation facilities. This element should include principles on constructing, extending, increasing capacity and other measures to bring the transportation system to an acceptable level of service. It shall also include the estimated costs, projected revenue, and a five-year-schedule for undertaking improvements. The element must be reviewed annually by the local government.

Comprehensive plans include a **future land use element**, a **future land use map (FLUM)**, and other components that guide development and related transportation. Local governments should use comprehensive planning tools to identify appropriate locations for transportation infrastructure and

designate special resource areas where certain types of transportation infrastructure should be avoided or designed sensitively.

Transportation infrastructure spurs development and development, in turn, may spur the need for more transportation infrastructure. Additionally, constructing new or expanding existing transportation infrastructure can result in “induced demand,” where demand for, usage of and congestion levels on enhanced facilities may actually increase once capacity is expanded.

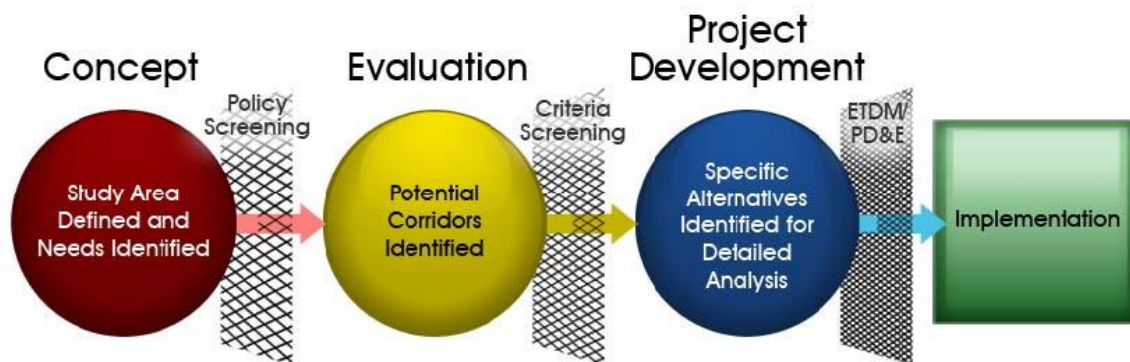
To save taxpayer dollars and protect sensitive areas, tremendous care should be taken to site new development near existing urbanized areas to take advantage of existing infrastructure and expand opportunities for transit. Care also must be taken to avoid the approval of inappropriate new development or extension of infrastructure into rural and agricultural lands, again to save taxpayer dollars, maintain the agricultural economy, and protect significant environmental and community resources. Communities are encouraged to take full advantage of their comprehensive planning process to shape a sustainable and financially responsible future.

To find out more see 1000 Friends' [Community Planning in Florida](#)

FDOT PROJECT PLANNING

After the development of the plans discussed above, the next step in the FDOT process is to undertake planning for specific transportation corridors and other road projects to implement those plans. These are required to be consistent with the plans described earlier and are discussed briefly here.

Corridor Planning is often undertaken in state and/or regional transportation planning and involves a comprehensive analysis of a transportation corridor. Florida's first major corridor planning initiative designed to incorporate environmental concerns related to the Wekiva Parkway in Central Florida, which resulted in the [Wekiva River Basin Coordinating Committee Final Report](#). After the report was completed, then-Governor Bush appointed a commission, also representing diverse interests, to oversee the project. The process has been widely hailed by conservationists as a model for highway planning.



Source: Florida Department of Transportation

As noted above, FDOT has a three-stage process for planning statewide corridors:

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

Some projects follow the **Alternative Corridor Evaluation (ACE) process** which is used to identify, evaluate, and eliminate alternative corridors on qualifying projects prior to the PD&E phase. The decisions made in an ACE can be used to refine the purpose and need for a project; determine the project area; define general travel modes or corridors; describe the general environmental setting for a project; identify preliminary environmental impacts and mitigation; and develop and refine a range of alternatives to be considered in detail during the PD&E Study.

Authorized under 2019 legislation, **M-CORES** (Multi-Use Corridors of Regional Economic Significance) called for creation of a 330-mile network of toll roads in three corridors through 19 predominantly rural counties in western Florida. As part of the process, three task forces were convened and developed recommendations on planning and designing toll roads in these corridors. The M-CORES legislation was repealed in 2021, but proposals for toll and other roadways in the three corridors are moving forward. The 2021 legislation calls for future transportation planning in these areas to “take into consideration” the task force recommendations in the planning process in these corridors. Visit [1000 Friends of Florida’s M-CORES webpages](#) to find out more about this project and its status.

The Project Development Process has six phases. The first phase project is the **Planning Phase**, where initial concepts are laid out. In the case of corridors, this can entail the Alternative Corridor Evaluation (ACE) project described above. During this phase, projects go through the **Efficient Transportation Decision Making (EDTM) process**. EDTM is Florida’s initial screening process to review the potential environmental and cultural impacts of certain transportation projects. Stakeholders include Metropolitan Planning Organizations, local, state and federal government agencies, Native American tribes, and the public, who may provide input to FDOT during the planning and programming processes. This is intended to identify issues and resolve disputes before the project is forwarded to the federally mandated PD&E Process. The Environmental Technical Advisory Team (ETAT) provides input regarding alternatives. ETAT input helps to determine the feasibility of a proposed project and focus the analysis of the ACE and Project Development and Environment (PD&E).

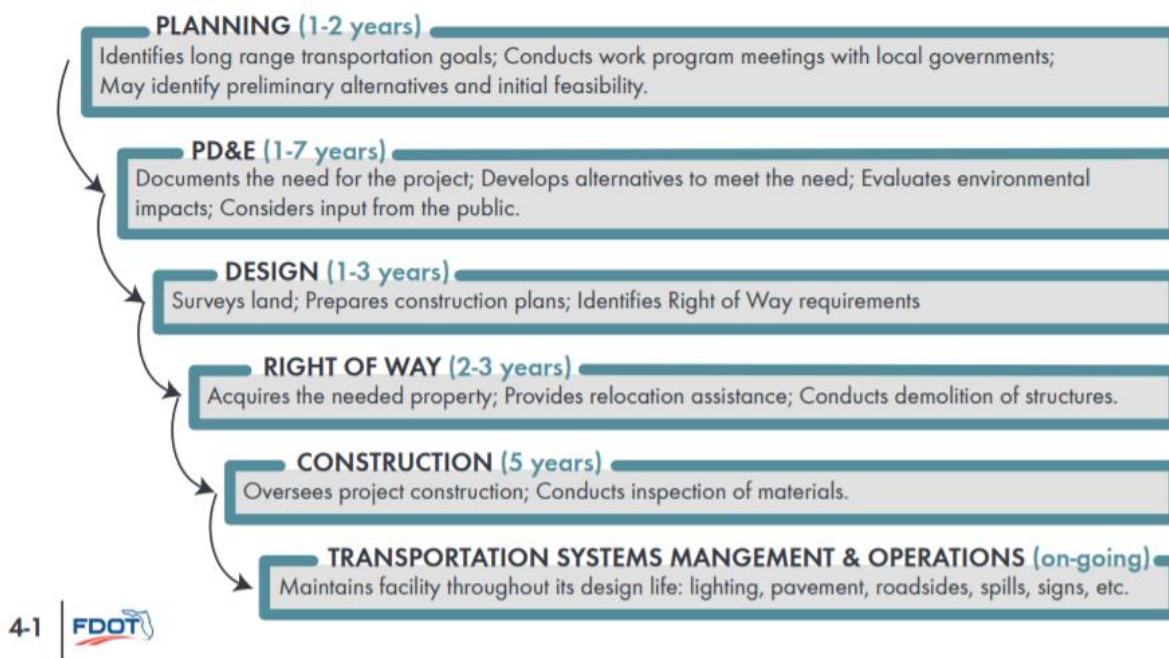
Projects that move forward to the second step, the **Project Development & Environment (PD&E) Process**, are further evaluated for potential physical, economic, or environmental impacts. It is not unusual for parts of the Planning and PD&E Phases to overlap.

The PD&E process is pursuant to National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, which requires that federal agencies (and state projects using federal funding) evaluate the environmental impacts of their actions. FDOT has assumed the Federal Highway Administration’s (FHWA’s) responsibilities under NEPA for projects related to the State Highway System (SHS) whose federal funding comes from FHWA. FDOT

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

Additionally, the **Florida Department of Environmental Protection** evaluates impacts of proposed projects on natural resources, air quality and other environmental issues; Florida's five **Water Management Districts** assess potential impacts on water resources within their jurisdiction; and the **Florida Department of State** evaluates impacts on cultural resources.

Overview of project development cycle and phases:



Source: Florida Department of Transportation

There is much less opportunity to play a role in the final phases of the project process. When a project reaches the **Design Phase**, a set of plans are developed to build that project. The **Right of Way Acquisition Phase** is when needed land is acquired to construct the roads. The **Construction Phase** is for those projects currently being built throughout the state. After projects are completed, they go through the ongoing **Transportation Systems Management & Operations Phase**, which addresses maintenance and other issues.

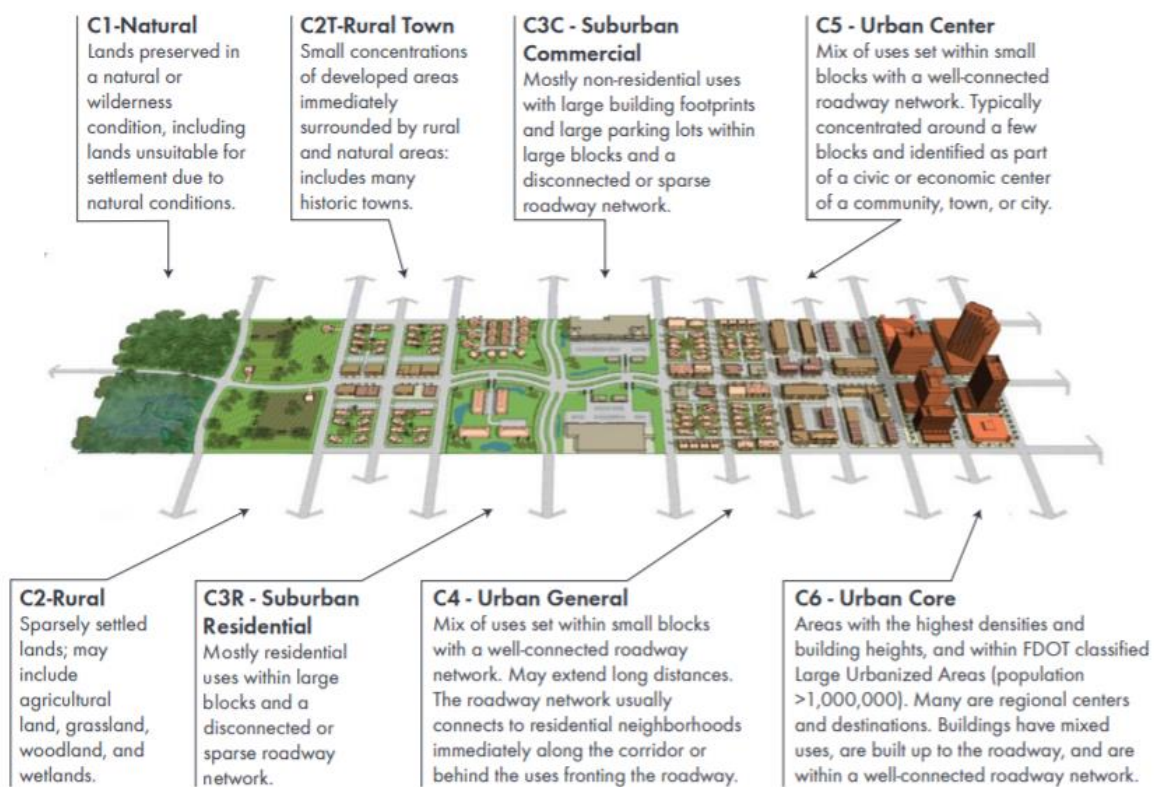
FDOT PLANNING TOOLS

Traditional transportation planning focused primarily on using automobiles to move people and goods as quickly and efficiently as possible to move from point A to point B. But in recent decades, there has been growing awareness of the negative impact this has on our communities and quality of life. Alternative approaches in Florida (and elsewhere) include:

Multimodal Planning is intended to “... provide safe and efficient facilities for all types of transportation including vehicles, pedestrians, bicycles, freight, and transit.” It involves greater coordination between land development and transportation than in the past. Strategies may include changes to land use policies, projects with bike paths to serve a wider variety of users or narrowing roadways to reduce speed and enhance safety.

Complete Streets in Florida was adopted through FDOT’s **Complete Streets Policy** in 2014. According to FDOT, “a **Complete Street** is one that is designed for users of all ages and abilities – including bicyclists, pedestrians, transit vehicles, freight handlers, and motorists. These transportation facilities are context-sensitive, and in Florida, they vary widely based on each community’s location, desires, and needs. Regardless of context, all of Florida’s Complete Streets strive to provide a multitude of benefits, including ‘increased safety, enhanced mobility, improved connectivity, enriched quality of life, and economic development.’”

FDOT CONTEXT CLASSIFICATIONS



Source: Florida Department of Transportation

Context Classification is a tool used by FDOT to “put the right street in the right place.” It includes eight classifications for roadways which “together with its transportation characteristics, provides information about who the users are along the roadway, the regional and local travel demand of the roadway, and the challenges and opportunities of each roadway user.” FDOT also reviews local comprehensive plans, land development regulations and other local planning tools to help determine the classification. This helps shape design features including speed, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, and more.

The FDOT Design Manual includes the principles of Complete Streets as “the foundation of all roadway planning, design, construction, and operations in the state.” It also includes the Context Classification Guide. The **Design Manual** is updated annually, with the 2022 update to include additional information on target speed setting.

Florida’s Scenic Highways are authorized under **Chapter 335.093, F.S.** which gives FDOT the authority to designate public roads as scenic highways in order to “preserve, maintain, and protect a part of Florida’s cultural, historical, and scenic routes for vehicular, bicycle, and pedestrian travel.” Florida has 27 scenic highways, six of which have received federal designation of **National Scenic Byway**, and two which have obtained the highest designation of **All American Road**.

OTHER AGENCIES

While FDOT, MPOs and local governments are the primary players in transportation planning, the Florida Turnpike Enterprise, Florida’s Expressway Authorities, and in some cases Regional Planning Councils play a role in transportation planning in their respective jurisdictions. This section provides a brief introduction to each of these, including how to find out more information.

The Florida Turnpike Enterprise (FTE), established in **Chapter 338.2216, F.S.** as a “separate business unit” of FDOT, also undertakes transportation planning and implementation. The FTE has its own **Five-Year Work Program** which “... is the result of an ongoing process that prioritizes and funds upcoming transportation system improvements during the next five fiscal years. The work program provides clear direction on what projects to include, when and where to build projects, and how to fund projects.” The FTE handles all operations on every FDOT owned and operated toll road and bridge.



Florida’s Expressway Authorities

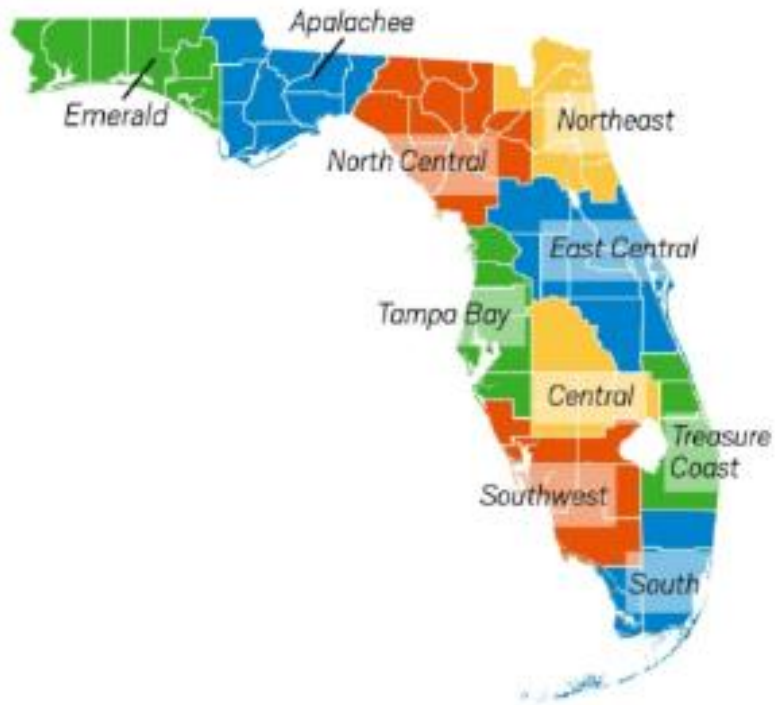
under **Chapter 348, F.S.**, are regional agencies empowered to develop tolled road systems within their jurisdiction, with main examples being the **Central Florida Expressway Authority**, **Tampa Hillsborough Expressway Authority**, and **Miami-Dade County Expressway Authority**. See the individual websites for more information on these authorities and their planning processes and projects.

Florida Turnpike Enterprise Turnpikes

Source: Florida Turnpike Enterprise

Regional Planning Councils (RPCs),

created under **Chapter 186.504, F.S.**, also play a role in transportation planning in Florida. Florida's 10 RPCs are comprised of local elected and appointed officials and lay citizens who consider planning and development issues within their jurisdictions from a multi-county perspective. They review and comment on local comprehensive plan amendments, develop Strategic Regional Policy Plans that include regional goals and policies for transportation, natural resources, and other issues. In areas without MPOs (typically counties with populations of less than 50,000) they may assist local governments with their transportation planning. More information can be found from the **Florida Regional Council Association**.



Florida's Regional Planning Councils

Source: Florida Regional Council Association

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Transportation plans and projects often include an amalgam of federal, state and local funding. Each of the public agencies discussed in this paper provide opportunity for public participation, both for agency policy plans and for specific transportation projects. Unfortunately, there is not a single “clearinghouse” to follow myriad transportation plans and projects from beginning to end.

Additionally, opportunities for public input are often more limited than in Florida's comprehensive planning process. Unlike the local comprehensive planning process, where there are defined opportunities to speak before decision-making bodies to raise issues and share your perspective, transportation planning often has fewer opportunities for public speaking. It is not uncommon for transportation planning agencies to hold workshops with a series of stations where staff explain components of the project. Written correspondence, including emails, are often the best way to share your perspective.

If you want to track or share input on a particular plan or project, below is some guidance on where to start:

- **Local Government** – Both your county and, if appropriate, municipal government play an important role in the transportation planning process and it is important to stay abreast of the local planning and development process.

- **Metropolitan Planning Organizations** – Find the link to your MPO at the [MPOAC website](#). MPOs develop Long Range Transportation Plans and engage in both policy and project planning for larger metropolitan areas.
- **Regional Planning Councils** – RPCs also engage in transportation planning, particularly in more rural areas not served by MPOs. You may find the link to your RPC at the [FRPCA website](#).
- **The Florida Turnpike Enterprise** – The FTE maintains a [list of proposed Turnpike projects](#) organized by region and county. Contact information is available at floridasturnpike.com/about/contact-us.
- **Florida Expressway Authorities** -- These include the [Central Florida Expressway Authority](#), [Tampa Hillsborough Expressway Authority](#), and [Miami-Dade County Expressway Authority](#). See the individual websites for more information on these authorities, their planning processes and projects, and contact information.
- **FDOT District Offices** – District offices play a major role in both policy and project planning and provide opportunities for public input. [Connect with your district office](#) by using the links on this page.
- **FDOT** – For issues related to public participation, FDOT maintains a [webpage](#) that includes links to its numerous documents on public participation, and also has a lengthy [Public Involvement Handbook](#) to guide government agencies in their outreach. The FDOT [Office of Policy and Planning](#) oversees the development of required state plans and policy documents. FDOT also maintains an [interactive map of current transportation projects](#) and you may also check out their [ETDM webpage](#) for more information on the environmental review process for specific projects.
- **Your Local Legislative Delegation** – You may also wish to share your concerns with [your local legislative delegation](#), particularly for transportation plans and projects that are mandated in state legislation.

Issues you raise during the public participation process depend on where the plan or project is in the process. If a project is in the design phase, questioning its need is likely to be unsuccessful but you may advocate for design improvements. It is important to remember that Florida's plans and projects are required to be based on appropriate plans, studies and other data, so try to secure access to key documents to help shape your views.

Some issues you may wish to explore include:

- **Is there a need for the proposed infrastructure?** Is this a current need or a future projected need? Could current and/or proposed technology or practices (such as increased working from home) significantly alter those projections? Will this plan or project result in induced demand, where additional capacity spurs additional traffic and, often, new associated development? Is this taken into account?
- **Is the plan or project financially feasible?** Are the sources of funding sufficient to cover the costs for initial planning or construction? How much will annual and long-term maintenance cost? Are there sufficient sources of income to cover these costs over the long term?
- **What vital resources are being impacted, and at what cost?** Will the project impact critical drinking water supplies, carbon sequestration sites, or other essential resources? What economic impacts are there, in terms of impacts on agriculture, main streets, and other vital

economic drivers? Will this have impacts on critical community resources, including historic areas, traditional neighborhoods, areas of significance to underserved communities of color?

- **What alternatives exist and have they been fully explored?** Could the current and projected future transportation needs instead be addressed through mass transit, improved broadband to enhance rural connectivity, incentives for businesses to allow employees to work from home where feasible, or other means?

If the plan or project moves forward, there should be a robust discussion on which area or route poses the fewest negative impacts, and how state-of-the-art design can minimize impacts on drinking water sources, wildlife habitat, historic areas, significant communities, and other resources.

As this paper has shown, transportation planning is a very complex process. It is important to determine early in the process the avenues for providing your input. If you are to help shape any outcomes, it is essential to identify the involved agencies and parties and engage as early as possible.

**Find out more about transportation planning at 1000 Friends of Florida's
Transportation Planning and Community Planning webpages.
Find out more about 1000 Friends at www.1000fof.org.**