



**CHARLOTTE COUNTY - PUNTA GORDA
METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION
MINUTES OF MARCH 4, 2026
CITIZENS' ADVISORY COMMITTEE (CAC) MEETING**

MEMBERS PARTICIPATING (IN PERSON)

Dianne Quilty, Mid County Representative, CAC Chair
Steven E. Hurt, Mid County Representative
Mary Ellen Kiss, South County Representative
Pauline Klein, At-Large Representative
Stephen Rabinowitz, Mid County Representative
Priya Ahluwalia, South County Representative
James Kunard, South County Representative
Steve Schoff, West County Representative
Sam Besase, West County Representative
Richard Russell, At-Large Representative

MEMBERS ABSENT

Jill Hartman, West County Representative, CAC Vice Chair-Excused

OTHERS PARTICIPATING IN PERSON

Lakshmi N. Gurram, MPO Director
Mark Yaxis, MPO Multi-Modal Planner
Bekie Leslie, MPO Administrative Assistant Supervisor
Tom Arsenault, FDOT Traffic Incident Management Team
Shirley Ciampi, Charlotte County Transit
Carl Bengé, City of Punta Gorda Urban Design
Officer W. Weisspennig, Charlotte County Sheriff Office
Ravi Kamarajugadda, Charlotte County Public Works (Participating Remotely)

1. Call to Order & Roll Call

MPO Director Lakshmi N. Gurram explained that CAC Chair Diane Quilty would be arriving late to the meeting and that Vice Chair Jill Hartman was excused. According to the CAC Bylaws, when neither the Chair nor the Vice Chair is able to attend a meeting, the Committee shall elect MPO Director or Staff member as an Interim Chair who may preside but shall not vote. Mr. Gurram indicated that the members present may begin the meeting by voting on a committee member or staff member to chair the meeting until such time as the Chair arrives.

Sam Besase nominated Mr. Gurram to temporarily chair the meeting of the CAC. **Pauline Klein** seconded the motion, which was carried unanimously.

Mr. Gurram called the meeting to order at 1:30 pm. A roll call was taken, and a quorum was present. Mr. Gurram welcomed Stephen Rabinowitz as the newest member of the CAC, being recently appointed by the MPO board to serve as a Mid County Representative.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

3. Public Comments on Agenda Items

There were no public comments.

4. Report:

A. Chair's Report

Mr. Gurram had nothing to report.

B. City of Punta Gorda Report

Carl Benge reported that the city is working with FDOT on improvements to Cooper Street and plans to bring the item to the City Council for consideration at the November meeting. It was also brought up that the South Fork Alligator Creek bridge project is approved by the city. Currently they are approved for design money and are looking for sources for construction funds.

A discussion was held among members regarding the roundabout at Carmalita Street. Mr. Gurram stated he would be happy to relay any concerns regarding the roundabout and safety to FDOT if member wish to provide comments regarding the design concerns

C. Charlotte County Report

Ravi Kamarajugadda reported on two projects from the County. The intersection improvements at Cochran Boulevard and Veterans Boulevard, are complete, and road widening work on Kings Hwy from Veterans Blvd. to Sandhill Blvd. is expected to begin soon.

Mr. Kamarajugadda also noted that beginning on April 1, 2026, automated ticketing will be implemented in specific school zones during designated hours.

Beginning in June, the program will expand to additional school zones throughout the County.

Dr. Mary Ellen Kiss inquired about the 1000 feet unfinished Burnt Store Road projects. Mr. Kamarajugadda indicated that he would follow up with her regarding the information requested. Further discussion occurred regarding Harborview Road and the importance of adequately addressing traffic generated by the proposed Buc-ees development, as well as confusion surrounding conflicting signage in the Deep Creek Elementary School Zone.

Mr. Besase asked whether the County could provide crash data for incidents occurring within school zones, as well as information on two projects on Gasparilla Road at the intersections of Ingraham Boulevard and Rotonda East Boulevard. Ravi Kamarajugadda indicated that county has the data but needs some refinement before it can be sent to the members

D. Sheriff's Report

Officer Weisspfennig reported that officer training for the school zone speed cameras program will begin on March 5, 2026. After the training officers will have a better understanding of how the initiative will be enforced.

There was discussion regarding the speed limit reduction on SR 31, which was determined to be a temporary while construction is underway. There was also discussion on the possible introduction of redlight cameras and speeding cameras throughout the county and if current cameras similar to and including FLOCK cameras would be used for this purpose, which officer Weisspfennig stated they would not be used for anything outside of intelligence gathering. Finally, a discussion occurred on the enforcement of e-bike usage on sidewalks and the speed limit as well as a possible buffer zone for enforcement. Officer Weisspfennig and Mr. Kamarajugadda indicated that on all public sidewalks in the county, e-bikes are limited to 15 mph and there is no buffer zone.

E. Charlotte County Transit Report

Shirley Ciampi reported that transit recently hired a senior dispatcher and that they are currently hiring a safety coordinator. Rebranding is underway and should be completed soon, with Transit officially becoming Charlotte County Rides in the near future. She reported that Transit has procured several new buses and that they expect more soon with increased capacity to meet a growing need. She also reported that Transit is now under Charlotte County Human Services, which better aligns with the services they provide.

Ms. Ahluwalia asked when Transit service may become available in the Babcock Ranch area. Ms. Ciampi responded that there is no definitive timeline at this time, but the County is continuing to explore the possibility.

5. Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) Report

FDOT was not present to provide an update or report.

6. Consent Agenda:

A. Approval of Minutes: Citizens' Advisory Committee (CAC) – November 19, 2025 Minutes

James Kunard made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. Priya Ahluwalia seconded the motion, and it was approved unanimously.

7. Citizens' Advisory Committee (CAC) Bylaws Amendment

At this time Chair Diane Quilty arrived at the meeting and Mr. Gurram transferred the chair to Ms. Quilty for the remainder of the meeting.

Mr. Gurram presented and indicated that staff have completed a review of the existing CAC Bylaws to ensure consistency with current MPO policies, federal and state requirements, and the committee's needs. The proposed revisions include updates to membership structure, committee composition and appointment procedures, member qualifications and terms, quorum and voting requirements, Chair and Vice Chair roles and responsibilities, meeting procedures and protocols, and compliance with Sunshine Law and Public Records requirements. Mr. Gurram stated the changes are intended to improve clarity, strengthen the CAC's core functions, and support more efficient coordination between MPO and its Committee members.

There was a discussion regarding whether the Bylaws should include or remove language requiring appointed CAC members to be United States Citizens. Several members suggested to update the wording to reference citizenship on the application form and also not making U.S citizenship a requirement to serve on the committees which are volunteers in nature. The Committee also discussed ensuring that the Bylaws clearly state that a quorum consists of six members under Section 6, or alternatively, that the quorum requirement be defined as a simple majority.

James Kunard made a motion to table this item for further discussion at the July 15, 2026, meeting to incorporate the changes outlined during the meeting. Sam Besase seconded the motion, and it carried unanimously

8. 2025 Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT)/Charlotte County-Punta MPO Joint Certification

Mr. Gurram stated that each year, FDOT and Charlotte County – Punta Gorda 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, as District One 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 February 10, 2026. Based on the review and evaluation, the Florida Department of Transportation had no recommendation and/or corrective actions.

He 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. Mr. Gurram praised the great working relationship between FDOT and the MPO.

There were no comments or discussion on this item

Sam Besase 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. **Pauline Klein** seconded the motion which was carried unanimously.

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

Mr. Gurram stated the MPO Board approved the current two-year UPWP on May 20, 2024. MPO staff recommends amending the FY 2026 UPWP by de-obligating \$40,000 from Task 1 Administration and \$20,000 from Task 8 Transit/TD Planning by rolling these funds into the new draft FY 2026/2027–FY 2027/2028 UPWP that will be effective July 1, 2026. The new draft UPWP also includes the updated Metropolitan Planning Organization Agreement.

Bekie Leslie clarified that the de-obligation of Federal Planning (PL) funds releases federal funds previously authorized but not expended by the MPO in FY 2025/2026 allowing these funds to be “carried forward” into the new FY 2026/2027 - FY 2027/2028 UPWP. These funds will then be available for use by the MPO by October 2026.

James Kunard asked for clarification on why the funds were being moved. Ms. Leslie explained that the funds are being transferred from one UPWP cycle to the new UPWP cycle starting July 1, 2026. The funds would be carried over from one fiscal year to the next.

Sam Besase asked for clarification regarding current MPO staff levels. Mr. Gurram stated that staff currently consists of the three staff members, with two additional staff positions anticipated in the near future, pending available funding.

Dr Mary Ellen Kiss 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. **Steve Schoff** seconded the motion which was carried out unanimously.

10. Traffic Incident Management (TIM) Team Presentation

Mr. Tom Arsenault, Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) gave a presentation on the Traffic Incident Management (TIM) Team effort by coordinating multi-agency partners to improve responder safety, reduce incident clearance times, and restore normal traffic flow as quickly as possible. His presentation focused on Florida's Open Roads Policy and what the TIM Team is, and the importance of such meetings facilitated by FDOT. Committee members expressed their appreciation for Mr. Arsenault's presentation, noting that it was highly informative.

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

Mr. Gurram presented the Draft FY2026/2027 – FY 2027/2028 UPWP. He stated that the final draft will be presented to the Committee for action at the Joint Meeting on April 23, 2026. This draft focuses on the next two fiscal years beginning on July 1, 2026. He stated the UPWP includes a narrative description of planned work activities and cost estimates for each task. Federal and state regulations govern the types of activities eligible for planning funding. Mr. Gurram stated that the final draft will be presented to the Committee for approval at the Joint Meeting on April 23, 2026.

Mr. Kunard requested information be sent to him about current projects being undertaken by Punta Gorda Airport. There was brief discussion for clarification on funding within the UPWP.

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

Mr. Gurram presented the draft FY 2026/2027 – FY 2030/2031 TIP. He explained 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 CAC formally reviews the development of the TIP. The Charlotte County – Punta Gorda MPO Board will review the TIP at the March 30, 2026 Regular Meeting.

He also mentioned the Charlotte County – Punta Gorda MPO entered into an interlocal agreement with Sarasota – Manatee MPO, Lee County MPO and also with Heartland Regional TPO, formalizing and specifying regional planning projects along with time frames 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 accordance with the interlocal agreement in the TIP.

Mr. Gurram stated that this draft is for informational purposes and review. A final draft will be presented to the Committee for action at the Joint Meeting on April 23, 2026.

Priya Ahluwalia requested additional information regarding the road closure on SR 31 at Babcock Ranch and what traffic plans will be place. Mr. Gurram stated that he will contact Lee MPO to obtain more information on the matter.

2026 Draft Project Priorities

Mr. Gurram presented the annual List of Project Priorities (LOPP) consistent with the goals, objectives, and policies of the MPOs adopted Long Range Transportation Plan. The LOPP is used in developing the next draft FDOT Five-Year Work Program, and the Charlotte County – Punta Gorda MPO Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Mr. Gurram discussed that the MPO is expecting project priority applications for candidate projects from Charlotte County and the City of Punta Gorda. Below is the list of top five projects that both entities submitted on October 1, 2025

Charlotte County Projects:

1. SR 776 at Biscayne Blvd – Signalization
2. Veterans Blvd at Atwater St – Turn Lanes / Intersection Improvements
3. SR 776 at Pine St / Placida Rd – Add Additional Westbound Left Turn Lane
4. SR 776 at San Casa Dr – Add Northbound Left Turn Lane
5. SR 776 at Spinnaker Blvd – Add Eastbound and Westbound Right Turn Lanes

City of Punta Gorda Projects:

1. Cooper St from Airport Rd to E. Marion Ave
2. Traffic Light at Burnt Store Rd and Home Depot
3. Retta Esplanade Traffic Calming
4. US 41 NB Harborwalk Phase IV from Retta Esplanade to Peace River Bridge
5. SUN Trail US 41 NB – South Alligator Bridge

Mr. Gurram noted that the top five projects submitted by Charlotte County on the LOPP will not be the same as those previously submitted and will include several additional projects. Mr. Gurram mentioned the final LOPP applications must be submitted in GAP to FDOT District One by March 31, 2026. The Final LOPP will be approved by the MPO Board and submitted to FDOT by June 30, 2026, for consideration during the development of the FY 2028–FY 2032 Draft Tentative Work Program.

There was a brief discussion on the need for widening of sidewalks because e-bikes are making it dangerous for others to share space with them. There was additional discussion on the bridge at Rotonda Blvd S and that it has been under construction for too long and is leaving residents to travel further.

13. Public Comments

There were no public comments.

14. Staff Comments

Mr. Gurram highlighted several key legislative items that would have an impact on transportation. He also presented information HB 543/SB 1080.

Dr. Kiss requested that staff send the committee members all pertaining information regarding HB 543 and SB 1080. Discussion explaining the proposed legislation also took place. Ms. Leslie provided a copy of the proposed HB 543 bill to members.

Bekie noted that the Peggie Walters Award nomination period is approaching and asked members to submit any nominations to staff. She also stated that she will forward a copy of the Peggie Walters Award criteria to members for their reference.

Mr. Gurram also updated the Committee on the Bike–Ped map that staff is currently revising, noting that it will be ready for public viewing as soon as possible. Mr. Gurram provided staff comments and thanked the CAC members for their participation.

15. Member Comments

Dr. Kiss thanked Mr. Gurram for attending a cross-jurisdiction meeting regarding Burnt Store Road, noting that it was a very productive meeting.

Sam Besase raised questions regarding multifamily housing development on Parade Circle and expressed concerns about potential traffic impacts in the area that have not been addressed. Ravi Kamarajugadda explained the project to Mr. Besase and described the method for counting units within a development.

Dianne Quilty commented on an intersection on SR 776 and Hollis Ave that several residents had contacted her about. Mr. Gurram recommended that she provide the comments to MPO staff so they can follow up and forward the information to the appropriate agency staff.

Mr. Kunard made a motion for the Committee members to draft a letter to the Florida State House, Senate, and other interested parties expressing their concerns regarding the proposed amendment to combine Charlotte/Lee/Collier. The Committee discussed preparing correspondence for members to use in opposition to the amendment filed to HB 543 and SB 1080. **Stephen Rabinowitz** seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

The MPO Director emphasized that the MPO cannot use federal dollars for lobbying activities and is prohibited from engaging in any form of lobbying.

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

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at **4:27** p.m. The next scheduled Joint CAC/TAC/BPAC meeting will be held on Thursday, April 23, 2026, in-person at Charlotte Harbor Event and Conference Center, 75 Taylor Street, Punta Gorda FL 33950 at 10 a.m.

DRAFT