



**TPO Board Meeting**

Marion County Commission Auditorium  
601 SE 25<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Ocala, FL 34471  
June 23, 2025  
3:00 PM

**MINUTES**

**Members Present:**

Councilmember Ire Bethea, Sr.  
Commissioner Craig Curry  
Councilmember James Hilty  
Councilman Tim Inskeep  
Councilmember Barry Mansfield  
Mayor Ben Marciano  
Commissioner Michelle Stone  
Commissioner Carl Zalak

**Members Not Present:**

Commissioner Kathy Bryant  
Councilmember Kristen Dreyer  
Commissioner Ray Dwyer  
Commissioner Matt McClain

**Others Present:**

Rob Balmes, TPO  
Shakayla Irby, TPO  
Kia Powell, FDOT  
Jon Scarfe, FDOT  
Clayton Murch, Marion Senior Services  
Karen Williams, Marion Senior Services  
Sean Lanier, City of Ocala  
Noel Cooper, City of Ocala  
Darren Park, City of Ocala  
Steven Cohoon, Marion County  
Matthew Cretul, Marion County  
Leyi Zhang, Kittelson & Associates  
Franco Saraceno, Kittelson & Associates  
Other members of the public not signed in.

### **Item 1. Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance**

Chairman Carl Zalak called the meeting to order at 3:00pm and led the board in the Pledge of Allegiance.

### **Item 2. Roll Call**

Administrative Assistant Shakayla Irby called the roll and a quorum was present.

### **Item 3. Proof of Publication**

Administrative Assistant Shakayla Irby stated the meeting had been published online to the TPO's website, as well as the City of Ocala, Belleview, Marion County, and Dunnellon's websites on June 16, 2025. The meeting had also been published to the TPOs Facebook and X pages.

### **Item 4. Consent Agenda**

*Mr. Bethea made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. Mr. Marciano seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.*

### **Item 5A. Fiscal Years (FY) 2026 to 2030 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)**

TPO Director Rob Balmes summarized that last month he presented a detailed draft of the Fiscal Year 2026-2030 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) to both committees. The draft was made available to the public on May 6th, with a presentation also provided to the TPO Board on May 27th.

Mr. Balmes noted that feedback received included comments related to the US 41 corridor and general traffic conditions. He also acknowledged valuable feedback from the East Central Florida Regional Planning Council, which suggested improvements to project descriptions, particularly for safety-related projects.

On June 10, 2025, the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) and Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) recommended the adoption of the TIP at the annual joint meeting.

TPO staff recommended adoption of the FY 2026 to 2030 TIP.

*Ms. Stone made a motion to adopt the FY 2026 to 2030 TIP. Mr. Hilty seconded it, and a roll-call vote was called. The motion passed unanimously.*

### **Item 5B. 2025 List of Priority Projects (LOPP)**

Mr. Balmes said that at the May 27, 2025, Board meeting, TPO staff presented the draft 2025 List of Priority Projects (LOPP), including recommendations from the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). The recommendations were recognized and accepted without formal action.

The draft 2025 LOPP was then updated to include the recommendations and presented on June 10 to the TAC and Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) at the annual joint meeting. The revised draft presented to the board reflected approved changes to the Policies and Procedures, including the removal of the Top 20 List, the addition of a Bridge List, and the addition of a Transit List.

Mr. Balmes said there had been one request from the Marion County Office of the County Engineer (OCE) regarding the Safety and Operations List project ranked #5. The Maricamp Road at Baseline Road Intersection Project had been labeled “Intersection and Flyover,” and OCE requested that it be referred to as “Intersection.”

On June 10, 2025, the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) and Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) recommended the adoption of the 2025 List of Priority Projects (LOPP) at the annual joint meeting.

TPO staff recommended approval of the 2025 LOPP.

Ms. Stone made a motion to approve the 2025 LOPP. Mr. Curry seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

### **Item 5C. 2025 List of Regional Priorities**

Mr. Balmes explained that the regionally significant projects are submitted annually to the Central Florida MPO Alliance. Typically, the Alliance approves the list in October before submission to the state. He noted that there were four key lists related to the comprehensive regional priorities: the TRIP (Transportation Regional Incentive Program) list, the Strategic Intermodal System (SIS) list, Tier 3 SUN Trail projects, and the Regional Transportation Systems Management and Operations (TSMO) list.

For the TRIP list, the same two projects from the previous year were carried forward, with no comments or recommendations for additional projects. The SIS list included projects primarily focused on the I-75 and SR 40 corridors, including the SR 40 widening, which was added to the fifth year (2030) of the TIP. Some of the SR 40 segments had right-of-way funding secured, and portions also had environmental funding in place, allowing them to move forward. Additionally, a PD&E study was added for SR 326 from SR 40 to US 301.

Mr. Balmes mentioned that the OCE requested adding SR 35 (Baseline Road) at SR 464 (Maricamp Road) to the Regional TRIP List and changing the project description to “Intersection Improvements” only, removing the reference to a flyover.

Mr. Balmes emphasized that for a project to be added to the TRIP list, it needed to demonstrate regional significance and have formal letters of support from at least two contiguous MPOs.

The 49th Street interchange project was given as an example, which received support from the Lake-Sumter MPO.

Regarding the Tier 3 SUN Trail, the Santos to Baseline project remained fully funded, while the three previously unfunded projects continued to be the top priorities with no changes from last year.

Under Regional TSMO, a new project was added for the US 27/I-75 interchange area, including operational improvements at NW 44th Avenue, NW 35th Street, and interchange ramps. Two other projects from last year remained: a potential future roundabout at Baseline Road and SR 40, and intersection/ rail improvements in the Belleview area.

Mr. Marciano made a motion to approve the 2025 Regional Priorities with the addition requested by OCE. Mr. Bethea seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

### **Item 6A. TPO Active Transportation Plan**

Leyi Zhang, with Kittelson & Associates, provided an update on the Active Transportation Plan. She reviewed the existing conditions and analysis completed so far, which included evaluating demographics, commuter modes, existing facilities, safety, and land use. The team assessed sidewalks, bike lanes, and trails across the county, noting areas with good connectivity and identifying gaps, particularly along major roadways.

Ms. Zhang described the Level of Traffic Stress (LTS) analysis, which measured the comfort and safety of walking and biking facilities, and highlighted where conditions were low or high stress. She also explained the accessibility analysis, which evaluated how well key destinations—such as schools, hospitals, parks, and community centers—were accessible by walking and biking on low-stress roadways.

Findings indicated that urban areas, like downtown Ocala and Belleview, had higher accessibility, while destinations along major high-speed roads had lower accessibility.

The team identified gaps in low-stress connections to destinations and planned to develop strategies to address them.

Next steps included finalizing the gap analysis, incorporating feedback, identifying additional projects, and reviewing local projects already in progress. Ms. Zhang noted that an online interactive map and printed maps were available for stakeholders to review and mark up with additional comments or project ideas.

Chairman Zalak asked for clarification on whether, once the process was complete, a permanent listing of roadways and connections needing improvement was created.

Ms. Zhang explained that the analysis she was presenting served as a reference and guidance to identify gaps in pedestrian and bicycle facilities and connections throughout the county. She noted that not all areas identified by the analysis were intended to be improved, as some were on major, high-speed roadways where pedestrian or bicycle facilities might not be appropriate. She added that recommendations also depended on the development, land use, and context of each area, and the analysis was meant to guide the process of identifying locations for improvement.

Mr. Marciano noted that Highway 200 was listed as an LTS 4, indicating poor conditions. He asked whether the current improvements on Highway 200 included upgrades to sidewalks or other pedestrian facilities, mentioning concerns from the elderly population about safety when walking in the area.

Ms. Zhang stated that improvements to the sidewalks on Highway 200 would enhance safety and comfort for pedestrians. She noted, however, that while the upgrades would help, the LTS rating might not decrease significantly due to the high speed and volume of traffic on the road.

Mr. Balmes explained that on a roadway with a posted speed of 45 mph and 25,000 vehicles per day, the level of traffic stress remains high, even with a buffered bike lane. He noted that separated multi-use facilities provide safer and more comfortable options for biking and walking, particularly for the general public, while high-speed, high-traffic roads are typically suitable only for avid cyclists. He added that the analysis aimed to identify ways to make facilities more comfortable for everyone or to find alternative routes and connections.

Ms. Stone asked whether the report would provide guidance to help identify grants for improving some of the identified locations.

Ms. Zhang stated that the final report would include a section providing a general identification of potential funding sources, while any detailed analysis would be referred to Rob's discretion.

Mr. Balmes stated that the plan was to develop a robust set of project lists, working with staff to leverage them for future federal and state grant opportunities. He added that the projects would also be tied into the LOPP process.

Mr. Bethea noted that the survey and analysis did not cover the metro areas within the city, focusing instead on state roads and main corridors.

Ms. Zhang explained that the external analysis primarily focused on roads eligible for federal aid, while the accessibility analysis also considered how local roads connect to key destinations within the city.

Ms. Zhang explained that roadways not on the federal network, such as local streets, were assigned lower values in the analysis due to limited data, lower speeds, and lower volumes. These results contributed to the roadway network connecting key destinations.

Mr. Balmes stated that an existing conditions analysis was conducted using the City of Ocala's sidewalk network, which was included in the assessment to help identify gaps in pedestrian facilities.

Chairman Zalak noted that he was beginning to understand the concept of comfort levels and the difference between separated and non-separated roadways. He asked whether the data collection included counts of actual users, such as pedestrians, cyclists, people with disabilities, or children, to better represent the level of service.

Ms. Zhang explained that the analysis did not involve collecting data on individual users or conducting surveys. Instead, a handbook was used to determine the attributes included in the assessment. She noted that consideration of individual users was likely part of developing the flow chart, which was then used to evaluate the facilities and roadways without collecting user-specific data.

Chairman Zalak asked whether, once the study was completed, it would be shared with the Board, TPO staff, or individual municipalities to guide project programming, and whether the study would account for actual users when planning improvements.

Ms. Zhang explained that the analysis in the ATP was a high-level, countywide assessment. She noted that more detailed, user-level analysis would occur during project programming to account for actual use of the facilities. The accessibility analysis provided an overview of areas with higher predicted walking and biking activity based on key destinations, but it did not replace actual counts of pedestrians and cyclists. She added that more robust analysis would be conducted when determining the specifics and phasing of individual projects.

#### **Item 6B. Local Government Transportation/ Capital Improvement Projects**

Mr. Balmes stated that the previous month there had been a general discussion regarding capital improvement programs beyond the TPO's Transportation Improvement Program, including those of the county and the cities of Ocala, Belleview, and Dunnellon. A request by Chairman Zalak had been made for city and county staff to attend the following meeting to discuss priority projects in their respective jurisdictions, both currently programmed and planned for the future. He noted that the agenda had included the county's adopted Transportation Improvement Program and a summary of the City of Ocala's capital projects, along with a citywide map depicting the projects. Mr. Balmes acknowledged the attendance of Sean Linear, City of Ocala Engineer, and Steven Cahoon, Marion County Engineer, for this discussion.

Mr. Lanier stated that most of the improvements consisted of signal timing adjustments, with some intersection improvements aimed at relieving congestion. Projects included both FDOT roadways and city-county intersections where one approach was managed by the city and the other by the county. He noted several four-lane widening projects, including the completion of 36th Avenue into the county. While the railroad overpass had already been completed, the section from the overpass to 35th Street still required widening, as did a short section from 14th Street to the widened portion over the railroad overpass.

Mr. Cohoon stated that since joining Marion County, Mr. Lanier and his team, as well as the City of Belleview, had been very helpful and supportive. He noted ongoing coordination on several projects, including the 40th/49th interchange and intersection improvements, where he had recently worked with the City of Ocala to expedite permitting for drill shafts and mast arms. He highlighted the Emerald Road project, which, although outside city limits, required coordination due to connections with the City of Ocala spray field. Additionally, discussions were underway for widening 35th Street and coordinating utility extensions through interlocal agreements. Mr. Cohoon emphasized the city's efforts in signal timing and noted that the forthcoming ATM master plan would be used to further improve the overall network, with continued collaboration on major projects including the 40<sup>th</sup>/49<sup>th</sup> Street utility work.

Mr. Cohoon stated that progress on the project had been positive, with visible construction activity and rapid progress. He noted that the project was still projected to open by the end of the year. He added that signalization at the north end, in coordination with the city, was expected to be completed by July, or shortly thereafter, with overall work moving quickly.

Chairman Zalak noted that additional relief measures would need to be considered, as long-term issues may persist. He expressed concern about traffic from Osceola Boulevard, including vehicles coming off SR 200 and 49th Street and heading toward the bypass, and asked whether there were alternative plans for that roadway.

Mr. Lanier stated that traffic was currently flowing well on 31st Street and 42nd Street. He noted that once the signalization on 44th Avenue was fully in use, increased traffic could be expected as drivers use it to navigate around the city, bypass I-75, and access the east side of the interstate or other interchanges.

Mr. Marciano asked whether the timeline for the 49th Street improvements aligned with the 44th Avenue project and whether both projects, managed by the city and county, were projected to be completed by the end of the year.

Mr. Lanier stated that the final signal on 20th Street and 44th Avenue was in the process of being awarded, after two previous no-bid attempts. He noted that once awarded, the signals were expected to be substantially complete by December, allowing continuous travel from US 27 to SR 200 without signal interruptions. He added that bids had been received for the widening of 44th Avenue from 20th Street southwest to SR 40, including the addition of inside lanes, with the bid expected to go to council at the next meeting or on August 1st.

Mr. Inskeep asked whether there was a timeframe for the modifications to the CR 484 bridge over the Rainbow River.

Mr. Cohoon stated that at the last Marion County Board of County Commissioners meeting, a FDOT agreement was approved to amend the previous state-funded agreement and reduce the project scope. Following that approval, the agreement was transmitted back to FDOT, with advertisement expected the week of July 4th. He noted that the procurement process would likely take an additional three to four months, but the project was ready to move forward.

Mr. Inskeep asked whether the bridge modifications would include fencing to prevent people from accessing the river from the bridge. He noted concerns about individuals removing concrete bags used to stabilize the shore, children throwing them into the river, campfires under the bridge, and people hanging hammocks from the bridge piping.

Mr. Cohoon acknowledged that there were constraints along the corridor and stated that he would follow up with the plans.

Chairman Zalak stated that the county needed to improve traffic signal timing, as it frequently experienced issues. He noted that many drivers were unaware of where city and county boundaries began. He emphasized the importance of coordinating signal timing between jurisdictions and asked whether there were ways for the teams to improve collaboration on this.

Mr. Cohoon stated that the county needed to catch up on many interconnections. He noted that the city was slightly ahead in ensuring physical loops were in place and mentioned that, while the county sometimes had the infrastructure, it was not always connected; however, this could be accomplished.

The discussion focused on peak-hour traffic volumes, when crashes were more likely, and emergency vehicles could disrupt signal coordination. Chairman Zalak noted it could take over ten minutes for lights to return to coordinated timing after such events and asked if the process could be expedited. Mr. Cohoon explained there was no quick fix, as signals had to gradually cycle back, and not all were connected or configured the same way.

Ms. Stone discussed the reliability of signal connections in rural areas, where many operated on cellular modems susceptible to outages. Broadband expansion projects by providers such as Spectrum and Cox were noted as opportunities to connect signals to broadband fiber.

Mr. Cohoon explained that while the city had its own fiber network, most county systems were closed-loop and not directly connected to broadband, and installing dedicated “dark fiber” would require special, higher-cost projects.

Signal timing coordination between city, county, and state roads was reviewed, with main corridors synchronized within jurisdictions and intersecting roads operating as side streets. State roads functioned as separate corridors with their own timing. The goal was to allow drivers traveling at the speed limit to move through without frequent stops, though interruptions occurred from side street traffic.

Ms. Stone said she would raise the possibility of expanding fiber connections for traffic management with the local planning technology group and the state.

### **Item 7. Comments by FDOT**

Kia Powell, FDOT Liaison, began with announcements and updates. She noted that the construction report for May was included in the agenda, with the June report to be released at the beginning of the month. Also included was the latest *Compass Points* newsletter, featuring district updates and informational articles.

She then shared a safety reminder about *Operation Southern Slow Down*, an annual weeklong speed enforcement and public education campaign conducted in partnership with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the southeastern states of Florida, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, and Tennessee. The initiative aims to reduce speed-related fatalities and serious injury crashes by targeting speeding and aggressive driving.

Florida’s campaign would begin with press conferences in media markets statewide, with enforcement running from July 14–19. Powell emphasized the importance of avoiding speeding.

Mr. Curry inquired about the pedestrian island at U.S. 441/27, noting it may not have been designed appropriately as it blocked the two left-hand turn lanes on State Road 40. He asked when the issue was expected to be corrected.



Mr. Michael McCammon, FDOT Operations Manager, stated that FDOT had been working closely with City of Ocala staff on a conceptual design to address the pedestrian island issue at U.S. 441/27. He explained that traffic counts had revealed more right-turn movements than left turns at the location, and the new design would convert part of the existing left-turn lane into an earlier right-turn lane. The short right-turn lane that had been in place was restricted by the large concrete island, which also blocked access to the dual left-turn lanes.

The plan included removing much of the concrete island and eliminating the crosswalk that lacked a pedestrian button or flashing lights. Preliminary traffic modeling had shown a significant improvement once the changes were implemented. McCammon said the design was expected to be completed within the next month, after which a fast-response contract would be pursued, allowing for up to three bids and a quicker turnaround if costs remained under \$500,000. He anticipated the project would be under contract within the next few months and, barring material acquisition delays, construction would begin within the year. He added that the modification was expected to result in a noticeable improvement in traffic flow.

Mr. Curry stated that there had been numerous calls regarding SR 200. He specifically asked about the planter boxes installed for beautification, inquiring when they would be updated or replaced with something more substantial than the weeds that were currently growing.

Mr. McCammon stated that the planter boxes on SR 200 were expected to be planted soon, as the work had to be completed 60 days before final acceptance of the project. He explained that crape myrtles, palm trees, and shrubs would be installed in the medians near the pedestrian signals, while the outer curbs would be planted with peanut grass as a low ground cover. He noted that during the first year, extensive weeding would be required and acknowledged that managing the weeds could be a challenge for the contractor, but eventually the plantings would establish and the area would look good.

Mr. Curry asked whether there would be water access for the plantings or if they would need to be manually watered. Mr. McCammon noted that there was no water access, so watering would need to be done as needed.

Mr. Curry asked about the purpose of the lane narrowing on SR 200.

Mr. McCammon explained that the lane narrowing was intended primarily for safety and to accommodate sidewalk construction. He noted that the project included lowering the speed limit from 45 to 40 mph and closing gaps in sidewalks along SR 200, where previously there were significant sidewalk gaps in front of businesses such as Palm Chevrolet, Chipotle, and others. Some property owners, including car dealerships, donated right-of-way to allow sidewalk construction.

He added that the new design would widen lanes from ten feet to eleven feet, which would improve traffic flow and reduce complaints from drivers of larger vehicles. The narrowing and lane adjustments also created space to fit in sidewalks and other improvements, with construction expected to be completed by the end of the year.

Mr. Bethea asked whether additional traffic signals were being added along SR 200, noting that some appeared to be located in the center of the road.

Mr. McCammon explained that three locations were being equipped with pedestrian hybrid beacons, which activate flashing red signals for vehicles only when a pedestrian pushes the button. He noted the locations as near Marion Technical College, the College of Central Florida/mall area, and by Ocean Buffet near a hotel across from Chick-Fil-A.

The discussion covered pedestrian crossings, noting that the new pedestrian hybrid beacons would operate via push button and were generally independent of the traffic signals.

Mr. McCammon explained that new crosswalks were being designed to be more effective, with separate buttons for crossing the main road versus side streets. Adjustments were also made to turn lanes, such as at Chick-Fil-A, to improve traffic flow, encouraging drivers to use alternate routes like the Home Depot light or Verizon parking lot.

Additionally, resurfacing updates were provided, including completion of the friction course from 25th Avenue to First Avenue, with final asphalt layers expected within 2–3 weeks. The conversation also addressed manhole cover placement during road construction and utility installations, emphasizing the goal of positioning them in lane centers to minimize bumps and maintain smooth pavement, though some adjustments were challenging due to multiple utilities.

Ms. Powell stated that for the CR 484 and I-75 interchange roadway improvements, the design of the new bridge containment wall had been completed, and negotiations on price and timeline were underway. She noted that once the negotiations were finalized, expected within the next few weeks, a clearer timeline and project dates would be available.

The discussion focused on the 464/441 intersection improvements. A traffic analysis was conducted by VHB and presented to FDOT and the City of Ocala, with both teams reaching consensus on moving forward. Key decisions included keeping the southbound left turn lane as a single lane and removing the concrete at the back of the turn lane. The pavement design package was updated, and project limits were slightly extended east of 441 on West 17th Street to match resurfacing on Southwest 17th Street.

Deputy City Engineer Noel Cooper noted that the traffic analysis accounted for future development, including planned residential areas, to ensure adequate turn lane capacity. While updated plans had not yet been reviewed, the design process aimed to avoid unusual pedestrian crossings and ensure the intersection could handle projected traffic volumes. It was emphasized that final designs would be presented to the city and board for approval, and adjustments would be made if concerns arose.

### **Item 8. Comments by TPO Staff**

Mr. Balmes provided three updates. First, he noted that more information on the 2050 Long Range Transportation Plan, including scenario growth work, priority projects, and federal, state, and local revenue projections, would be presented at the next meeting for review and discussion. Second, he stated that the 2025 Traffic Counts Report and map would be published by July 1st, as done annually. Third, he mentioned that the Commitment to Zero Safety annual report was planned for publication in August and would include community project stories alongside the usual statistics.

**Item 9. Comments by TPO Board Members**

Matthew Cretul, Marion County Legislative Manager, provided an update on a request for a letter of support for the USDOT Regional Infrastructure Accelerator Demonstration (RIA) Program grant application for the NE/NW 35th Street Phase II project. The project highlighted partnerships with the TPO, CEP, and the City of Ocala.

The county was requesting \$2 million for right-of-way acquisition to advance the project to the next phase. Chairman Zalak confirmed that the request was solely for a letter of support, and no objections were raised.

Mr. Marciano recognized the presence and efforts of OPD officers, noting that the department had recently started a traffic unit. He highlighted that citations had increased by 150% and praised the six officers for their active enforcement, emphasizing that drivers speeding in Ocala would be pulled over.

**Item 10. Public Comment**

*There was no public comment.*

**Item 11. Adjournment**

Chairman Zalak adjourned the meeting at 4:19 p.m.

**Respectfully Submitted By:**

Shakayla Irby, Administrative Assistant