

Commitment to Zero Safety Action Plan efforts initiated by Commissioner Stone, stressing the necessity for follow-through and further development of the initiative.

Chairwoman Dreyer affirmed agreement with Mr. Curry, mentioning a subsequent discussion with the mayor and police chief regarding the issue. She noted forthcoming data that would be provided at the next board meeting and extended an invitation to the police chief to share efforts being undertaken. Emphasizing their commitment to the goal of zero fatalities and accidents, she highlighted the importance of collaborative action and a shared dedication to achieving the objective of safety.

Chief Mike Balken, the Ocala Police Chief, spoke to the board, agreeing with the Chairwoman's remarks. He emphasized the police department's focus on analyzing data to improve enforcement efforts. They study various factors contributing to crashes, such as causes and locations, and use techniques like crash mapping to target problem areas effectively. They also consider factors like time of day and injury severity to prioritize their actions. Chief Balken highlighted their efforts to address environmental issues affecting traffic safety, mentioning the Ocala Downtown historical area, and collaborative efforts with the City of Ocala Traffic Engineering Department. He acknowledged the need for continued community efforts to reduce accidents while affirming the police department's dedication to the cause.

Chief Balken also mentioned their partnership with the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), attending their meetings regularly and utilizing state grants for DUI enforcement and addressing bicycle and pedestrian violations. He acknowledged the significant impact these violations have on fatality rates and emphasized their efforts to address them. Chief Balken expressed a willingness to share information with the entire board and welcomed further discussions on improving partnerships. He highlighted existing collaborations with the Sheriff's Office and Highway Patrol, including joint operations, and mentioned plans to expand the traffic enforcement unit in Ocala, aiming to double or triple its size by the end of the year.

Mayor Marciano reflected on the progress made since the last meeting, specifically mentioning the establishment of the traffic unit. He noted that over the recent weekend, the unit had been active, receiving calls and enforcing laws related to speeding and other violations. The goal was to further develop this unit to ensure public safety by deterring behaviors that contributed to accidents and fatalities.

Chief Balken talked about the challenge of policing a city that experiences a significant increase in population. Despite the staffing limitations, they have been working smarter by utilizing technology and support from the mayor and council. While they explore various technological solutions. He emphasized the ongoing efforts to enhance traffic safety in both the city and county, acknowledging that many may not be aware of these endeavors.

Mr. Bethea highlighted the issue of scooters crossing roads without proper attention, noting the potential danger they pose due to their speed, which can exceed 25 miles per hour. He emphasized the need for awareness and caution among individuals, as well as the community as a whole, regarding the matter.

Chief Balken acknowledged that the city dealt with a range of challenges, including the use of scooters and golf carts on public roads. Enforcing regulations and educating the public about safety measures proved difficult. The department made significant efforts to educate people,

particularly concerning allowing children to drive golf carts on public streets. However, due to ongoing issues, they considered taking a stricter approach to enforcement in the near future.

Mr. Curry expressed his understanding of the ongoing communication and coordination between Chief Balken and the sheriff regarding traffic safety efforts. He requested that Chief Balken coordinate with the sheriff to ensure alignment between their respective initiatives.

Chief Balken assured Mr. Curry that he would discuss coordinating efforts with the sheriff during their upcoming meeting. He mentioned that they would aim to provide data on traffic stops, which exceeded 26,000 in 2023, highlighting the extensive enforcement efforts often unseen by the public. The overarching goal remains to reduce fatalities and overall crash rates by curbing aggressive driving and slowing down traffic.

Mr. Curry inquired what Chief Balken believed was the top two reasons for crashes.

Chief Balken regretted not bringing the data with him but shared insights from the police department's findings. He highlighted intoxication, whether from drugs or alcohol, as a significant factor in fatalities. Among violation types, rear-end collisions were common, while right-of-way violations, like turning in front of oncoming traffic, were often the deadliest due to the high risk of intrusion into the passenger compartment. Texting while driving exacerbated the problem, but enforcing anti-texting laws were challenging due to loopholes in the statutes. Chief Balken proposed that rewriting the statutes to prohibit holding a phone while driving would simplify enforcement efforts and improve road safety.

Mr. Curry inquired if the blue lights seen at signals were cameras.

Chief Balken responded that they were signal indicators that inform officers whether a red light was indeed violated on the opposite side of the intersection.

Chairman Curry inquired about the community's current capability to use cameras at intersections, questioning whether the necessary ordinances had been passed or if there was opposition to their implementation.

Chief Balken responded that the use of cameras at intersections is a decision for local governments to make. While he acknowledged the effectiveness of red-light cameras in encouraging compliance with traffic signals, he expressed community concerns about their intrusive and sometimes unfair nature. Additionally, he disapproved of the business model that directs fines to companies rather than contributing to community welfare. Chief Balken noted that while red light cameras can deter red light running, they may not address other causes of traffic violations, such as distracted driving. As both a professional and a resident of Marion County, he talked about being skeptical of red-light cameras, primarily due to the issue of where the generated revenue goes. Nonetheless, he acknowledged that there are tools available that could potentially improve traffic safety.

Mr. Curry asked Chief Balken would he come back with any kind of recommendations.

Chief Balken expressed his current goal to expand the traffic unit to enforce traffic regulations round the clock, rather than just during typical daytime hours. He emphasized the need for continuous coverage as traffic issues can occur at any time, including late at night.

Improving staffing to implement a 24/7 schedule was a priority to address community concerns effectively. Additionally, he suggested enhancing education in the school system to instill better driving habits among youth. Chief Balken expressed willingness to return and share ideas on how to improve traffic safety with the board, with a focus on partnerships as a key aspect of the approach.

Chairwoman Dreyer informed the attendees that Chief Balken provided substantial information that could address many of their inquiries. She mentioned that she would forward the information to Mr. Balmes, who would distribute it to all members. That would allow them to review the information and formulate any questions they may have before the next meeting.

Ms. Stone raised a point about the recently approved safety study on intersections, inquiring whether it would also consider installing pedestrian buttons to improve safety at crossings. She suggested that addressing pedestrian safety could be an opportunity for improvement. Ms. Stone expressed concern about pedestrians and cyclists behaving inappropriately, particularly instances of jaywalking on roads like US 441 and US 27. She suggested that educating citizens and issuing warnings could help mitigate such risky behavior and improve overall safety.

Chief Balken replied, the police department enjoyed the bike pedestrian grant every year. Officers used it as an educational tool. They greatly contribute to fatality numbers that were being looked at and was a big problem. State Route 200 had been a significant issue for the police department with pedestrian fatalities. They had also seen several on State Road 40 as well.

Chairwoman Dreyer inquired about the inclusion of crosswalks and pedestrian access points at various locations along State Road 200 in the preliminary plan.

Mr. Michael McCammon from FDOT addressed the board, highlighting the main change planned for State Road 200: the installation of a median in place of the bidirectional turn lane. This would necessitate more U-turns instead of left turns at many driveways along the corridor. He mentioned that the project had been awarded and was expected to commence in a few months. Regarding additional crosswalks, Mr. McCammon stated he was not aware of any specific plans. However, he noted changes in the design of pedestrian poles, with a focus on placing them closer to where pedestrians enter the road to cross. The design modification had already been implemented in recent resurfacing projects on 441 and Belleview, and it was anticipated for State Road 200 as well. Mr. McCammon acknowledged the need for improvements, citing instances where pedestrian buttons were inconveniently located, including one instance where a button was almost hidden in bushes at a signal in town. He emphasized the ongoing efforts to address such issues, particularly during intersection upgrades or maintenance projects.

Chairwoman Dreyer suggested wrapping up the discussion, indicating the need for further internal discussions on how to enhance collaboration with other stakeholders.

Mr. Curry acknowledged that the issue at hand would require significant coordination efforts, particularly given the current challenges posed by population growth and increased traffic.

Ms. Stone added an additional suggestion, proposing the inclusion of traffic calming measures or environmental considerations in the long-range planning of road projects. She emphasized the collective responsibility of local stakeholders in integrating such features into road design.

Despite acknowledging that this might increase the cost of road projects, Ms. Stone underscored the importance of prioritizing safety and environmental concerns in the planning process.

Chairwoman Dreyer remarked on her recent experience in Tampa, noting the city's effective implementation of pedestrian crosswalks. She observed that residents and visitors alike in Tampa are accustomed to stopping for pedestrians due to the widespread presence of crosswalks throughout the city. Chairwoman Dreyer further commented on her experiences during ride-alongs with law enforcement officers, highlighting instances where people frequently cross the road in locations without designated crosswalks. She suggested considering the addition of additional crosswalks to address such situations, similar to the recent efforts in Belleview. This, she noted, would make it easier and safer for pedestrians to cross the road.

Chief Balken addressed the challenge of pedestrian safety in Ocala, comparing it to cities like New York where pedestrians are accustomed to drivers stopping for them. He mentioned bringing up the idea of pedestrian flyovers to the city manager, particularly around areas like tunnels, due to several fatalities occurring around the square. Chief Balken highlighted the issue of alcohol-serving businesses downtown, contributing to the mix of pedestrians and cars. While acknowledging the potential benefits of additional crosswalks.

Mr. McClain raised concerns about the potential negative effects of adding numerous crosswalks pointing out that increasing the number of crosswalks could slow down traffic and lead to increased agitation among drivers. Additionally, cautioning that more crosswalks might encourage risky behavior from pedestrians and drivers alike, as people might attempt to rush through intersections to reach their destinations more quickly. Therefore, emphasizing the need for caution when considering additional crosswalks and suggested evaluating the potential consequences carefully.

Mr. Bethea inquired about the placement of common devices on State Road 200.

Mr. McCammon stated that he hadn't examined the plans in detail, but he expressed doubt about the installation of raised structures like those seen in front of Eighth Street Elementary, as they wouldn't be suitable for State Road 200. However, he suggested that certain traffic adjustments, such as shifting lanes, might inadvertently have a calming effect in some areas.

Mr. Bethea brought up the issue of traffic flow along State Road 200, highlighting the frustration caused by the necessity of making U-turns at traffic lights instead of being able to turn left directly. He noted that only five cars typically make the U-turn, leading to increased agitation among drivers waiting to turn. Mr. Bethea emphasized the importance of considering such factors in planning, especially given the increasing traffic volume in the area. He mentioned the need for alternative routes to alleviate congestion, particularly as the population continues to grow.

Mr. McCammon acknowledged that the completion of the project on State Road 200 would likely result in an increase in U-turn movements. He suggested a potential solution to address this by studying the frequency of U-turns and adjusting signal timing accordingly. By increasing the duration of the green arrow for U-turns, more vehicles could pass through the intersection. However, he noted that this adjustment might impact traffic flow in other directions. Despite this, he appreciated the point raised and recognized the importance of finding a balance to improve overall traffic efficiency.

Chairwoman Dreyer directed that the materials provided by Chief Balken be circulated to all board members before the next meeting. She instructed that Chief Balken return to address the concerns raised and collaborate with the sheriff to discuss their joint efforts.

Chief Balken clarified that while law enforcement can contribute to addressing issues related to traffic safety, their primary focus is on enforcement. Chief Balken mentioned the possibility of implementing joint enforcement efforts similar to past programs like STEER, which involved collaboration between law enforcement agencies to target problematic areas. He suggested that while law enforcement can address certain aspects of the issue, other solutions may need to come from the traffic engineering side.

Chairwoman Dreyer acknowledged Chief Balken's points and added that they would discuss any upcoming projects that are funded and set to be implemented, presenting them at the next meeting.

Mr. McClain inquired about the availability of data and studies necessary for effective enforcement efforts. He raised the possibility of conducting further analysis, such as studying traffic patterns and understanding movement between different parts of the county and the city. Mr. McClain sought clarification on whether law enforcement feels adequately equipped with the existing data or if there is a need for additional information to enhance enforcement strategies.

Chief Balken explained that while law enforcement primarily focuses on analyzing crash data and recommending improvements to key intersections based on traffic patterns, they do not track specific departure points and destinations of drivers. He cited examples of successful interventions where slight changes to the environment around certain intersections have reduced collision rates. Chief Balken noted that while law enforcement has access to substantial amounts of data from various sources such as records management systems, citation information, and community complaints, they do not track individual travel routes. He expressed concern about providing excessive data, such as heat maps, to external parties when law enforcement personnel are already familiar with crash locations through their daily operations. Chief Balken suggested involving officers and community service specialists, who possess valuable insights from their interactions with crash victims and witnesses, in discussions about potential environmental changes to improve safety. He emphasized the importance of their perspectives in shaping effective enforcement strategies.

Mayor Marciano expressed interest in exploring potential options for improving traffic safety and suggested adding this topic to the agenda for future discussions. While he acknowledged that implementing changes might not be feasible in the immediate future, he emphasized the value of researching and identifying potential solutions to address traffic safety concerns effectively.

Chief Balken affirmed the department's commitment to contributing to solutions that enhance traffic safety. He emphasized the importance of reducing crashes not only for public safety but also to free up manpower for addressing other community needs. Chief Balken reiterated the department's willingness to assist in efforts to improve traffic safety and expressed readiness to collaborate with other stakeholders towards this goal.

Chairwoman Dreyer acknowledged the collaborative nature of addressing traffic safety, noting that their discussions and strategies could be replicated in other areas such as Belleview and

Dunnellon. She emphasized the importance of recognizing that they are one part of a larger puzzle, and encouraged coordination and collaboration among various stakeholders to address traffic safety concerns comprehensively across different jurisdictions.

Ms. Stone provided an update on traffic safety initiatives in Dunnellon, mentioning that two crosswalks were set to be installed in the area. She indicated that discussions and collaboration on projects related to traffic safety were already underway, demonstrating proactive efforts in Dunnellon.

Mr. Balmes and Mr. Curry had some discussions about a one-page document that could outline the roles and responsibilities of each partner involved in the collaborative effort to address traffic safety. The document would serve as a tool to facilitate understanding of each partner's contributions and potential areas for collaboration and support. By clearly delineating the roles of each stakeholder, it would help streamline efforts and enhance coordination in achieving shared goals related to traffic safety.

Mr. Curry emphasized the need for a collaborative approach involving multiple stakeholders, including law enforcement, FDOT, engineering departments, and local governments, to address various aspects of traffic safety such as left-hand turn lanes and signalization changes. He suggested that by coordinating efforts and pooling resources, they can develop a comprehensive overview of the issues and identify feasible solutions. Mr. Curry emphasized the importance of prioritizing and allocating funding for necessary changes to improve traffic safety effectively.

Item 7. Comments by FDOT

Ms. Kia Powell provided updates to the board, starting with the latest construction report included in their agenda packet, detailing eight current road closures as of that morning. She directed members to cflroads.com for further information, where they could find project updates by clicking on hyperlinks within the construction report. Ms. Powell also informed the board that bridge improvements on State Road 492 over the CSX railroad had commenced, involving concrete repair, joint rehabilitation, and epoxy overlay application to the bridge deck. She encouraged members to visit cflroads.com for updates on these projects. Lastly, Ms. Powell announced the release of the second edition of the District Five Compass Points newsletter, which features district-wide highlights and information, including events for National Distracted Driving Awareness Month.

Mayor Marciano inquired if US 441 was still on track to be completed by the end of May 2024.

Mr. McCammon provided an update on the construction schedule, mentioning a recent meeting with the contractor to discuss the schedule. The contractor suggested July as the expected completion date, but Mr. McCammon indicated that they were not in agreement with this timeline and were working through the issues with the contractor.

Mr. Curry inquired about the timeline for paving the sidewalks on 464 as part of the ongoing infrastructure improvements, noting that the city had completed infrastructure improvements on 17th Street.

Mr. McCammon provided an update, stating that the contractor was last seen paving County Road 464 beyond Baseline Road with their crews. He mentioned that the same contractor had won both jobs, including those in the surrounding area. Efforts were made to encourage the contractor to return to the road for further work. Additionally, Mr. McCammon acknowledged that some of the worst spots were addressed back in February or December. Initially, they anticipated the contractor's return in February, but they indicated it would likely be around May. He mentioned that he hadn't received an update on this in a few weeks and promised to check on it and provide further information.

Mr. Curry speculated that the contractor might have prioritized the sidewalk construction first, intending to complete the paved road part once that phase was finished.

Mr. McCammon explained that contractors sometimes prioritize certain tasks, such as paving, based on their own schedules and crew availability. In this case, it appears that the contractor chose to focus on completing other work that was further behind schedule. He expressed hope that once they start paving, they will remain committed to the task, especially in areas where the asphalt is beginning to degrade, causing roughness known as Ravel. Mr. McCammon highlighted efforts to identify roads at risk of deterioration earlier to facilitate timely repaving, drawing parallels with State Road 200 west of Interstate 75. He acknowledged the importance of learning from past experiences to better predict road failures and ensure proactive maintenance. He also committed to providing Mr. Curry with a date of completion as soon as possible, enabling him to respond to inquiries accurately.

Chairwoman Dreyer requested an overview of the procedure regarding contractor scheduling and adjustments. She provided an example of a situation where the contractor was causing disruptions during rush hour on 36th Ave, prompting the city's staff to intervene and request a switch to night work, which was promptly accommodated. Chairwoman Dreyer sought clarification on whether the FDOT or other entities have authority over such decisions.

Mr. McCammon explained the process for managing lane closures during construction projects. When contracts are awarded, lane closure restrictions are included in the plan, allowing contractors to bid accordingly. However, there are instances where traffic behavior necessitates modifications to these lane closures, as seen in Chairwoman Dreyer's example. The FDOT considers traffic numbers during the design stages of a project to determine lane closure restrictions. Mr. McCammon emphasized that lane closure management is not just a science but also involves an element of art and experience. Factors such as proximity to signals and community events impact lane closure decisions beyond engineering formulas.

Chairwoman Dreyer inquired about the protocol for implementing lane closure adjustments. She sought clarification on the triggers for initiating such adjustments, whether it be calls from commissioners or engineering staff, and how the FDOT is notified of issues without having to physically inspect the site daily.

Mr. McCammon outlined the general approach to scheduling road work, particularly on state roads, where most work was conducted at night, especially within city limits. However, on more rural state roads in forested areas, daytime lane closures might be allowed if traffic could handle it well due to signals being farther apart. This approach was based on years of experience and was typically established during the design phase without requiring many changes. However, there were instances where a contractor might have requested to start work earlier to increase

productivity, which the FDOT might have accommodated based on their experience and to optimize project timelines.

Ms. Stone inquired about the installation of a large tower near the interstate, specifically mentioning the new rest areas being built along I-75. She sought clarification on how the tower was installed and whether it was temporary.

Mr. McCammon explained that the large tower near the interstate was part of an agreement between the state of Florida and a specific company to utilize the right-of-way for such structures. He noted that there is a process in place to engage with local government if there are concerns about particular areas. While he wasn't certain if the county had been contacted regarding this specific tower, he clarified that it was part of an existing agreement and would be permitted unless there was a conflict.

Ms. Stone emphasized that the county typically requires a fall radius, highlighting the potential consequences if the tower were to collapse and shut down I-75. She requested a reevaluation of the situation to address this concern and ensure appropriate safety measures were in place.

Mr. McCammon acknowledged the concern raised by Ms. Stone and committed to discussing it with the relevant personnel at the district office and to see what would come of the discussion.

Item 8. Comments by TPO Staff

Mr. Balmes provided several updates during the meeting. Firstly, he mentioned the upcoming FDOT Safety Summit in Orlando on May 17th, where Commissioner Curry would be serving on a panel, highlighting appreciation for his involvement.

Moving on to the I-75 projects in Marion County, he reported positive progress discussed at the Central Florida MPO Alliance meeting on April 12th. Construction activities are expected to commence by summer next year, starting from the northern end and progressing to the southern end with two separate contractors. The southern end, from State Road 44 to State Road 200, was projected to conclude its PD&E process by the end of the year, with a community workshop scheduled for June.

However, there were concerns regarding funding, as a \$50 million shortfall for District Five was identified due to the member appropriation process. This shortfall may lead to deferrals or deletions of projects, impacting Marion County in fiscal year 2025.

Additionally, Sara would present a draft of the fiscal year 2025 to 2029 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) next month, engaging with the public in the process. Moreover, the draft 2026 to 2030 list of priority projects process would begin next month, seeking feedback on priority projects from the board.

Item 9. Comments by TPO Members

Ms. Stone said she had been appointed by the board to serve as the chair of the Transportation Disadvantaged Local Coordinating Board (TDLCB) when she was first elected back in 2016 and had enjoyed that role. However, she wanted to offer the opportunity to another individual. The bylaws stated that a Marion County commissioner was to chair that board.

She wanted to recommend and make a motion for Commissioner Matt McClain to take on that role in his capacity as a county commissioner.

Chairwoman Dreyer asked if Mr. McClain would be okay with taking on the role of chair for the TDLCB, and he responded that he would be happy to do so.

Ms. Stone made a motion to appoint Mr. McClain as Chair of the TDLCB. Mr. Zalak seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Item 10. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Item 11. Adjournment

Chairwoman Kristen Dreyer adjourned the meeting at 4:02pm.

Respectfully Submitted By:

Shakayla Irby, Administrative Assistant