



**Joint Meeting Minutes**  
**Sarasota/Manatee & Charlotte County-Punta Gorda**  
**Metropolitan Planning Organizations**

**DATE:** Monday, January 26, 2026

**TIME:** 11:00 a.m.

**LOCATION:** **DoubleTree by Hilton**  
 8009 15<sup>th</sup> Street East  
 Sarasota, Florida

Wireless Access Available  
 WiFi: Hilton Honors Meetings  
 User Code Access: SARASOTA

**JOINT MEETING MINUTES OF JANUARY 26, 2026**

[\(Link to Meeting Full Recording\)](#)

**1. Call to Order, Pledge of Allegiance and Confirmation of a Quorum: Joint Chairs**

Mayor Gene Brown, Chair, Sarasota/Manatee MPO, called the meeting to order at 11:11 a.m. followed by the Pledge of Allegiance. It was confirmed by Mr. Dave Hutchinson, Sarasota/Manatee MPO, that a **quorum of both MPOs was present.**

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

**Charlotte County-Punta Gorda MPO**

Commissioner Christopher Constance, MD, Chair	Charlotte County
Commissioner Kenneth Doherty	Charlotte County
Commissioner Joseph Tiseo, Vice Chair	Charlotte County
Commissioner Thomas Thornberry	Charlotte County Airport Authority

**Sarasota/Manatee MPO**

Mayor Gene Brown, Chair	City of Bradenton
Councilmember Jayne Kocher	City of Bradenton
Commissioner Steve Branham	Town of Longboat Key
Mayor Dan West	City of Palmetto
Mayor Liz Alpert	City of Sarasota
Commissioner Mike Rahn	Manatee County
Commissioner Tal Siddique	Manatee County
Commissioner Teresa Mast	Sarasota County
Commissioner Mark Smith	Sarasota County
Vice Mayor Jim Boldt	City of Venice

**FDOT District One Non-Voting Advisor**

Wayne Gaither, Director, FDOT Southwest Area Office (SWAO)

**Sarasota/Manatee MPO Staff**

Ryan Brown, Deputy Director  
 Kelly DeForest, Office Manager  
 David Hutchinson, Executive Director  
 Jane Li, Transportation Planner  
 Megan Lui, Planning Manager  
 David Machado, Fiscal Manager  
 Grace Scigousky, Public Involvement Coordinator  
 Wenonah "Nina" Venter, Senior Planner  
 Nick Chiavini, Transportation Planner  
 Rachel McClain, Fiscal Analyst

**Charlotte County-Punta Gorda MPO Staff**

Lakshmi N. Gurram, MPO Director  
 Bekie Leslie, Administrative Services Coordinator  
 Mark Yaxis, Multimodal Planner



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**Others Present**

Kimlyn Walker, Charlotte County Assistant Attorney  
Ned Baier, Volkert, Inc.  
Wade Carrell, Pond and Company  
John Elias, Charlotte County  
Robert Fakhri, Charlotte County  
Spencer Anderston, Sarasota County  
James Wernicke, Sarasota/Charlotte County Resident  
Emily Saidi  
Heidi Maddox, Transit Operations Manager  
Dianne Quilty, Charlotte County-Punta Gorda MPO, CAC Chair

**2. Public Comment**

Mr. James Wernicke, member of the Bicycle Pedestrian Advisory Committee (Charlotte County) made the following comment:

- Expressed his concern to the Board for the need for an interconnecting trail system between Charlotte and Sarasota Counties. He recommended use of the Sun Trail funding, in order to get bicycles onto their own trail system and off the roads mitigating tensions between drivers and bicyclists.

**3. Director's Reports**

Mr. Lakshmi N. Gurram, Director, Charlotte County-Punta Gorda MPO (CC-PG MPO), made the following comments:

- Emphasized coordination among regional partners as essential in meeting the needs of the growing population. He pointed out that both MPO's are experiencing increased congestion, higher rates of serious injuries and fatalities, and greater pressure on our existing transportation system, while decreased revenues and increased construction costs.
- Stated that both MPO's remain committed to strengthening hurricane evacuation routes and advancing climate resilient infrastructure, and that coordinating the safety and resiliency strategies protects residents and improves reliability of the transportation system.
- Reported that all four MPO's unanimously support the study identifying the rail feasibility for the area. Lastly, emphasizing that the efficiency of our transportation system be improved by embracing modern technology and AI (artificial intelligence), which can be leveraged to optimize technology and improve projects, making the efforts effective and enhancing safety.

Mr. David Hutchinson, Executive Director, Sarasota/Manatee MPO (S/M MPO), made the following comments:

- Stated that while working for FDOT, District 1, he helped with FDOT efforts to support the response and recovery from Hurricane Charlie and many other storms since then; the collaboration and relationships built during those challenging times pay off despite ever present funding challenges.
- Introduced his successor at the Sarasota/Manatee MPO, Ryan Brown.

Mr. Ryan Brown, incoming Executive Director, Sarasota/Manatee MPO, made the following comments:

- Emphasized the efforts made regarding the joint effort of both MPO's as Tampa Bay grows and is a region that has significant impact to the state of Florida, while dealing with capacity and funding issues.



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Commissioner Christopher Constance, Chair, Charlotte County made the following comments:

- Recognized Mr. Hutchinson's work, emphasizing the regional cooperation and organizational efficiency throughout the years.

#### 4. FDOT Secretary Remarks

FDOT SWAO Director, Wayne Gaither, made the following comments:

- Opened by conveying the Secretary's apologies for being unable to attend due to other obligations. He discussed earmarks and funding conflicts, stating that if an earmark relies on Transportation Trust Fund (TTF) dollars, it effectively re-prioritizes projects already agreed upon with the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), creating conflicts within the existing project list. However, if earmarks are funded through general revenue, they introduce new funding and do not interfere with TTF priorities. Federal funding is separate and does not pose this conflict.
- Discussed the department policy at the MPO level, stating that the department is working to place limits on the timeline for PD&E studies (Project Development and Environment), because frequent scope changes and new ideas often extend both time and cost. Additionally stating they aim to keep projects on an eight-year completion path, following a typical structure of two years per project phase and that these changes are intended to make the overall project delivery process more efficient for MPOs and local communities.

#### 5. Regional Discussion Items

##### a. Long Range Transportation Plans (LRTPs) Coordination (Charlotte-Punta Gorda MPO, Sarasota/Manatee MPO)

1. District One Regional Planning Model (D1RPM) Coordination
  - Mr. Ryan Brown explains the recent adoption of the region's Long Range Transportation Plan and highlights the major coordination required to support it. A key component is the District 1 regional planning model, developed in collaboration with a private contractor (Traffic Data) and the State of Florida. This model is used to project future travel demand and test various roadway improvement alternatives.
  - Mr. Constance, Chair, Charlotte County, asked what grant programs were available under the current federal administration, to which Mr. Gaither, FDOT, replied that discretionary grants will continue to be available; however, FDOT prefers to use formula driven grants at the state level.
2. Proposed New I-75 Interchange at Yorkshire/Raintree and Prerequisite Projects
  - Mr. Lakshmi N. Gurram, Director, Charlotte County-Punta Gorda MPO, stated Charlotte County's 2050 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) identifies approximately \$2.3 billion in needed roadway improvements, adding that many of the highest-priority needs fall on Strategic Intermodal System (SIS) facilities—such as I-75, US 17, and US 41—because these corridors experience the greatest number of severe crashes. He stated that the County is focusing first on safety and intersection improvements before pursuing major capacity projects, as widening roadways is significantly more expensive.
  - Mr. Gurram stated the LRTP currently includes roughly \$938 million in unfunded needs, largely tied to improvements on state highways and other major regional roads, including SR 776, which spans two counties. The County continues to highlight these regional projects in coordination documents such as the 2022 white paper and in ongoing work toward the next LRTP update.
  - Mr. Gurram continued to state that a key regional priority under discussion is the proposed Yorkshire interchange on I-75, which Charlotte County and the City of North Port support.



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However, movement on the project has been limited. The MPO and partner agencies note that an Interchange Justification Report (IJR) is required, and failure to meet federal justification criteria could restrict eligibility for funding. Additional improvements to surrounding corridors—such as Veterans Boulevard, Winchester Boulevard, and US 41—would likely be needed before an interchange could be justified.

- Mr. Gurram added alternative solutions, such as improvements to Kings Highway, including a potential collector-distributor system north of the existing interchange, were also discussed. Kings Highway currently experiences severe congestion, and an operational evaluation is programmed for 2031–2040. Charlotte County and partner MPOs plan to keep both the Yorkshire and Kings Highway options active so they are positioned to pursue funding should opportunities arise.
  - Mr. Gurram finished by stating the agencies will continue coordinating to support regional mobility, safety, and long-term growth across county lines.
3. River Road
- Mr. Ryan Brown reported significant progress has been made on River Road, particularly on the northern segment between I-75 and US 41, which is currently under construction and advancing well. The southern portion—from US 41 to the county line—was previously a major concern, but substantial movement has occurred over the past year.
  - Mr. Brown added that funding for the southern improvements has come from multiple sources, including Resilient SRQ, HUD funds, state funding, and federal dollars. The combined investment for the South River Road project is approaching \$80 million, divided into two primary segments: US 41 to Winchester, and Winchester to the county line.
  - From the MPO's perspective, Mr. Brown emphasized that Sarasota County's commitment and significant financial investment in this corridor are appreciated. Noting the improvements are also important to Charlotte County, where rapid development and increased traffic demand highlight the need for added roadway capacity along this corridor.

#### b. Regional Trails

- Mr. Ned Baier, Certified Planner & Director of Planning for Volkert, Inc., introduced a Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) study completed last year examining the economic impact of trails and greenways, with a focus on designated SUN Trail segments and official trail towns across the state.
- Mr. Baier stated that the SUN Trail program is a 5,000-mile statewide trail vision, with more than 1,500 miles completed and another 1,000 miles programmed for planning, design, or construction. Recent legislation—Senate Bill 106—expanded both funding and agency responsibilities for implementing the system. The study explored how greenways and trails contribute to economic development, particularly in trail towns located along routes such as the Gulf Coast Trail, which extends from Tampa Bay to Naples. Mr. Baier added that the research focused on five trail-town locations and analyzed visitor spending, property value impacts, trail construction costs, and overall economic activity. Although the study examined only 1% of the SUN Trail network, it documented significant benefits, including:
  - \$30 million in annual GDP increase
  - \$22 million in added personal income
  - 300+ jobs per year
  - Over \$8 million in annual user expenditures
  - More than \$125 million in increased property values
- Mr. Baier presented that case studies from Gainesville, Homestead, Tallahassee, Titusville, and Dunedin illustrated substantial economic activity driven by trail users, particularly in communities with established trail-oriented downtowns. The Pinellas Trail, for example, now draws over 2 million users annually. He added key findings, which included:
  - Florida trails function as a major economic engine.
  - Older, well-established trails generate higher usage and greater economic returns.



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- Most trail users are local residents, though long-distance cyclists remain an important tourism segment.
  - More trail-use counters are needed to document demand and counter the common misconception that “no one will use the trail.”
  - Mr. Baier’s recommendations from the study included expanding the sample size for future economic analyses, incorporating additional metrics such as health, transportation benefits, quality of life, and safety impacts, and continuing statewide data collection.
  - Mr. Baier announced a Greenways and Trails Foundation conference to be held at the Venice Community Center on November 9–10, 2026, focusing on trails, economic development, and tourism—topics of growing interest among policymakers and the public.
  - Mr. Dave Hutchinson raised two key points before updating the group on local trail projects:
    - Trails as Transportation Infrastructure: trails and bicycle/pedestrian facilities are not solely recreational amenities—they serve national, state, and local transportation interests. They support safety, mobility, and economic development, and should be recognized as essential transportation infrastructure. Even though many users are local, the broader system benefits everyone.
    - SUN Trail Program Funding Concerns: the original intent of the SUN Trail program was to fund construction-ready projects that local jurisdictions and MPOs had already prepared. Recently, however, FDOT has shifted toward using SUN Trail funds for large, expensive PD&E studies on long-term segments, moving away from its original purpose. Mr. Hutchinson emphasized that local trail segments in Manatee, Sarasota, and Palmetto are construction-ready and should receive priority for SUN Trail dollars. They encouraged attendees to communicate to state representatives that if FDOT intends to reduce PD&E spending, that policy should apply to the SUN Trail program as well, ensuring funds support construction-ready projects.
  - Lakshmi Gurram’s presented on how the Florida Gulf Coast Trail spans 420 miles, with several segments running through Charlotte County. MPO Staff recently coordinated with the statewide trail council to update the South County alignment, particularly along US 41 to Burnt Store Road. He further stated that multiple trail projects in the county are currently in design, with construction funding still needed—especially for three major segments on SR 776 and US 41, estimated at nearly \$30 million. Mr. Gurram concluded showing some additional US 41 projects that are already under construction but do not yet meet full SUN Trail standards.
  - Wenonah “Nina” Venter presented that further north, Sarasota and Manatee counties have several Gulf Coast Trail projects progressing through the draft FDOT work program. These include segments from the 2023 SUN Trail alignment study, new construction funding, and ongoing PD&E work in Palmetto. Ms. Venter concluded showing how local initiatives are also advancing connections such as the Beneva Road–Fruitville link to Legacy Trail, overpass designs, and key north–south connectors like South River Road, and that together, these efforts aim to build a continuous regional trail network linking multiple counties.
- c. Joint Transportation Regional Incentive Program (TRIP) Project Priority List**
- Mr. Lakshmi N. Gurram, Director, Charlotte County-Punta Gorda MPO, discussed the Transportation Regional Incentive Program (TRIP) and how funding is allocated among Charlotte, Sarasota, and Manatee counties. Under the counties’ interlocal agreement, each is entitled to a one-third share of TRIP funding, with a rotation system determining which county’s project receives priority in a given cycle. Mr. Gurram stated that historically, Charlotte County has received the greatest total amount—approximately \$23 million since 2006—followed by Sarasota and Manatee.
  - Mr. Ryan Brown, incoming Executive Director, Sarasota/Manatee MPO, emphasized that TRIP funding is limited—roughly \$7–8 million per year shared across all 12 counties in District 1—and noted that available dollars have declined over time. Mr. Brown added that because many local project requests are extremely large and exceed the scale of TRIP’s annual capacity, counties and MPO staff are working



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to segment large projects into smaller, fundable components to improve their chances of being selected and to avoid requiring large local matches in a single year.

- Mr. Gurram added that Charlotte County announced one change to its TRIP priority list: Kings Highway (Sand Hill Blvd to the DeSoto county line) has been removed because it is already in construction through 2027.

In addition, Mr. Gurran stated that Tucker's Grade Extension—a new corridor connecting Burnt Store Road to US 41 and eventually I-75—has been added in its place.

- Mr. Ryan Brown reiterated that segmenting projects increases deliverability and ensures the region captures its share of TRIP funding, including additional discussion about potentially re-evaluating TRIP distribution statewide, including creating a single, unified District 1 TRIP list rather than multiple joint lists among only some MPOs. Mr. Brown added this concept may be brought forward at future CUTS (Coordinated Urban Transportation Studies) meetings.

#### 6. Board Member Comments

- Mayor Gene Brown, Chair, Sarasota/Manatee MPO, concluded with an anecdote underscoring the importance of incremental progress—tackling long corridors one segment at a time rather than waiting for full corridor funding at once. The message reinforced the need for regional cooperation, strategic timing, and phased project development to successfully advance major transportation improvements.
- Commissioner Christopher Constance, Chair, Charlotte County-Punta Gorda MPO, concluded with offering thanks to Mr. Dave Hutchinson, Executive Director, Sarasota/Manatee MPO, for his years of dedicated service.

#### 7. Adjournment of Joint Regional Meeting

Chair Gene Brown adjourned the meeting at 12:36 p.m.