



**TPO Board Meeting**

Marion County Commission Auditorium  
601 SE 25<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Ocala, FL 34471  
October 22, 2024  
3:00 PM

**MINUTES**

**Members Present:**

Councilmember Ire Bethea  
Commissioner Kathy Bryant (*arrived at 3:04pm*)  
Councilmember Kristen Dreyer  
Commissioner Ray Dwyer  
Councilmember James Hilty  
Councilman Tim Inskeep  
Councilmember Barry Mansfield  
Mayor Ben Marciano  
Commissioner Michelle Stone  
Commissioner Carl Zalak

**Members Not Present:**

Commissioner Craig Curry  
Commissioner Matt McClain

**Others Present:**

Rob Balmes, TPO  
Sara Brown, TPO  
Shakayla Irby, TPO  
Kia Powell, FDOT  
Mike McCammon, FDOT  
Nathan Gallops, Ocala Police Department  
Eric Smith, City of Ocala  
Darren Park, City of Ocala  
Sean Lanier, City of Ocala  
Noel Cooper, City of Ocala  
Christopher Zeigler, Marion County  
Tracy Straub, Marion County  
Barb Girtman  
Other members of the public not signed in.

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

Chairwoman Kristen Dreyer called the meeting to order at 3:00pm and led the board in the Pledge of Allegiance.

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

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

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

Shakayla Irby stated that the meeting was published online on the TPO website and the City of Ocala, Belleview, Dunnellon, and Marion County websites on October 15, 2024 and shared on the TPO's Facebook and Twitter pages.

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

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

### **Item 5A. Fiscal Years (FY) 2025 to 2029 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Amendment #2**

Sara Brown, Transportation Planner presented a proposed amendment to the Fiscal Years (FY) 2025-2029 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The amendment included one project, with the following details:

#### **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

*Mr. Zalak made a motion to approve FY 2025 to 2029 TIP Amendment #2. Mr. Marciano seconded, a roll-call vote was called and the motion passed unanimously.*

### **Item 5B. Election of 2025 Board Chair and Vice-Chair**

Per Board Bylaws, at the last meeting of the calendar year, members must elect a Chair and Vice-Chair to serve one-year terms. In 2024, the current officers are:

- Chair, City of Ocala Councilmember Kristen Dreyer
- Vice-Chair, Marion County Commissioner Carl Zalak, III

Ms. Stone made a motion to appoint Mr. Carl Zalak as the Chair and Mr. James Hilty as the Vice-Chair. Ms. Bryant seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

### **Item 5C. Proposed 2025 Board Meeting Schedule**

Rob Balmes, TPO Director stated that TPO staff had proposed up to eight TPO Governing Board meetings for 2025, scheduled for 3:00 PM at the Marion County Board of County Commissioners Auditorium.

He highlighted a specific proposal to hold the public hearing and regular meeting for the adoption of the 2050 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) on Thursday, November 20. The LRTP was required to be adopted by November 24, which fell during Thanksgiving week. To meet the deadline and avoid scheduling conflicts with local council and commission meetings, staff had recommended adopting the LRTP the prior week.

Ms. Stone noted that the proposed November 20 date coincided with the Florida Association of Counties Conference, scheduled from November 19 through November 21. She mentioned this might present a scheduling challenge for Marion County and proposed moving the meeting to November 18.

Mr. Balmes explained that the reason for scheduling the meeting during that week was the requirement to adopt the 2050 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) no later than Monday, November 24, 2025. He noted that the TPO typically meets on Tuesdays, but since the deadline could not be missed, the meeting date was moved up slightly.

Mr. Zalak stated that, he preferred to have Mr. Balmes revisit the schedule considering everyone's calendars. He suggested adopting the rest of the proposed calendar while requesting him to identify a date for the November meeting that would work for all members.

Ms. Bryant also noted a conflict with the proposed June 24 meeting date for Marion County and requested that the date be revisited.

Mr. Zalak advised Mr. Balmes to consult with staff and ensure there were no conflicts when selecting new meeting dates.

Mr. Zalak made a motion to move the January, March, and May dates presented.  
Ms. Bryant seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

**Item 5D. Appointments to the Florida Metropolitan Planning Organization Advisory Council (MPOAC)**

On an annual basis, the Board selects two representatives to serve on the Florida MPOAC, a statewide transportation planning and policy organization that serves the 27 MPOs/TPOs in Florida. The MPOAC consists of a Governing Board of elected officials, with one Member and one Alternate Member from each MPO/TPO.

The MPOAC also has a Staff Directors Advisory Committee, represented by the TPO Director. In 2025, the MPOAC Governing Board is scheduled to meet quarterly in Orlando. For 2024, the TPO's Governing Board Member and Alternate Member for the MPOAC are as follows:

- Governing Board Member: City of Ocala Councilmember Jim Hilty
- Alternate Member: Marion County Commissioner Michelle Stone

*Mr. Zalak made a motion to approve the current members of the MPOAC. Ms. Bryant seconded and the motion passed unanimously.*

**Item 5E. Appointments to the Central Florida MPO Alliance (CFMPOA)**

At the final meeting of each year, TPO Board members nominate and approve representatives to serve on the Central Florida MPO Alliance for the upcoming year. The Alliance is a coalition of six MPOs/TPOs within the Central Florida region, represented by a Policy Board of 18 members—three from each MPO/TPO, including three TPO Board members and the TPO Director.

In 2025, the Alliance is scheduled to meet three times at the Orlando MetroPlan offices on the following dates:

- February 14
- April 11
- October 10

The TPO's current 2024 delegates for the Central Florida MPO Alliance are:

- City of Ocala Councilmember Ire Bethea, Sr.
- Marion County Commissioner Craig Curry
- Marion County Commissioner Michelle Stone

*Mr. Marciano made a motion to approve the current appointments of the CFMPOA. Ms. Bryant seconded and the motion passed unanimously.*

**Item 6A. 2050 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) Status Update**

Rob Balmes, TPO Director, 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.

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

Ms. Kia Powell, Liaison FDOT provided an update on storm recovery and ongoing projects.

### **Storm Recovery Updates:**

- Hurricane Melton caused significant damage, though District 5 was less affected compared to Districts 1 and 7.

- Recovery efforts included addressing flooding, washouts, slope erosion, retention pond failures, and debris cleanup.
- Key recovery highlights:
  - Severe washouts occurred on State Road A1A in Flagler and Ormond-by-the-Sea, where buried seawalls are under construction, and on US 1792 in Orange City, which closed for five days during repairs.
  - Cleanup operations have been extensive, involving 61 crew members from District 2 and heavy equipment, including 50 dump trucks and 14 front-end loaders.
  - FDOT utilized emergency contracts to expedite recovery, with district staff assisting in debris removal and inspections.
- Specific to Ocala/Marion County:
  - Ocala operations responded 24/7 to reports of downed trees and cleared moderate amounts of debris, with most collected in the first pass.
  - Traffic signals were quickly restored through coordination between FDOT and local partners.

## **Project Updates:**

### **1. State Road 200 (East of I-75 to US 301)**

- Start Date: September 2024
- Estimated Completion: Fall 2025 (delayed due to weather)
- Scope:
  - Safety enhancements, including replacing the multi-directional center lane with a raised concrete median and adding segmented left-turn lanes to reduce crossover movements.
  - Traffic shifts will occur to facilitate phased construction, with temporary striping guiding traffic.
  - The Southwest 34th Avenue intersection will remain closed for six more weeks, potentially longer with weather delays.
- Expected Benefits: Reduced vehicle conflict points and driver speeds.

Mr. Marciano inquired whether the fall 2025 completion date for the State Road 200 project represented a worst-case scenario based on weather conditions or was simply an optimistic estimate. He asked for clarification on the expectations surrounding the timeline.

Mr. Mike McCammon, FDOT Operations Engineer, explained the factors influencing the timeline for the State Road 200 project:

- The project was initially scheduled for approximately 350 days. However, rain days, holidays, and unanticipated extra work typically extend the schedule.
- Without unforeseen issues, the project could finish by September 2025. However, additional challenges could push the completion date to December 2025, January 2026, or February 2026, depending on how events unfold.
- He noted that updates to the construction timeline are reflected in the construction report as new information arises.

Mr. McCammon acknowledged frustrations with past delays, specifically referencing the intersection project at US 441 and State Road 40, which experienced unexpected contractor-related challenges. He assured the board that the FDOT continues to work with the contractor to address unresolved time-related issues.

He emphasized the inherent challenges of road construction and stated that while providing exact dates early in the process is difficult, the timeline becomes more accurate as the project progresses.

Mr. Marciano inquired about how FDOT had worked with businesses along State Road 200 to ensure they understood the project, particularly those directly affected by the construction.

Mr. McCammon responded, explaining that FDOT had conducted a public meeting and outreach efforts with city and county officials during the design phase of the State Road 200 project.

- He acknowledged past resistance to medians along the corridor, which had shifted in recent years, with support growing for the safety improvements.
- He shared a personal example of safety concerns, such as avoiding left turns onto State Road 200, to emphasize the benefits expected from the medians.
- He noted that some businesses would lose direct left-turn access, which could lead to concerns from business owners.

Mr. McCammon also addressed anticipated challenges during construction:

- Lane closures would be necessary to build the center medians, reducing traffic capacity and causing inconvenience for several months.
- He suggested holding another public meeting to inform the public about the construction process and expected impacts.
- He indicated that the most significant disruptions were expected in April or May 2025, with plans for additional outreach to address public frustrations during that time.

Chairwoman Dreyer emphasized the importance of promptly notifying the TPO Board once the date for the next public meeting regarding the State Road 200 project is set.

- She highlighted that since the initial community outreach meetings with city council took place two to two-and-a-half years ago, there had been significant changes in the business landscape, including new businesses, business closures, and management turnover.
- She stressed the need for a fresh public meeting to ensure all current businesses are informed about the project and its impact.

Mr. McCammon noted his commitment to planning a public meeting in early 2025, prior to the implementation of the State Road 200 project. The meeting would provide businesses with an opportunity to learn about the project, its objectives, and the expected impacts during construction.

Mr. Zalak inquired whether there was a specific reason preventing the construction work on State Road 200 from being conducted at night, particularly given the road's significance.

Mr. McCammon explained that while FDOT typically conducts much of its work at night, such as asphalt milling and resurfacing, certain tasks, like removing asphalt and pouring concrete, cannot be completed overnight and will require daytime closures. He noted that in most resurfacing projects, the road is open by morning with minimal impact to the public. However, the State Road 200 project will involve more significant daytime closures, which is not typical for a resurfacing project.

Mr. Zalak asked whether it would be possible to work with FDOT, particularly the city, to manage the scope of work in a way that minimizes disruptions. He noted that FDOT gives contractors significant discretion regarding how much of the road is opened at a time and suggested adjusting the schedule to prioritize the most work at night and reduce daytime disruptions. He proposed fine-tuning the schedule to minimize the impact on the community, believing that it would reduce the overall burden for everyone involved.

Mr. McCammon discussed the potential to split the project into segments to minimize disruption. He explained that while the contract had already been finalized with a 350-day timeframe, the team had explored whether it was feasible to divide the work into sections, which would take longer but might reduce congestion in certain areas. He highlighted specific areas with pedestrian signals that would take longer to construct. Mr. McCammon emphasized the need for input on whether to complete the work in a shorter timeframe with more disruption or extend the timeline for a less disruptive approach.

Mr. Zalak acknowledged that the duration of construction significantly impacts the community, especially based on previous projects. He emphasized that contractors' approaches to managing construction timelines matter, as a rushed approach, such as tearing up the entire section at once, could cause major disruption. He advised caution to avoid such a scenario.

Mr. Marciano asked if the meeting with businesses would be scheduled for April, as indicated earlier by Mr. McCammon.

Mr. McCammon clarified that the public meeting would be held a month or two before the shift to median work and the closure of inside lanes. He proposed bringing a plan to the board ahead of the meeting for review.

Chairwoman Dreyer confirmed that she received information on the project from Kia and would pass it on to the mayor for further communication during the weekly updates from the mayor.

Ms. Powell provided an update on a project not included in the current construction report but listed in the TIP: the US 441 at State Road 464 intersection. The project was scheduled to begin in May 2026. The work focused on traffic operation improvements to relieve congestion at the intersection. Proposed improvements included a dual left turn lane for northbound traffic on US 441 to State Road 464, an extended left turn lane from southbound 441 to State Road 464, and a new right turn lane for westbound State Road 464 traffic turning north onto US 441. Additional work involved minor drainage, pedestrian, sidewalk, signalization, and lighting improvements. Median work was expected due to the dual turn lane configuration.

Chairwoman Dreyer addressed concerns regarding the median work and dual lanes, referencing complaints she had received about the traffic backups at the intersection of 441 and Westbound 40.



She expressed frustration with the traffic situation and questioned the intent behind the improvements made at that location, specifically asking whether the goal was to slow down traffic, as it appeared to have achieved that outcome.

Mr. McCammon explained that the goal of the improvements made 20 years ago at the intersection of 441 and Westbound 40 was to alleviate traffic backups caused by a high volume of left-turning vehicles. The project aimed to enhance traffic flow by adding dual left-turn lanes and improving the capacity of the left-turn movement.

Additionally, a right-turn lane was added, and adjustments were made to the through lanes. He acknowledged that if the current setup isn't working as intended, the signal timing could be revisited to improve traffic flow, and suggested working with the city traffic department to optimize the signal timings.

Chairwoman Dreyer expressed concerns that the depth of the median and the two lanes intended for left-turn movement at the intersection weren't long enough, causing traffic to back up for northbound drivers on 441.

She requested that the 17th Street project be revisited to ensure the lanes are long enough, as the current setup was not working. While she acknowledged that signal retiming could be tried, she felt that it wouldn't resolve the issue.

Mr. McCammon noted that pedestrian movement might complicate the situation at the intersection due to the crosswalk and median. He suggested that, in the long term, they could consider moving the pedestrian crosswalk further down the road. He clarified that there were not similar pedestrian complications at the 464 intersection, and they would work with the design team to ensure that the issues at the 441 intersection weren't repeated in the 464 improvement project.

Ms. Bryant expressed agreement that the improvements at 40 and 441 were not effective. She suggested that the expanded concrete barrier had worsened the situation, making it harder for vehicles to pass through. She shared her experience of frequenting the area and not noticing any difference after the work was completed due to the continued traffic backup, which extends past the police station. She then asked if a similar improvement would be made at 17th and 441.

Mr. McCammon responded that he would need to review the plans and get back to Ms. Bryant with an answer.

Mr. McCammon mentioned that he would need to review the plans regarding the concrete median for the dual left-turn lane and get back with more details. He acknowledged that the traffic flow at 40 and 441 is not working effectively, where the left-turn lanes block through traffic, and suggested potential pedestrian movement changes.

A discussion followed about the possibility of converting 17th and 441 into a roundabout. While there is sufficient right-of-way, it would require a significant amount of space and might involve acquiring additional land. The board emphasized the importance of considering long-term solutions due to the rapid growth of the community.

Further discussion addressed the concerns of congestion and operational issues, with some suggesting that current designs do not meet the needs of local traffic. Mr. McCammon noted that improvements, like signal timing, could help temporarily, but ultimately, more substantial changes might be necessary for better traffic management.

Regarding the 102nd Place bike trail project (Bellevue to Greenway Trail), Mr. Balmes confirmed it was a priority, and the team was waiting for updates on the development of the work program. He promised to provide a status update once more information became available.

Ms. Powell provided an update on Mobility Week, which ran from October 25th to November 2nd. She encouraged all community members to participate and mentioned that she had sent out flyers at the last meeting. She offered to resend the flyers virtually for anyone who needed them.

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

Mr. Balmes provided several updates:

- The Central Florida MPO Alliance meeting was canceled due to the storm and rescheduled for November 8th. One of the key agenda items for that meeting was the adoption of the Regional Priorities Lists, which the TPO Board had approved for Marion County in June. A draft of the list had been included in the packet.
- Mr. Balmes highlighted the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC), noting that the group had two new members that year but might lose one or two members. The committee was composed of eight members, and the bylaws allowed for up to 15. The group had been seeking more members who were residents of Marion County and willing to serve for one or two years.
- The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) had seen fluctuating membership, but there was hope to stabilize it in 2025. The Greenways and Trails membership faced a loss with Mickey Thomason stepping down, and the search for a replacement with a background in greenways and trails was ongoing. The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) had also been contacted to confirm their continued involvement in the committee.
- Regarding Safety Matters, Mr. Balmes mentioned that he and Shakayla Irby had continued to coordinate with Bobbi Perez's team from the Public Information Office. A couple of videos had been scheduled, including one with the mayor and Chief Balken on bicycle and pedestrian safety, and another on school and bus safety. More videos were in the works, and efforts had been made to keep them short and impactful, with some aiming for just one-minute informational messages.
- Finally, Sara Brown provided an update on the Active Transportation Plan. A survey and a comment map were available on the website, and efforts had been made to encourage public participation. Due to the hurricane's disruption, social media posts to spread the word had been rescheduled, and committee members were encouraged to share the information to garner more responses.

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

Mr. Bethea thanked everyone for their help during the storms, acknowledging that the team worked well together and came together in a gracious manner.

### **Item 10. Public Comment**

David Tillman from Tillman Associates Engineering, located at 1720 SE 16th Ave, Building 100, Ocala, FL 34471, addressed the board, emphasizing the issues with the intersection improvements on State Road 40 and US 441.

He described the new design, particularly the concrete median, as problematic, blocking access to the left and right turn lanes and exacerbating traffic congestion. He stated that the changes created more problems than they solved, with stacking occurring in the lanes and significant restrictions on traffic flow.

Mr. Tillman criticized the design as inadequate and urged the board to press FDOT to review and modify the design. He offered his assistance in providing suggestions for improvement, highlighting the urgency of addressing the issue to alleviate daily traffic struggles.

### **Item 11. Adjournment**

Chairwoman Dreyer adjourned the meeting at 4:04 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted By:

Shakayla Irby, Administrative Assistant