

# Joint Meeting Minutes



## Minutes

**Wednesday, May 6, 2026 | 10 a.m.**

Location: UF IFAS Extension Office DeSoto County 2150 NE  
Roan Street Arcadia, Florida 34266

### 1. **Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 10:00 a.m. by Charlotte County Commissioner/Charlotte County – Punta Gorda MPO Chair Christopher Constance, who then chaired the meeting. A quorum was present for both MPOs.

#### **HRTPO Board members in attendance included:**

Jerod Gross – DeSoto County Board of County Commissioner  
Tim Stanley – Glades County Board of County Commissioner  
Chris Campbell – Highlands County Board of County Commissioner  
Scott Kirouac – Highlands County Board of County Commissioner  
Don Elwell – Highlands County Board of County Commissioner, HRTPO Chair  
Harrison Harvey – City of Sebring Council Member  
Jamie Driggers – Interim FDOT District One Secretary

#### **Charlotte County – Punta Gorda MPO Board members in attendance included:**

Christopher Constance – Charlotte County Board of County Commissioner,  
Ken Doherty – Charlotte County Board of County Commissioner  
Jeannine Polk – City of Punta Gorda Council Member  
Joe Tiseo – Charlotte County Board of County Commissioner  
TJ Thornberry – Charlotte County Airport Authority Commissioner

#### **Local Government Staff and Other Attendees**

Carl Berge – City of Punta Gorda  
Tom David – Charlotte County  
Tony Conte – Charlotte County Schools  
John Elias – Charlotte County Public Works  
Scott McCall – Florida Department of Transportation  
Mandy Hines – DeSoto County  
Judy Schaeter – DeSoto County Board of County Commissioner  
Jessica Bezares – Okeechobee County  
Edith Perez – Florida Department of Transportation  
Bill Stephenson – Samaritan's Touch Care Center  
L. N. Gurram - Charlotte County-Punta Gorda MPO  
Bekie Leslie - Charlotte County-Punta Gorda MPO  
Mark Yaxis - Charlotte County-Punta Gorda MPO  
Marybeth Soderstrom - Heartland Regional TPO  
Richard Ranck – Heartland Regional TPO  
Brenda Torres - Heartland Regional TPO

**2. Invocation**

The Invocation was lead by Chair Constance.

**3. Pledge of Allegiance**

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited by those in attendance.

**4. Chairs' Comments**

Board leadership emphasized the importance of regional coordination and noted that this was the first formal joint meeting between the two organizations.

Members discussed the need to strengthen communication between neighboring counties and transportation agencies and recognized the importance of regional collaboration regarding freight movement, evacuation planning, roadway congestion, and growth management.

Commissioners expressed appreciation for FDOT participation and acknowledged the value of having direct discussions with regional partners rather than operating independently.

Members emphasized local decision-making and the importance of documenting regional coordination for state and federal partners.

**5. Public Comments on Agenda Items**

No formal public comments were made at this time.

**6. SR 31 Improvements**

Staff presented an overview of SR 31 corridor improvements and ongoing projects in Lee, Charlotte, and DeSoto Counties.

The corridor was described as a significant north-south Strategic Intermodal System (SIS) facility extending from SR 80 in Lee County to SR 70 in DeSoto County, carrying substantial freight traffic. Current traffic volumes were noted at approximately 19,800 vehicles daily, with nearly 19% truck traffic.

Discussion included:

- The SR 31 widening and bridge replacement project in Lee County
- Construction of the new Babcock Ranch alignment
- The SR 31/CR 74 roundabout project in Charlotte County, anticipated for completion in Summer 2026
- The unfunded need to widen SR 31 from two lanes to four lanes between Cypress Parkway and CR 74, estimated at approximately \$263 million total project cost

Staff also reviewed DeSoto County projects, including:

- A resurfacing project from north of SE Apache Drive to SR 70 programmed for FY 2028
- The SR 31 Extension project from SR 70 to US 17 northeast of Arcadia
  - PD&E is complete
  - Design is anticipated in 2027
  - Right-of-way funding is identified in the 2040-2045 SIS Cost Feasible Plan
  - Construction remains unfunded

Members noted that the corridor has been discussed regionally for decades and stated that growth pressures throughout Southwest Florida make the project increasingly critical.

Commissioners discussed how inland growth is accelerating as coastal development constraints increase and emphasized the need to proactively improve inland infrastructure before congestion, safety, and capacity challenges worsen.

## 7. **Kings Highway Project Status**

Staff presented the status of Kings Highway (CR 769) corridor improvements in Charlotte and DeSoto Counties.

Kings Highway was identified as a key north-south regional corridor connecting Charlotte and DeSoto Counties. Existing traffic volumes were noted at approximately 17,400 vehicles per day.

Charlotte County staff reviewed:

- The widening project from Sandhill Boulevard to the DeSoto County line
- BOCC approval of the construction contract
- Issuance of the Notice to Proceed on April 27, 2026

DeSoto County and FDOT representatives reviewed the DeSoto segment widening project from the Charlotte County line to Peace River Street.

Staff explained that:

- The corridor will ultimately widen from two lanes to four lanes
- Due to funding constraints, the project was segmented into phases
- The first segment from the Charlotte County line to SW Glenadine Street is funded for construction in FY 2027

FDOT project staff provided an update regarding:

- 90% plans anticipated by June 2026
- Final design completion anticipated in November 2026
- Construction letting anticipated in March 2027
- Estimated construction duration of approximately 1.5 to 2 years

Commissioners stated that Kings Highway has become increasingly important due to congestion on I-75 and increased regional growth. Multiple members noted that residents increasingly use Kings Highway and US 17 instead of I-75 due to interstate congestion.

Discussion also highlighted:

- The role of Kings Highway in hurricane evacuation
- Flooding experienced during recent storms
- Concerns that existing two-lane segments are insufficient for projected growth

Board members from both counties expressed support for continuing regional advocacy for the Kings Highway widening project.

## 8. **Joint Transportation Regional Incentive Program (TRIP) Project Priority List**

Staff presented information regarding the Transportation Regional Incentive Program (TRIP) and discussed establishment of a Joint Regional Multimodal Transportation System and coordinated TRIP Priority List.

Staff reviewed TRIP eligibility requirements, including:

- Minimum 50% local match
- Location on an adopted regional roadway network
- Joint prioritization by adjacent MPOs
- Inclusion within local Capital Improvement Elements (CIEs)

The previously executed Interlocal Agreement between the HRTPO and Charlotte County–Punta Gorda MPO was discussed.

Staff reviewed existing regional roadway networks and current TRIP priority lists.

Board members discussed:

- The importance of creating unified legislative priorities
- Memorializing regional transportation priorities
- Coordinating legislative outreach and advocacy with state and federal partners

Members agreed that Kings Highway should be elevated as a joint regional transportation priority for both boards.

Several members also discussed Bermont Road (CR 74) as a potential future joint priority corridor. There was broad consensus supporting continued coordination between the boards regarding regional transportation priorities and legislative advocacy.

## **9. Bermont Road Status (CR 74)**

Staff presented an overview of Bermont Road (CR 74) corridor conditions and planned improvements.

The roadway was described as a critical east-west corridor connecting US 17 in Charlotte County to SR 29 in Glades County. Existing traffic volumes include:

- Approximately 9,200 vehicles daily between US 17 and SR 31, with approximately 30% truck traffic
- Approximately 6,200 vehicles daily between SR 31 and SR 29, with approximately 11% truck traffic

Charlotte County staff reviewed:

- Recent safety enhancements
- Reduced speed limits
- New no-passing zones
- Long-range widening needs identified in the 2050 LRTP

Glades County staff discussed the resurfacing project extending from US 27 west to the Charlotte County line.

Commissioners discussed:

- Significant truck traffic
- Freight movement
- Safety concerns
- Lack of east-west connectivity south of SR 70
- The importance of the corridor during hurricane evacuations

Members emphasized that Bermont Road is becoming increasingly important as regional growth continues eastward.

Discussion also focused on future coordination opportunities and the importance of ensuring that roadway improvements are planned proactively rather than reactively.

## **10. US 17 Improvements**

Staff presented an overview of US 17 corridor conditions and planned improvements.

Traffic volumes along US 17 were reviewed:

- Approximately 16,500 vehicles daily from US 41 to I-75
- Approximately 29,500 vehicles daily from I-75 to Bermont Road
- Approximately 18,000 vehicles daily from Bermont Road to the DeSoto County line

Staff reviewed:

- Planned improvements from US 41 to E. Marlympia Way
- Freight-related improvements from Copley Avenue to Belmont Road
- SIS planned improvements at the I-75/US 17 interchange

Discussion focused on:

- Freight congestion
- Truck traffic growth
- Safety concerns
- Increased regional development pressures

Commissioners emphasized that US 17 remains a major regional freight corridor and that traffic volumes are continuing to increase significantly throughout the region.

#### **11. Next Meeting Date**

Board members agreed that the joint boards should meet at least annually, with additional meetings scheduled as needed.

Members also supported continued coordination between executive directors, staff, and FDOT representatives between formal meetings.

#### **12. Staff Comments**

Staff thanked all participants for attending and emphasized the importance of maintaining regional collaboration moving forward.

FDOT representatives expressed appreciation for the productive dialogue and stated that continued coordination would be beneficial for future regional transportation planning efforts.

#### **13. Public Comments**

Public comments included concerns regarding:

- Safety concerns along SR 70
- Truck traffic
- Lack of roadway shoulders
- Evacuation challenges
- Electric vehicles not contributing to roadway funding through fuel taxes
- Road deterioration caused by heavy truck traffic

Members of the public encouraged continued regional coordination and transportation investment.

#### **14. Member Comments**

Board members continued discussion regarding:

- Rising construction costs
- Inflation impacts
- Federal transportation funding uncertainty
- Challenges with project delivery timelines
- The need for stable, long-term funding sources

Members repeatedly emphasized the need for:

- Additional transportation funding
- Better coordination with state and federal legislators
- Long-term infrastructure planning
- Proactive investment before congestion, safety, and capacity challenges worsen

Commissioners thanked FDOT Secretary Driggers for attending and participating in the discussion.

#### **15. Adjournment**

The Joint Meeting of the Charlotte County–Punta Gorda MPO Board and the Heartland Regional TPO Board was adjourned.

