This primer provides a brief overview of major components of Florida’s transportation policy, planning and implementation process. Many transportation 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 responsible for planning, operating and maintaining the State Highway System 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:

- **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.

To find out more see *Partnering with FDOT: A Resource Guide for Local Governments*
Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) 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.

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.

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).”
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.

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 corridor of toll roads 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 steps. 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, economical, 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.

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 maintains an **interactive map of current transportation projects** and FTE maintains a **list of proposed Turnpike projects** organized by region and county.

### 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.’”
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, and the 2022 update will include additional information on target speed setting.

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), created in 2002 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 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.

Regional Planning Councils (RPCs) 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.
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Transportation plans and projects often include an amalgam of federal, state and local funding. All of the public agencies discussed in this paper provide opportunity for public participation, both for the agency plans and for the transportation projects. 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. Each of the major agencies mentioned, including MPOs, RPCs, local governments, the Florida Turnpike Enterprise, and Florida’s Expressway Authorities have processes for public engagement in the development of plans and implementation of projects.

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 engage as soon 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.