



**CHARLOTTE COUNTY - PUNTA GORDA
METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION
MINUTES OF THE MARCH 12, 2026
BICYCLE/PEDESTRIAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE (BPAC) MEETING**

MEMBERS PARTICIPATING (IN PERSON)

Laura Rossi, Chair, Mid County Representative
David Cormier, West County Representative
Philipp Pfäeffli, Bicycle Business Representative
Brian Blankinship, South County
Pauline Klein, Bicycle Club Representative
Lorenzo Daetz, Historical/Cultural/Environmental

MEMBERS ABSENT

Jan Dick, South County Representative – Excused

ADVISORY MEMBERS

Norma Garcia, Charlotte County Public Schools
Mike Koenig, Charlotte County Community Services
Tanya Merkle, FDOT
Sgt. Dustin Paille, Charlotte County Sheriff's Office

OTHERS PARTICIPATING IN PERSON

Lakshmi N. Gurram, MPO Director
Mark Yaxis, MPO Multi-Modal Planner
Bekie Leslie, MPO Administrative Assistant Supervisor
Tom Arsenault, FDOT
Betty-Ann Sherer, Charlotte County Transit

1. Call to Order & Roll Call

Chair Laura Rossi called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m. A roll call was taken, and a quorum was present.

1A. Addendum: Election of 2026 Officers

Mr. Gurram stated the Election of 2026 Officers was tabled on the November 20, 2025, meeting due to the lack of quorum and would need to be revisited during this meeting.

Mr. Gurram chaired the meeting for agenda item 1A and entertained nominations for BPAC Chair.

Pauline Klein nominated **Laura Rossi** as BPAC Chair. **Brian Blankinship** seconded the nomination, and **Laura Rossi** was elected unanimously.

Mr. Gurram asked for nominations for BPAC Vice Chair.

Laura Rossi nominated **Brian Blankinship** as BPAC Vice Chair. **David Cormier** seconded the nomination, and **Brian Blankinship** was elected unanimously.

Laura Rossi resumed the duties of chair.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

3. Public Comments on Agenda Items

There were no public comments.

4. Consent Agenda:

- A. Approval of minutes: Bicycle/Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC) – November 20, 2025**
- B. Approval of minutes: Bicycle/Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC) – September 25, 2025**
- C. Approval of minutes: Bicycle/Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC) – July 16, 2025**

Brian Blankinship made a motion to approve the minutes. **Laura Rossi** seconded the motion, and it was passed unanimously.

Chair Laura Rossi moved to place Agenda Item 10, Traffic Incident Management (TIM) Team Presentation as the new Agenda Item 5 and to renumber Agenda Items accordingly. **David Cormier** seconded, which was approved unanimously.

5. Traffic Incident Management (TIM) Team Presentation

Tom Arsenault, FDOT, presented on the Traffic Incident Management (TIM) Team, which coordinates multi-agency partners to enhance responder safety, reduce incident clearance times, and restore traffic flow. FDOT supports these efforts through regular TIM meetings, Road Ranger operations, Traffic Management Center monitoring, and real-time traveler information systems.

Members asked questions regarding the availability of camera feeds, and Ms. Garcia requested information about presenting the program to district bus drivers.

6. Bicycle/Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC) Bylaws Amendment

Mr. Gurram reported that staff completed a review of the BPAC Bylaws to ensure consistency with MPO policies and federal and state requirements. Proposed revisions update membership structure, appointment procedures, member qualifications and terms, quorum and voting requirements, leadership roles, meeting procedures, and compliance with Sunshine Law and Public Records requirements.

Mr. Daetz announced his intent to resign at the conclusion of the meeting due to his limited ability to participate in the coming year. Staff suggested converting the Historic/Cultural/Environmental representative seat to an At-large position to provide greater flexibility in filling the vacancy. Members briefly discussed the idea and noted that an at-large designation would broaden eligibility and allow Charlotte County residents to serve.

***Laura Rossi** made a motion to recommend the MPO Board approve the revised BPAC Bylaws. **Lorenzo Daetz** seconded the motion which was carried unanimously.*

7. 2025 Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT)/Charlotte County-Punta MPO Joint Certification

Mr. Gurram indicated during FDOT's annual Joint Certification review, the Charlotte County-Punta Gorda MPO was rated Low Risk, which shows that the MPO is operating efficiently, following all required procedures, and managing federal and state funds responsibly. He also noted that no corrective actions or recommendations have been suggested to the MPO. Mr. Gurram praised the great working relationship between FDOT and the MPO.

Ms. Sherer and Ms. Klein both complimented MPO staff for their work.

***Pauline Klein** made a motion to recommend the MPO Board approve the 2025 FDOT/MPO Joint Certification, authorizing the MPO Board Chair to sign the Joint Certification Statement. **Brian Blankinship** seconded the motion which was carried unanimously.*

8. FY 2025 – FY 2026 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) De-obligation of Planning Funds (PL)/FDOT MPO Amendment to Agreement

Mr. Gurram reported that the MPO Board approved the current two-year UPWP on May 20, 2024. Staff recommend amending the FY 2026 UPWP by de-obligating \$40,000 from Task 1 Administration and \$20,000 from Task 8 Transit/TD Planning and rolling those

funds into the draft FY 2026/2027–FY 2027/2028 UPWP, effective July 1, 2026. The draft UPWP also includes the updated Metropolitan Planning Organization Agreement.

The de-obligation of Federal Planning (PL) funds releases previously authorized but unspent funds from FY 2025/2026 so they may be carried forward into the next UPWP and available for MPO use beginning October 2026.

Laura Rossi made a motion to recommend the MPO Board approve the FY 2025/2026 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) amendment through the de-obligation of \$60,000 in PL funds, amend the Metropolitan Planning Organization Agreement, and authorize staff to make any minor revisions as recommended by FDOT and FHWA. **Brian Blankinship** seconded the motion which was carried unanimously.

9. Reports:

A. Chair's Report

Chair Laura Rossi reported that she attended the Safe Roads Summit hosted by the Miami-Dade TPO and Broward MPO. She noted that several topics were discussed, including the use of AI tools in the transportation planning process.

B. Charlotte County Report

No representative from Charlotte County was present.

C. City of Punta Gorda Report

No representative from the City of Punta Gorda was present.

D. Sheriff's Report

A report from the Sheriff's Office detailing recent crash data was provided in advance. Ms. Klein commented on the high number of crashes in a short period of time. Members discussed how bicycles are classified in crash data, which includes pedal-powered bicycles and e-bikes but not electric motorcycles. Some confusion remains as these vehicle categories continue to evolve.

E. Charlotte County Transit Report

Ms. Betty-Ann Sherer provided an update on Transit activities. Transit recently hired a senior dispatcher and is actively recruiting a safety coordinator. Two new buses are scheduled to enter service in April, with six additional buses expected by the beginning of the fourth quarter. Three of the new buses will feature LED destination screens.

Transit is also undergoing rebranding as Charlotte Rides. Recent performance data shows 100% on-time performance and 1,237 trips booked in February through the Charlotte Rides app. The median rider age is 55, while the median app user age is 44.

Mr. Cormier inquired about the possibility of purchasing retired buses. Ms. Sherer explained that retired vehicles are typically returned to FDOT for auction but noted she would confirm the process. Ms. Rossi asked about the availability of bike racks; Ms. Sherer stated that racks are not currently planned but remain under consideration.

10. Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) Report

Ms. Tanya Merkle reported that FDOT is not currently accepting new SUN Trail applications in order to prioritize funding for existing projects. Additional applications may be considered as more funding becomes available. She noted that FDOT is particularly interested in projects located along corridors with high bicycle and pedestrian crash rates or where there is demonstrated public demand.

Members discussed how neighboring counties have developed enhanced trail systems, such as Sarasota County's Legacy Trail. Ms. Merkle explained that these projects often rely on substantial local matching funds and contributions from nonprofit partners.

Members also reviewed SUN Trail requirements and funding sources, including the 1% sales tax. One member observed that Charlotte County ranks among the lowest in funding received for SUN Trail projects.

11. Draft FY 2026/2027 – FY 2027/2028 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)

Mr. Gurram presented the Draft FY 2026/2027–FY 2027/2028 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), which outlines planned work activities and associated costs for the next two fiscal years beginning July 1, 2026. He noted that federal and state regulations determine which planning activities are eligible for funding.

The final draft will be presented for action at the Joint Meeting on April 23, 2026. This item was informational, and no questions or comments were raised.

12. Draft FY 2026/2027 – FY 2030/2031 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

Mr. Gurram presented the Draft FY 2026/2027–FY 2030/2031 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), which outlines federal and state transportation capital improvements and serves as a staged, multi-year program consistent with the MPO Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). The MPO Board will review the TIP at its March 30, 2026 meeting.

He also noted that the Charlotte County–Punta Gorda MPO has interlocal agreements with the Sarasota-Manatee MPO, Lee County MPO, and Heartland Regional TPO to coordinate regional planning projects. Each MPO identifies regional priorities and incorporates those projects into its TIP. Previously adopted regional priorities are included in the current draft.

Members briefly discussed the item for clarification.

13. 2026 Draft Project Priorities

Mr. Gurram presented the annual List of Project Priorities (LOPP), which is consistent with the goals and policies of the MPO's Long Range Transportation Plan. The LOPP is used in developing the FDOT Five-Year Work Program and the MPO Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Project priority applications are expected from Charlotte County and the City of Punta Gorda. The final LOPP will be approved by the MPO Board and submitted to FDOT by June 30, 2026 for consideration in the FY 2028–FY 2032 Draft Tentative Work Program.

Mr. Daetz asked whether the county was considering signalization instead of roundabouts at certain intersections. Members explained that while roundabouts are often safer and more efficient, they require additional right-of-way and may not be suitable for tighter intersections. Studies typically balance cost, safety, and operational efficiency. Members also discussed why projects are sometimes divided into smaller segments, noting that phased funding often makes it easier to advance projects incrementally.

14. Public Comments

There were no public comments.

15. Staff Comments

Mr. Gurram provided an update on the current legislative session. He and Mr. Yaxis also presented information on BPAC membership trends across Florida's 27 MPOs to support future discussions regarding potential adjustments to BPAC membership structure, including whether to expand membership and whether additional technical staff from local jurisdictions should serve as voting members.

16. Member Comments

Brian Blankinship mentioned that the Pedal and Play event is on Saturday, March 21, 2026 at Laishley Park in Punta Gorda. There are several bike routes planned to range from an interactive 10-mile "Mystery Ride" to a 62-mile ride throughout much of Punta Gorda and the surrounding area.

17. Adjournment (Next Joint BPAC/TAC/CAC Meeting – April 23, 2026)

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at **4:17** p.m. The next scheduled Joint BPAC/TAC/CAC meeting will be held on Thursday, April 23, 2026, in

BPAC Meeting Minutes
March 12, 2026

person at Charlotte Harbor Event and Conference Center, 75 Taylor Street, Punta Gorda, FL 33950 at 10 a.m.