



Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) Meeting

Marion County – Library Headquarters
2720 E. Silver Springs Blvd., Ocala, FL 34470
3:30 PM

MINUTES

Members Present:

Steven Cohoon (*Chris Zeigler attended as an alternate*)
Noel Cooper
Tom Duncan
Kia Powell
Loretta Shaffer
Jeff Shrum
Bob Titterington
Chad Ward
Casey Griffith

Members Not Present:

Chuck Varadin

Others Present:

Rob Balmes, Ocala Marion TPO
Shakayla Irby, Ocala Marion TPO
Liz Mitchell, Ocala Marion TPO
Aubrey Hale, City of Ocala
Eric Smith, City of Ocala

Item 1. Call to Order

Vice-Chairman Bob Titterington called the meeting to order at 3:30pm.

Item 2. Roll Call

Secretary Shakayla Irby called the roll and a quorum was present.

Item 3. Proof of Publication

Secretary 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 March 4, 2025. The meeting had also been published to the TPOs Facebook and Twitter pages.

Item 4. Consent Agenda

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

Item 5a. List of Priority Projects (LOPP) Policies and Procedures Update

TPO Director Rob Balmes provided background on discussions from the January TPO Board meeting. TAC Chair Steven Cohoon had proposed updating the process guidance document to remove the Top 20 Priority Projects list. The topic was discussed at the end of the board meeting, during which Commissioner Stone raised questions about the potential removal of the Top 20 list. This prompted TPO Board Chairman Zalak to suggest placing the matter on a future agenda. Following the meeting, Chairman Zalak recommended placing the LOPP Policies and Procedures on the March TPO Board agenda to align with the list development timeline.

Mr. Zeigler explained that one reason for reconsidering the Top 20 list was that it often created competition over which project ranked highest, rather than focusing on specific needs and priorities within various project types. He emphasized a more important consideration moving forward: as the TPO continues to grow and mature, agencies will increasingly expect projects to be categorized by type. He noted that other TPOs in the region—including Gainesville and those across District 5—do not use a single Top 20 list but instead rank projects within individual categories.

Mr. Zeigler added that the suggested categories for organizing the priority project list included: Strategic Intermodal System (SIS), regionally significant projects, Transportation System Management and Operations (TSMO), trails and bicycle/pedestrian projects, planning studies, and bridges.

Committee members discussed whether a final decision on eliminating the Top 20 list was expected at the meeting. Mr. Balmes clarified that a recommendation was being sought to inform the TPO Board at its March meeting, which aligned with the annual List of Priority Projects (LOPP) development timeline. He noted that the current process needed to be finalized by June for submission.

There was general discussion about the relevance and effectiveness of maintaining a Top 20 list.

Mr. Shrum expressed concerns that a single list forced competition between project types (e.g., planning studies vs. major roadway projects) and could obscure the relative importance of projects within specific funding categories.

Mr. Zeigler proposed an alternative approach: ranking projects within specific categories—such as SIS, TSMO, trails, planning studies, and bridges—similar to how other MPOs in District 5 operate.

Ms. Powell clarified that FDOT did not require a specific list format and supported flexibility based on local preference.

Mr. Shrum expressed the need for clearer justification before changing the established approach, stating that the Top 20 list served as a tool for giving all TPO Board members a voice in overall priorities. He also raised concerns that removing the list might reduce the TPO's ability to present a unified priority message to FDOT.

There was further discussion on potentially modifying rather than eliminating the list—for example, expanding it to a Top 25—and the potential impact of rankings on funding perceptions.

Mr. Balmes noted that in the previous year, only two projects from the Top 20 received funding.

Mr. Shrum acknowledged that although the Top 20 list was not a requirement, its purpose had been to consolidate regional priorities for presentation to FDOT and to support transparency and engagement across jurisdictions. He emphasized that any changes to the process would require clear direction from the TPO Board.

Mr. Zeigler made a motion to remove the Top 20 combined priority list and establish six categorized lists for Strategic Intermodal System (SIS), regionally significant projects, Transportation System Management and Operations (TSMO), trails and bicycle/pedestrian projects, planning studies, and bridges. However, there was no second, so the motion did not carry.

Item 6a. List of Priority Projects (LOPP) Policies and Procedures Update

Tom Duncan, Transit Administrator for the City of Ocala, presented an update on the SunTran Transit Development Plan. The update covered recent improvements, funding progress, and strategic initiatives aimed at enhancing sustainability, service accessibility, and alignment with state transportation authorities.

Mr. Duncan discussed changes to the Transit Development Plan regulations, including extended deadlines for project reporting and the new requirement for performance benchmarking against peer transit systems to boost operational efficiency and competitiveness. Sustainability and equity remain central priorities, with Florida now requiring documentation of low-emission initiatives and expanded reporting on accessibility for underserved populations.

The annual update highlighted continued ridership growth, improved service efficiency, and major infrastructure projects, such as renovations to transit facilities and bus shelter upgrades. Significant improvements were noted in ridership and on-time performance, and SunTran's cost per passenger trip remains lower than the average of comparable agencies.

Operational enhancements included software upgrades for route optimization, real-time tracking tools, and enhanced driver training programs. Financially, SunTran secured major federal and state grants to support the purchase of electric buses, maintenance facility upgrades, and downtown circulator operations.

Future plans included completing downtown transit station renovations, adding new bus shelters with ADA-compliant access, and launching a downtown circulator service featuring a trolley. SunTran remains committed to expanding electric bus services and introducing microtransit options to reinforce sustainability goals.

Mr. Duncan provided an update on the downtown trolley. The trolley was expected to roll out in June or July 2025, with some vehicles scheduled for delivery by the end of the year. There had been challenges with the original vehicle order, leading to internal adjustments to expedite delivery.

The downtown circulator was considered a priority, with leadership placing it at the top of the list. The program would serve as a pilot, incorporating automatic vehicle and passenger-counting technology to collect specific ridership data, allowing for detailed analysis of its success. The service was offered free of charge to encourage ridership, especially in the congested downtown area. Mr. Duncan emphasized that the service would support remote parking initiatives and service the second parking garage once completed.

The committee expressed enthusiasm for the program, noting that it had long been a goal. While the pace of the project was influenced by the speed of government processes, they were optimistic about its progress. The project was also part of a larger \$16 million grant, which would support the integration of electric vehicles. As the community's charging infrastructure was insufficient for the anticipated fleet, a strategic approach was being developed to ensure proper capacity.

Item 6b. Active Transportation Plan Update

Rob Balmes, TPO Director, provided an update on the Active Transportation Plan, which focused on non-motorized transportation like biking and walking. The plan assessed current conditions, examined the "level of stress" or comfort and safety of facilities, and evaluated accessibility to key community destinations such as transit stops, healthcare facilities, and schools. It also addressed system needs and improvements, while considering the economic, health, and social benefits of active transportation.

The planning process began last September and was at its midpoint. Upcoming steps included a stakeholder meeting in April to review technical analysis, followed by further updates in May and June, leading to a draft plan release in August and adoption by the TPO Board in October. The Active Transportation Plan would be incorporated into the 2050 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP).

Rob highlighted the results of a public survey conducted between September and February, which collected 158 responses. The survey revealed that most participants valued walking and biking for recreation and exercise, with walking rated highest in terms of quality of life benefits. Key improvements desired by the community included safer pedestrian crossings, expanded trails, and better sidewalk networks. Although direct feedback through the mapping tool was limited, notable concerns included the need for safer facilities along SW 27th Avenue and NE 25th Avenue.

Mr. Shrum inquired about the comprehensive scope being considered, particularly regarding connectivity, accessibility, sidewalks, and school-related aspects.

Mr. Balmes stated that the accessibility analysis will cover all schools, focusing on connectivity and existing infrastructure such as sidewalks.

It was noted that the goal of the analysis was to produce a map identifying gaps in connectivity. The intent was to highlight project needs as well as priority projects, such as those related to new areas.

Item 7. Comments by FDOT

Kia Powell from FDOT provided an update, noting that the latest construction report was provided in the meeting packet and that there were four intermittent lane closures at the time. She invited questions after the meeting for more specific details.

Upcoming events included Marion County Day on March 29, where FDOT's Safety Office would be participating from 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM. She also shared a positive safety update, reporting a 15% decrease in fatalities across District 5 in 2024, equating to over 110 lives saved.

Ms. Powell also announced two upcoming events: A Central Florida transportation industry hiring event on April 30 and the FDOT Safety Summit on May 9 at Daytona International Speedway.

Item 8. Comments by TPO Staff

Mr. Balmes provided an update on the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP).

He informed the committee that they should expect upcoming presentations and opportunities for feedback. In May, the consultant team was scheduled to present an updated revenue forecast, a draft project needs list covering roadway, highway, transit, and active transportation projects, as well as growth scenarios and priority recommendations. By June, a finalized needs and priority list would be developed to guide the cost-feasible plan.

A draft LRTP plan was scheduled to be presented in September, followed by a 30-day public comment period, with final adoption scheduled for November 13. Mr. Balmes also confirmed there would be no meeting in April but emphasized that the May meeting would include a draft list of priority projects for committee review and a draft Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). A joint CAC/TAC meeting was planned for June.

Mr. Balmes inquired with the committee about future meeting scheduling and venue options, suggesting a late morning time slot (around 10:30 a.m. to noon) to improve venue availability. The Growth Services training room was mentioned as a preferred facility due to its size. It was noted that some members have standing meetings on Tuesday mornings, so Mr. Balmes stated he would conduct a Doodle poll to determine the best time and location for upcoming meetings.

Item 9. Comments by TAC Members

Vice-Chairman Titterington inquired about the status of the remaining segment of 49th Street north of 66th, asking whether it was nearing completion or delayed.

Mr. Zeigler responded that the intent was for the segment to be under construction by December. He noted that the signal at 65th Street was under design-build, with right-of-way acquisition being finalized. A temporary road was in place on the north side, and additional right-of-way acquisition was ongoing.

Item 10. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Item 11. Adjournment

Vice-Chairman Titterington adjourned the meeting at 4:36pm.

Respectfully Submitted By:

Shakayla Irby, TPO Administrative Assistant