



Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) Meeting
Marion County – Growth Services Training Room
2710 E. Silver Springs Blvd., Ocala, FL 34470
1:00 PM

MINUTES

Members Present:

Jim Belonger
Travis Magamoll (*arrived at 1:05pm*)
Suzanne Mangram
Richard McGinley
Nick Mora
Steve Rudnianyn

Members Not Present:

Matt Fabian
Michelle Shearer

Others Present:

Rob Balmes, Ocala Marion TPO
Shakayla Irby, Ocala Marion TPO
Liz Mitchell, Ocala Marion TPO
Kia Powell, FDOT
Matthew Richardson, FDOT
Loreen Bobo, FDOT
Jen Musselman, Kittelson and Associates
Leyi Zhang, Kittelson and Associates
Ben Baugh, 352today
April Dotson

Item 1. Call to Order and Roll Call

Chairman Steve Rudnianyn called the meeting to order at 1:00pm. Administrative Assistant Shakayla Irby called the roll, and a quorum was present.

Item 2. 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 October 7, 2025. The meeting had also been published to the TPO's Facebook and X pages.

Item 3. Consent Agenda

Mr. McGinley made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. Ms. Mangram seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Item 4A. Draft Active Transportation Plan

Ms. Leyi Zhang with Kittelson and Associates presented an overview of the Active Transportation Plan, which is being developed in coordination with the 2050 Long Range Transportation Plan to ensure consistency. The plan aims to guide investments in safe, connected nonmotorized networks throughout Marion County, highlighting the area's equestrian heritage and extensive trail systems as unique assets. The benefits of active transportation were emphasized, including improved mobility, public health, safety, and economic vitality.

The presentation covered the Active Transportation Plan's structure, which includes chapters on vision and goals, public and partner engagement, existing conditions, traffic stress and accessibility analyses, needs assessment, proposed improvements, project prioritization, and next steps. Public engagement efforts included workshops, an open house, pop-up events, and an online survey, which gathered input from local governments, schools, tourism representatives, and the cycling and horse farm communities. The survey captured preferences for walking, biking, equestrian use, and spending habits.

Existing conditions in Marion County were reviewed, noting its status as the fifth-largest county in Florida with a growing population projected to reach 526,000 by 2050. While urban areas like Ocala, Belleview, and Dunnellon have some sidewalk and bike lane infrastructure, rural areas remain underserved. Safety remains a concern, with 491 fatalities and 1,857 serious injuries reported between 2019 and 2023, a significant portion involving pedestrians and cyclists.

The Level of Traffic Stress (LTS) analysis revealed that most roadways fall into higher-stress categories (LTS 3 and 4), with lower-stress routes concentrated in downtown Ocala, Belleview, and Dunnellon. Accessibility analysis evaluated how easily people can reach key destinations like schools, parks, and hospitals via low-stress routes. The needs assessment identified high-stress corridors such as SR 200, SR 40, and US 301 as overlapping with crash hot spots and areas of low accessibility.

Proposed improvements were informed by technical analysis and community input, including concepts like the Marion Oaks Trail Plan to enhance future connectivity. Projects were prioritized based on factors such as user comfort, safety, local priorities, and accessibility. A scoring system was used to categorize projects into three tiers, providing a framework for discussion rather than a final ranking.

Next steps include advancing Tier 1 projects into the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), pursuing funding from various sources, integrating Active Transportation Plan recommendations into roadway projects, and continuing public engagement. The presentation concluded with a review of resources and strategies for implementing active transportation improvements, emphasizing their community and economic benefits.

Mr. McGinley inquired whether a methodology exists for monitoring actual bicycle traffic on the designated paths. In response, Loreen Bobo with FDOT stated that the department has counters available that can be borrowed to track trail usage and better understand traffic volumes.

Mr. McGinley asked whether the Active Transportation Plan addressed the missing link between the Santos Trail and Dunnellon. Ms. Zhang confirmed that the gap had been identified in the trail projects section of the plan. Mr. Balmes added that filling this gap is considered a Tier 1 top priority.

Ms. Mangram made a motion to approve the Draft Active Transportation Plan as presented.
Mr. Belonger seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Item 5B. Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) Office of Safety Presentation

Loreen Bobo, P.E., Safety Administrator for FDOT District 5, delivered a presentation focused on the region's ongoing efforts to achieve zero serious injuries and fatalities on the transportation network. The presentation centered on the theme "Getting to Zero Together" and provided a detailed look at crash data, safety strategies, infrastructure improvements, and community engagement initiatives.

In 2024, the Ocala Marion TPO area experienced over 10,000 crashes, resulting in 115 fatalities and 316 serious injuries. A significant portion of these incidents involved pedestrians and bicyclists, highlighting the vulnerability of non-motorized users. The presentation emphasized that speeding, distracted driving, and lack of occupant protection remain leading contributors to crashes across Central Florida.

To address these issues, FDOT is implementing a range of infrastructure-based safety strategies. These include lane narrowing to reduce speeding, raised crosswalks to improve pedestrian visibility, Pedestrian Hybrid Beacons (PHB) and roundabouts to minimize conflict points and reduce crash severity. Intersection Control Evaluations (ICE) are being used to assess and redesign intersections for improved safety and efficiency. In one example from Orange County, a corridor that was previously the deadliest mile for pedestrians has seen zero pedestrian fatalities since the implementation of multiple countermeasures.

Speed management was a key focus, with FDOT highlighting how design elements such as enclosure, engagement, and deflection can influence driver behavior. Projects like the SR 500/US 441 corridor in Orlando have successfully reduced speeds by 5 mph through design changes, including narrower lanes and raised crossings, without generating complaints from the public or emergency services.

Beyond infrastructure, FDOT is also investing in behavioral outreach. Over 150 safety events were held across the region in the past year, including helmet fittings, school programs, and public education campaigns. Digital outreach efforts, such as geofenced safety messages and video campaigns, reached millions of viewers at a low cost per impression. These efforts are designed to raise awareness and encourage safer behavior among all road users.

The Central Florida Safety Strategic Plan was introduced as a collaborative initiative involving more than 50 partners, including MPOs, counties, cities, and advocacy groups. The plan is being advanced through focus groups and a regional steering committee, which includes representatives from Marion County and the City of Ocala. These groups are working on action steps that go beyond infrastructure, such as school zone speed cameras, insurance partnerships, and community-based safety education.

Ms. Bobo also highlighted available grant opportunities, including High Visibility Enforcement and Traffic Safety Grants. Local agencies such as the Marion County Sheriff's Office and Ocala Police Department have already participated in these programs to address speeding, aggressive driving, and pedestrian safety.

In recognition of local efforts, the Ocala Marion TPO received the Safety Matters Award for its outstanding outreach through the @SafetyMattersMarionCounty initiative. This award underscores the TPO's commitment to promoting transportation safety and engaging the community in meaningful ways.

Ms. Bobo concluded the presentation with a call to action, encouraging continued collaboration among agencies, elected officials, and residents. Achieving zero fatalities, Bobo emphasized, will require a shared commitment and a culture of safety that extends across all levels of the transportation system.

Ms. Mangram asked for clarification on the term "occupant protection," and Ms. Bobo explained that it refers to wearing a seatbelt.

Mr. Magamoll requested clarification on the abbreviation "PHB." Ms. Bobo explained that it stands for Pedestrian Hybrid Beacon and referenced the PHBs currently installed along SR 200.

Mr. Magamoll also inquired about the design of the PHBs. Ms. Bobo responded that planters were used in the design to create a sense of enclosure, which helps calm traffic by discouraging higher speeds. Additionally, she mentioned that the spacing of the PHBs was designed to allow for proper water drainage.

Mr. McGinley asked how many roads can feed into a roundabout. Ms. Bobo responded that she has seen roundabouts with up to five connecting roads and explained that when roundabouts are installed, the goal is to evaluate how to most effectively move traffic through the area.

Mr. McGinley inquired about the maximum speed limit at which a bike lane can be installed adjacent to a roadway.

Ms. Bobo explained that in some cases, separate bicycle facilities are constructed to accommodate higher-speed corridors, as physical separation enhances safety. She noted that there are specific restrictions related to speed limits and bike lane placement, but she did not recall the exact thresholds at the time.

Item 5B. Draft 2050 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP)

Mr. Rob Balmes, TPO Director, noted that the 2050 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) had been in development for over 18 months. He emphasized that the process had been thorough and inclusive, with the committee involved at every step. He provided an update on the current status of the plan and outlined the next steps in the adoption process.

The presentation included a preview of key upcoming dates related to the 2050 LRTP:

- October 14, 2025 – CAC and TAC meetings
- October 28, 2025 – TPO Board LRTP Public Hearing
- November 4, 2025 – CAC and TAC Endorsements
- November 13, 2025 – TPO Board Adoption of the 2050 LRTP

These milestones mark the final stages of the plan's development and adoption, with opportunities for public input and committee recommendations before final approval by the TPO Board.

Item 6. Comments by FDOT

Kia Powell, FDOT Liaison provided an update on current and upcoming FDOT projects in the Ocala Marion TPO area, as well as key events and announcements.

Project Updates:

New Project – I-75 Improvements (S.R. 200 to S.R. 326) [Project 452074-1]:

This project aims to improve traffic capacity and operational efficiency. A pre-construction meeting was held on September 24, and utility coordination is scheduled to begin in the following month. Construction is expected to begin in November.

Ongoing Work – I-75 Improvements (South of S.R. 44 to S.R. 200) [Project 452074-2]:

Work began in February 2025 and is expected to be completed in early 2026. Current activities include clearing, grubbing, and deep milling on northbound I-75 to prepare for future widening and bridge construction.

Completed Project – Silver Springs State Park Pedestrian Bridges [Project 426179-1]:

Final acceptance was received on August 6, 2025. The project included the construction of two ADA-compliant boardwalks: a 748-foot boardwalk over Half Mile Creek and a 550-foot boardwalk crossing the Fort King Waterway with a 65-foot timber bridge. These enhancements improve connectivity within the park and access to underutilized trails and campsites.

Events:

FDOT Work Program Public Hearing:

Scheduled for October 20–24, 2025, with an in-person open house on October 21 from 3:30–5:00 p.m. at the FDOT District 5 Office in DeLand. Public comments are due by November 7, 2025. More information is available at www.fdot.gov/wp/h/district5.

Announcements:

The Work Program Presentation will be delivered at the November 4, 2025 CAC and TAC meetings, and again at the November 13, 2025 TPO Board Meeting.

The latest edition of the FDOT Compass Point Newsletter was provided to the committee members.

Item 7. Comments by TPO Staff

Mr. Rob Balmes, TPO Director, provided a brief update and noted that safety briefing sheets from FDOT Central Office were included in the meeting packets. He described these materials as educational resources developed at the state level and shared them for informational purposes.

He also reminded attendees that the next CAC/TAC meeting is scheduled for November 4, 2025, which is one week earlier than usual due to the Veterans Day holiday on November 11.

Mr. Balmes further emphasized that this earlier meeting date aligns with the timeline for the adoption of the 2050 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). He noted that formal meeting notices would be distributed and included in the October 28 meeting packet.

Item 8. Comments by CAC Members

Mr. Belonger inquired why only two Pedestrian Hybrid Beacons (PHBs) had been activated while the others had not. Ms. Powell responded that she was unsure why all of the PHBs had not gone live but stated she would follow up and provide an answer.

Mr. Mora expressed concern regarding traffic conditions on northbound I-75 near the CR 484 interchange. He noted that, depending on the time of day, exiting traffic is often forced to use the through lane and shoulder due to congestion. He suggested that, as part of the auxiliary lane improvement projects, consideration be given to beginning improvements at the interchange and working southward to potentially extend the turn lane. Mr. Mora emphasized that the current situation presents a safety concern due to the speed differential between vehicles on the shoulder and those in the travel lanes, particularly when large trucks pass at high speeds.

Ms. Powell acknowledged the concern and stated that she would share Mr. Mora's comments with the appropriate team.

Item 10. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Approved –

Item 11. Adjournment

Chairman Rudnianyn adjourned the meeting at 2:07pm.

Respectfully Submitted By:

Shakayla Irby, TPO Administrative Assistant