



Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) Meeting
Marion County – Library Headquarters, Meeting Room B
2720 E. Silver Springs Blvd., Ocala, FL 34470
3:30 PM

MINUTES

Members Present:

Steven Cohoon (*arrived at 3:31pm*)
Noel Cooper (*alternate Eric Smith attended*)
Tom Duncan (*alternate Ji Li attended*)
Kia Powell
Loretta Shaffer (*arrived at 3:46pm*)
Jeff Shrum
Bob Titterington
Chuck Varadin

Members Not Present:

Chad Ward

Others Present:

Rob Balmes, Ocala Marion TPO
Sara Brown, Ocala Marion TPO
Shakayla Irby, Ocala Marion TPO
Liz Mitchell, Ocala Marion TPO
Ken Odom, Marion County
Chris Zeigler, Marion County
Mo Ansari, Kimley-Horn
John Scarfe, FDOT
Melissa McKinney, FDOT

Item 1. Call to Order

Chairman Jeff Shrum 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 November 5, 2024. The meeting had also been published to the TPOs Facebook and Twitter pages.

Item 4a. Membership Update

Chairman Shrum stated that, based on a recent membership change request from Marion County Administration, Steven Cohoon, P.E., from the Marion County Office of the County Engineer, had been appointed as a new TAC member. He replaced Tracy Straub, effective November 12.

Mr. Cohoon provided a brief introduction of himself, stating that he was the County Engineer from Marion County. Prior to joining Marion County, he worked in Sumter County as Assistant Director for six years, and before that, he resided in Alabama.

Chairman Shrum inquired whether a replacement had been appointed for Mickey Thomason, who had retired from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP).

Mr. Balmes stated that he had contacted DEP to inquire if they had someone who could serve on the TAC in Mickey Thomason's absence. He noted they were waiting for a response. To his knowledge, Mickey's position had not yet been filled. Mr. Balmes expressed the importance of having someone knowledgeable and experienced in greenways and trails within the county, emphasizing how beneficial such expertise would be for trail projects and the Active Transportation Plan.

Chairman Shrum suggested giving DEP until the end of the year to respond regarding a replacement for Mickey Thomason. He recommended visiting their offices to follow up and stress the importance of appointing a representative.

Item 5a. Consent Agenda

Mr. Titterington made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. Mr. Cohoon seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Item 6a. Election of 2025 TAC Officers

Mr. Titterington made a motion to appoint Mr. Steven Cohoon as the Chair. Mr. Li seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Shrum made a motion to appoint Mr. Bob Titterington as the Vice-Chair. Mr. Li seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Item 6b. 2025 Meeting Schedule

It was noted during the meeting that November 11, 2025, falls on Veterans Day. Mr. Balmes was informed that the TPO would need to revisit the November meeting date and propose a new date at the next TAC meeting.

Mr. Varadin made a motion to approve the 2025 Meeting Schedule with the understanding that a new November 2025 meeting date would be proposed in the future. Mr. Li seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

Item 7a. Fiscal Years (FY) 2025 to 2029 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Amendment #2 Update

Transportation Planner Sara Brown provided a brief update on TIP Amendment #2. One project was amended into the Fiscal Years (FY) 2025-2029 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) at the October 22, 2024, TPO Board Meeting. This amendment had originally been an action item for the October 8th meeting, which was canceled due to Hurricane Milton. The following summarizes the amended change to the TIP.

FM# 452074-2: I-75 Improvements from South of SR 44 to SR 200

- Add auxiliary lanes on I-75
- PD&E, PE, ROW, RRU, and DSB Phases
- Funds to be added to FY 2025
- Total: \$232,191,543
 - DEM: \$250,000
 - DIH: \$615,621
 - DS: \$122,953
 - MFF: \$231,202,969

Item 7b. 2050 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) Status Update

TPO Director Rob Balmes provided an update on the 2050 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), highlighting activities completed to date and upcoming milestones. He emphasized public engagement efforts, including the first open house held on September 18, 2024, where the public provided input and some citizen advisory committee members also attended.

Mr. Balmes noted that a second open house would occur in February 2025, where citizens would again be invited to provide feedback on topics such as roadwork, growth and development scenarios, and transportation needs across all modes. A public survey would also be launched around that time.

Key milestones include:

- March and May: The consultant will present the overall needs assessment, cost feasibility tied to the projected budget, and the draft plan leading to adoption.
- Ongoing: The consultant continues background work, data collection, and modeling of socioeconomic factors, population, housing, and traffic projections.

Public Participation Summary

- A public survey held from spring through July 2024 garnered 293 responses, with support from local media. Key findings:
 - 63% of participants were 55 and older.
 - Top challenges identified: congestion, traffic safety, signal timing, and road conditions.
 - 70% prioritized improving and maintaining local roadways.
- An online comment map collected nearly 300 comments, with congestion, safety, and pedestrian/bicycle issues as primary concerns. Heat maps highlighted congestion hotspots, such as US 41, Highway 326, State Road 200, and I-75 interchanges, while safety concerns were more widespread.
- The September community workshop had 25-30 attendees, where participants identified congestion, safety, and road improvements as top challenges and priorities.

Next Steps

- A virtual steering committee convened recently, with additional meetings planned to gather input from local planners, engineers, and stakeholders.
- In January 2025, staff will present draft goals, objectives, performance measures, and revenue projections, incorporating the newly passed penny sales tax.
- Additional public engagement and workshops will occur early next year, with ongoing opportunities for review, feedback, and collaboration.

Mr. Shrum inquired whether there was representation from the School Board on the LRTP steering committee.

Mr. Balmes stated that the School Board was part of the steering committee.

Mr. Shrum mentioned a meeting the City of Ocala had with the School Board, where he encouraged them to be part of the LRTP process. He also noted that the previous point of contact, Chris Carlisle, had moved on to another position.

Item 8. Comments by FDOT

Ms. Powell provided an update on hurricane cleanup efforts, noting that while the overall damage in the district was less severe than in others, this was one of the largest cleanups the district had undertaken in recent years. Cleanup addressed flooding, washouts, slope erosion, retention pond, and outfall failures, with nearly 25,000 cubic yards of debris collected so far. All five operations centers worked seven days a week, supported by 61 crew members from District 2 and significant heavy equipment, including dump trucks, loaders, and grapple trucks.

She highlighted that Ocala operations maintained a 24/7 response before, during, and after the storms, clearing debris promptly, with most picked up during the first pass and the second pass now complete in Marion County. Remaining efforts continue in two other counties.

Ms. Powell invited questions about the hurricane cleanup or contact information for the Ocala operations team. She also mentioned seven active construction projects with lane closures as of the morning and offered to discuss details.

In addition, Ms. Powell discussed the 2055 transportation plan, emphasizing the importance of public engagement. She offered to share the website or QR code for accessing virtual or in-person participation options and encouraged attendees to get involved in the process.

Item 9. Comments by TPO Staff

Ms. Brown shared that the TPO was still collecting public input for their transportation plan, which had been announced at the September meeting. The consultants had been onboarded in October, and the TPO was working through an existing conditions analysis. The second stakeholder meeting was scheduled for December.

She highlighted the availability of an online survey and a comment map on the project's webpage. The website included information on existing conditions, as well as field verification photos and videos. The public survey included specific questions based on responses, allowing participants to focus on topics like active transportation, including walking, hiking, horseback riding, cycling, and e-scooters. The survey aimed to gather feedback on areas needing sidewalks, crosswalks, or other active transportation improvements.

Ms. Brown encouraged participants to provide as much feedback as possible

Mr. Balmes shared that during the last week of October, Mobility Week, the TPO had distributed flyers and social media postings, which were successful in promoting mobility week events.

A visit from Secretary Tyler was highlighted, where he interacted with transit officials and viewed the city's future transit facility, including plans for electric buses in the community.

The City of Ocala also held a helmet fitting event, which the TPO participated in at the Mary Sue Rich Center, and a Try Transit Tuesday where participants could ride the bus for free. Mr. Balmes mentioned that he took the bus that day. The event was capped off with a video production for the Safety Matters series, featuring Mayor Marciano and Chief Balken, focusing on bicycle and pedestrian safety.

Additionally, videos on school and bus safety, featuring Dr. Gullett, Lt. Bloom, and Dennis McFatten, were in production and would be released soon. Several more videos in the series would follow into next year. Mr. Balmes emphasized the importance of safety in the community, especially in light of recent pedestrian fatalities reported in the news.

Item 10. Comments by TAC Members

Mr. Cohoon mentioned that Project 10 on the List of Priority Projects (LOPP), which involves Southwest 49th Avenue from 95th Street to Marion Oaks Trail, would require county staff and their vendor to go before the Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) and Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). He noted that the next available meeting for regular business was on February 14th, 2025. However, he was unsure if they would be ready to present by that time. He was considering attending the meeting to introduce themselves and seek feedback on acquiring the necessary right-of-way for the Greenway's north-south connector.

Mr. Cohoon suggested the possibility of returning to the ARC with a formal presentation after gathering feedback. He also offered the option for committee members to work together or attend the meeting as a group. If February was not feasible, he indicated that April 2025 would likely be the next available timeframe, with the meeting taking place in Tallahassee.

Item 11. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Item 12. Adjournment

Chairman Shrum adjourned the meeting at 4:05pm.

Respectfully Submitted By:

Shakayla Irby, TPO Administrative Assistant