



**CHARLOTTE COUNTY - PUNTA GORDA
METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION**

**MINUTES OF THE MARCH 6, 2025
BICYCLE/PEDESTRIAN ADVISORY (BPAC) COMMITTEE**

BPAC MEMBERS PARTICIPATING (IN PERSON)

Laura Rossi, Chair, South County Representative
James Wernicke, Vice Chair, West County Representative
Robert Logan, Mid-County Representative
Ben Turner, West County Representative
Brian Blankinship, South County
Pauline Klein, Bicycle Club Representative
Philipp Pfäeffli, Bicycle Business Representative
Norma Garcia, Charlotte County Public Schools

BPAC MEMBERS ABSENT

Lorenzo Daetz, Historical/Cultural/Environmental Representative - excused
Vacancy, South County Representative

OTHERS PARTICIPATING IN PERSON

Laks Gurram, MPO Interim Director
Bekie Leslie, MPO Administrative Services Coordinator
Ray Scott, Administrative Support Staff
Tanya Merkle, FDOT
DFC William Weisspfennig, CCSO
Richard Lisenbee, Charlotte County Public Works
Carl Benge, City of Punta Gorda Urban Design
Shirley Ciampi, Charlotte County Transit
Marc Ispass, Consultant, Kimley-Horn

OTHERS PARTICIPATING REMOTELY

Ravi Kamarajugadda, Charlotte County Public Works
Jake Kistel, Transportation Control Systems, Inc.
John Kubicki, FDOT

1. Call to Order & Roll Call

BPAC Chair Laura Rossi called the meeting to order at 2:01 pm. Members, staff and consultants introduced themselves. A quorum was present.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

All attendees recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. Public Comments on Agenda Items

There were no public in attendance.

4. Reports

A. CAC/BPAC Chairs' Report

BPAC Chair, Laura Rossi, did not have anything to report. She opened a vote for Vice Chair. Brain Blankinship nominated James Wernicke, and the vote passed unanimously.

B. Charlotte County Report

Ravi Kamarajugadda updated the committee on three major projects: King's Highway widening and two intersections in West County on Gasparilla Road. He also touched on the subject of Tucker's Grade Road east of I-75 deterioration, as mentioned in the previous BPAC meeting. He reiterated that control over maintenance of the road is still unknown, but he believes it may fall on Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), as they own the land on that section of road. There was discussion about who should be taking responsibility for the road. Mr. Kamarajugadda stated that he will continue to probe into the issue and bring it to the next BPAC meeting. Tanya Merkle remarked that she would reach out to the limited access maintenance team. Mr. Gurram suggested that Mr. Blankinship send an email to FDOT regarding his concerns about the maintenance of the road. Discussion on a Sun Trail that previously went through Babcock Webb followed.

Richard Lisenbee stated he is currently working on retiming traffic signals in Charlotte County. Biggest corridors are being fine-tuned, and it is a huge project that is going well. He stated that this week has been very challenging with multiple closures on I-75. During these closures they did adjust some of the diversion route signal timings and requested assistance from FDOT to assist in the diversion or detouring signal timing software.

C. City of Punta Gorda Report

Carl Benge introduced himself. He stated that many City of Punta Gorda Urban Design staff members are new and still familiarizing themselves with the area projects. City staff had recently met with MPO Staff. Information discussed between staff will be presented to the City Council for direction. He discussed the LAP project on Cooper Street which is a Complete Streets project that complies with Vision Zero. There was a brief discussion on Mr. Benge's knowledge of the FDOT Sun Trail, US Bike Route 15, and Legacy Trail. He stated he would research these projects. One question was what types of bike facilities would be put into place. Mr. Benge responded that he has not seen final plans but knows that some pathways include stations such as bike pumps and tools, which may also be present from the scope of work.

D. Sheriff's Report

Officer William Weisspfennig did not have anything to report. James Wernicke asked about the uptick in fatalities on Charlotte County roadways. Officer Weisspfennig explained that besides the rapid population growth that the roads cannot sustain, when they do rule enforcement on specific locations it can lower incidents by 30-40%. However, the process is very time consuming, and the numbers of incidents go back up relatively quickly once drivers realize that the location is no longer being monitored. He also stated that drivers became accustomed to the lapse in traffic enforcement that took place as a result of the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Laura Rossi asked about education that officers receive regarding laws and rules for bicycles and pedestrians. Officer Weisspfennig answered that the constantly changing rules are a challenge for the Sheriff's Department. There is a large road patrol update once a year for all members of the staff, but the traffic department goes over updates once a month. There are also block training sessions that take place several times a year.

During this discussion, Pauline Klein brought up a suggestion that the eastern part of Charlotte County, specifically for the Babcock Ranch area, would have a representative on the committees. Laks Gurram stated that this is something that could be brought to the MPO Board in the future.

5. Consent Agenda:

A. Approval of Minutes: November 14, 2024, Meeting

Brain Blankinship had provided staff several corrections prior to the meeting.

Brian Blankinship made a motion to approve the November 14, 2024 BPAC Meeting Minutes as amended. Pauline Klein seconded the motion, and it was passed unanimously.

6. FDOT Bicycle/Pedestrian Coordinator Report

Tanya Merkle reported that FDOT is currently going through SUN Trail applications with a hard due date of April 15th. She reminded the committee that the funds for SUN Trail go to the entire State as well as current projects. She encourages anyone submitting SUN Trail applications to keep those current projects in mind as they can have funding diverted to new projects before they are completed. She also discussed briefly that safety is a top priority for FDOT, and they are attempting various ways to educate the public on changes in laws and rules for the average driver. During this time there was also a discussion about an educational tool available to schools and how it functioned.

7. FY 2024/2025 – FY 2028/2029 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Amendment

FDOT Staff requested the Charlotte County – Punta Gorda Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) approve the following STIP/TIP Amendments in the current FY 2024/25 through FY 2028/29 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) at the March 31, 2025 MPO Board Meeting:

- 1. 452491-1 Charlotte County Transit FTA 5310 Operating Assistance. This is a new project for Transit and requires a formal amendment to add it to the TIP in FY 25.**
- 2. 456205-1 Regent Road crossing 623232 L – This is a rail safety project, and this amendment adds as a new project for railroad safety in Charlotte County.**

A STIP/TIP amendment is required to the MPO's TIP and the Statewide STIP when a major change occurs to a project. These changes include: addition or deletion of a project, a major change in project cost, project phase initiation dates, or a major change in design concept or design scope (i.e., changing project termini or the number of through traffic lanes). [23 C.F.R. 450.104].

An amendment requires public review and comment, demonstration of financial constraint, or a conformity determination, if applicable.

The proposed TIP amendment:

- [1. FDOT TIP Amendment letter dated 02/5/2025](#)
[Re: Request to Modify Fiscal Year \(FY\) 2024/25-2028/29 Transportation Improvement Program \(TIP\)](#)

Laks Gurram discussed the two amendments: (1) A transit grant with a 50% match and (2) a railway safety project for a railroad crossing on Regent Road at US 17.

James Wernicke made a motion to recommend MPO Board approval of the amendment to the Charlotte County-Punta Gorda MPO's TIP for FY 2024/25 through FY 2028/29 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Pauline Klein seconded the motion, and it was approved unanimously.

8. Draft FY 2025/2026 – FY 2029/2030 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

Federal and State legislation require MPOs to adopt a five-year Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The TIP outlines federal and state capital improvements for transportation and is a staged, multi-year, intermodal program of transportation projects that is consistent with the MPO Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). The Technical and Citizens' Advisory Committees formally review the development of the TIP.

The Charlotte County-Punta Gorda MPO is scheduled to review and adopt the TIP at the May 19, 2025 MPO Board Meeting. The attachment below is the Draft Charlotte County-Punta Gorda MPO TIP for 2025/2026 – FY 2029/2030.

The Charlotte County-Punta Gorda MPO entered an interlocal agreement with the Sarasota/Manatee MPO and Lee County MPO, formalizing and specifying regional planning projects along with timeframes to produce those projects. The agreement calls for each MPO to identify regional priorities and include those projects in the respective MPO's TIP. Those priorities that were adopted last year are included in the TIP, in accordance with the interlocal agreement.

DRAFT 2025/2026 – FY 2029/2030 Charlotte County-Punta Gorda MPO Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

Laks Gurram gave a presentation on the required documents. He noted that a resolution would go forward at the May 19, 2025 MPO Board Meeting and be reviewed by the BPAC in April. Snapshots will be updated and received April 9, 2025 from FDOT.

9. 2025 Draft Project Priorities

Laks Gurram gave the 2025 Draft Project Priorities presentation. Florida Statute 339.175(8) requires every MPO in the state to develop an annual List of Project Priorities (LOPP) consistent with the goals, objectives, and policies of the MPO's adopted 2045 Long Range Transportation Plan. The LOPP is used in developing the next draft FDOT Five-Year Work Program and Charlotte County-Punta Gorda Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).

A preliminary list of project priorities along with project applications will be submitted to FDOT District One by March 31, 2025. The project priorities must be approved by the MPO Board and submitted to FDOT by June 30, 2025.

The MPO received candidate projects from Charlotte County. These projects include Highway, Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP), Congestion Mitigation/Transportation System Management (CM/TSM), and Transportation Regional Incentive Program (TRIP) projects.

MPO Staff provided an overview of the Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 List of Project Priorities. The final list will be presented at the May 19, 2025 MPO Board meeting for adoption. The prioritized list is then transmitted to FDOT for consideration of funding during development of the FY 2027 through FY 2031 Draft Tentative Work Program.

Below is the Draft LOPP for which MPO Staff anticipates submittal of a project priority application in 2025:

- Harbor View Road from Date Street to I-75 – Road Widening (CST)
Edgewater Drive from Midway Blvd. to SR 776 – Road Widening (ROW & CST)
- N. Jones Loop @ Piper Road – Roundabout – (CST)*
- SR 776 @ Charlotte Sports Park - Turn Lanes (CST)*
- SR 776 @ Flamingo Blvd – (CST)*
- SR 776 at Biscayne Drive - Design and Construction Turn lanes and Signal (PE&CST)
- SR 776 at Cornelius Blvd. – Design and Construction Turn Lanes (PE&CST) *
- SR 776 at Jacobs Street – Design and Construction Turn Lanes (PE&CST) *
- SUN Trail – on SR 776 from Gulf Cove to US 41 (CST)
- SUN Trail – on SR 776 from Gulf Cove to Myakka Forest (CST)
- US 41 Bridge Approach Decorative Finish Street Lights
- US 41 MURT Bridge at S. Alligator Creek – (CST) *
- US 41 SB Harborwalk Phase II – ADA ramp improvements – Differed

* Projects programmed through construction will be removed from the 2025 LOPP.

[2024 Project Priorities – Approved by MPO Board May 2024](#)

[2025 DRAFT Project Priorities](#)

[2025 TRIP Regional Project Priorities](#)

There was a discussion about the similarity of the SUN Trail to the Legacy Trail, which was used by 675,000 users last year. Laks Gurram informed that SUN Trails are regional projects and provide regional connectivity to all users. Laura Rossi was glad to see the Comprehensive Safety Action Plan included among the Project Priorities List.

10. 2024 Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT)/Charlotte County-Punta Gorda MPO Joint Certification

Laks Gurram described how each year the FDOT and the MPO must jointly certify the metropolitan transportation planning process as described in **23 U.S.C. 134(k) (15)** and **23 C.F.R. 450.334 (a)**. The joint certification begins in January. The District and the MPO create a joint certification package that includes a summary of noteworthy achievements by the MPO and if applicable, a list of any recommendations and/or corrective actions. The Charlotte County-Punta Gorda MPO Joint Certification Package has been reviewed and accurately reflects the results of the joint certification review meeting held on January 24, 2025 in Fort Myers. Based on the review and evaluation, the Florida Department of Transportation had no recommendations and/or corrective actions.

[2024 FDOT/MPO Joint Certification/Noteworthy Achievements](#)

[2024 FDOT/MPO Joint Certification Statement](#)

Pauline Klein made a motion to recommend MPO Board approval of the 2024 FDOT/MPO Joint Certification, authorizing the MPO Board Chair to sign the FDOT/MPO Joint Certification Statement. James Wernicke seconded the motion, and it was approved unanimously.

11. 2050 Long Range Transportation Plan Update

Marc Ispass gave BPAC Members an update on the 2050 LRTP.

The MPO is required to update its Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) at least every five years. The next update of the LRTP will have a horizon year of 2050 and must be adopted by the MPO Board by October 2, 2025.

The MPO Staff has received the preliminary results of the 2023 Existing plus Committed (E+C) Network Deficiency Analysis from FDOT. Based on this analysis, the MPO will be able to identify the needed roadway projects based on future (2050) travel demand.

These network changes will initially be based on the 2045 LRTP Roadway Needs. Added to the 2045 Needs will be comments received from the public during the outreach activities currently underway as well as input from the MPO Board and Advisory Committees. Updates

for the model development process will also include revisions to the allocation of population and jobs based on the LRTP Subcommittee's review and comments.

Initial outreach on the 2050 Needs Plan has been underway including the three public workshops that were held on February 10, 11 and 12, 2025 where more than 50 individuals attended and provided input on the development of the LRTP. Additional outreach activities include a short survey and an interactive mapping exercise. Both of these items are available on the MPO's website; www.ccpgmpo.gov. MPO Staff and the Consultant met with the Steering Committee on February 26th, 2025 to provide feedback on the existing network.

2050 LRTP Multimodal Needs

Power Point Presentation

Laura Rossi asked how unforeseen changes may affect this plan given its long-term scope. Mr. Ispass explained that there is an amendment process in place for adding, changing, or fast tracking projects. He also described the document as a living document that evolves with time. Mr. Gurram explained that it is built on over time from previous LRTP plans, as it is updated every 5 years, with a future horizon that is 25 years out. There was also discussion in the previous LRTP updates about the possibility of connecting Punta Gorda to Englewood with an additional bridge across the Charlotte Harbor.

12. SR 776 Safety Improvements – Presentation

Laks Gurram introduced John Kubicki, FDOT, who virtually presented information on planned SR 776 safety improvements. The Safe System Approach was discussed. Much public outreach was underway. A workshop on the Charlotte County side of Englewood would be coming soon. It would be similar to a workshop done in Sarasota County. A safety workshop will be held on Monday afternoon, March 17, 2025 in Fort Myers.

The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), District One, is proposing improvements at multiple intersections along State Road (SR) 776 in Charlotte County. The purpose of the improvements is to promote safety, enhance traffic flow and reduce crashes. The proposed improvements include converting existing full median openings to two-way directional median openings at seven (7) intersections along the corridor:

- Oceanspray Boulevard,
- Sea Mist Drive/Shalimar Street,
- David Boulevard,
- Hollis Avenue,
- Cornelius Boulevard,
- Biscayne Drive,
- Collingswood Boulevard.

Potential median modifications are also being considered at three (3) additional intersections:

- Mayport Street/Biggs Street,
- Regina Drive/Roberta Drive,
- Port Charlotte Town Center west entrance.

[SR 776 Safety Improvements](#)

Pauline Klein asked how FDOT handles the transitional period when putting up the restricted intersection crossing. Mr. Kubicki said that this change will possibly have variable signs placed to warn motorists of the change but will likely not place one at all 7 intersections. There was some discussion of how a bicyclist gets around or through the median delineators. It was recommended that bicyclists follow the same pathways as either pedestrians or motor vehicles.

Laura Rossi asked if there were plans to create more permanent solutions to these intersections. Mr. Kubicki explained that the concreting was often done at the same time as other standard road maintenance such as during resurfacing. Ms. Rossi praised FDOT for making such quick moves to mitigate crashes at these intersections.

13. Emergency Vehicle Preemption Devices Installation - Presentation

Information from County Consultants: In 2005, Miovision set out to create a Video Collection device and accompanying software that would revolutionize the way traffic data was collected. In 1968 Opticom was born from the need for traffic signal priority. In mid-2023, these two companies came together on a mission to make streets safer for all road users, while giving cities the ability to better serve and protect their citizens. Opticom has been the leading brand when it comes to priority at intersections, and we have over 180,000 connected vehicles and intersections, Opticom is installed in the 48 of the largest US cities, and we have over 5,000 cities worldwide who depend on this technology.

[Power Point Presentation](#)

Jake Kistel lead the presentation virtually. Laura Rossi asked about current preemptive measures, which are only in place at intersections that are directly connected to the fire department. Richard Lisenbee stated they are piloting the Opticom communicators at 9 intersections and 5 vehicles in the City of Punta Gorda. Ms. Rossi also asked about security measures that are in place to protect the system from outside influences. Mr. Kistel has recommended to go through the white paper sent to MPO Staff member Ray Scott .

14. Public Comments

There were no public comments.

15. Staff Comments

Mr. Gurram gave a brief overview of the comments received from the LRTP public workshops conducting during the month of February.

Shirley Ciampi brought updates on relevant statistics related to Charlotte County Transit and reminded the team about the Charlotte Rides app. There was a question from the committee about bike racks on the buses. Ms. Ciampi stated that was something that could be talked about, though the back of the buses are typically for lift systems. Several members mentioned that their departments are currently hiring.

16. Member Comments

Mr. Wernicke voiced his opinion on the possible non-compliance of bicyclists with the safety recommendations brought forward by Mr. Kubicki. Mr. Blankinship mentioned that the Pedal and Play in Paradise would be taking place on March 22nd.

17. Adjournment (Next BPAC Meeting – April 24, 2025)

Pauline Klein made a motion to adjourn the BPAC meeting. James Wernicke seconded the motion which was approved unanimously.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:36 pm.

The next regularly scheduled BPAC meeting will be held on Thursday, April 24, 2025. Meeting location will be 1050 Loveland Blvd., Port Charlotte, Florida 33980 at 2:00 p.m.