



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

MINUTES OF THE MPO BOARD MEETING
MONDAY, AUGUST 3, 2026
CHARLOTTE COUNTY ADMINISTRATION CENTER
18500 MURDOCK CIRCLE, ROOM #119
PORT CHARLOTTE, FL 33948

MEMBERS PRESENT

Commissioner Christopher Constance, MD, Charlotte County Commissioner, *MPO Chair*
Commissioner Joseph Tiseo, Charlotte County Commissioner, *MPO Vice Chair*
Commissioner Ken Doherty, Charlotte County Commissioner
Commissioner Thornberry, Charlotte County Airport Authority
Councilmember Jeannine Polk, Vice Mayor, Punta Gorda City Council

ADVISORY MEMBERS

Jamie Driggers, PE, FDOT, Interim District One Secretary
Wayne Gaither, FDOT Southwest Area Office Director

STAFF PRESENT

Lakshmi N. Gurram, MPO Director
Bekie Leslie, MPO Administrative Services Supervisor
Mark Yaxis, MPO Multimodal Planner
David Moscaso, County Attorney (MPO Legal Services)

OTHERS PRESENT IN-PERSON

John Elias, Charlotte County Public Works
Bill Frank, First Baptist Church of Punta Gorda
Sam Besase, Citizen
Dianne Quilty, CAC Chair
Emma Van Gheem, Sea Grant
David Scarpelli, FDOT Liaison
William Roll, Kimley-Horn
Shaun Cullinan, Charlotte County Community Development
Robert Fakhri, TAC Chair
Heidi Maddox, Charlotte County Transit
Brittany Hilburn, Charlotte County Public Works
Betty-Ann Sherer, Charlotte County Transit

Mary Ellen Kiss, Citizen

Jill Turner, Charlotte County Transit

Harry Metzger, Citizen

Joshua Olive, Citizen

Frank Hommena, Citizen

Don Scott, Lee County MPO

1. Call to Order & Roll Call

MPO Chair, Commissioner Constance called the meeting to order at **2:00 pm**. All MPO Board members were present.

2. Invocation – Pastor Bill Frank – First Baptist Church of Punta Gorda

Pastor Bill Frank of the First Baptist Church of Punta Gorda gave the invocation.

3. Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

4. Presentation of the “Peggy Walters” Citizen Mobility Award

Chair Constance awarded Dianne Quilty, CAC Chair, with the 2026 “Peggy Walters” award on behalf of the MPO. He gave a brief speech commending Ms. Quilty for her service to the County for many years both in her career for many years as well as in her volunteer position on the CAC.

5. Additions and/or Deletions to the Agenda

Mr. Lakshmi N. Gurram, MPO Director indicated that they are no additions or deletions to the agenda. Mr. Gurram noted that Item 10, FDOT Report, had been updated to include the US-41 Bridges “No Fishing” signs under 10 E. This item has been included at the recommendation of MPO Chair Constance . Mr. Gurram also took the opportunity to welcome Lee County MPO Director, Don Scott who attended the meeting.

6. Public Comments on Agenda Items

Sam Besase commented on two items, item 10 and item 13. He stated that he and two other CAC members are adamant about retaining the CAC bylaw requiring American citizenship for committee service. Mr. Besase also provided his opposition to the idea of consolidating the MPOs of Charlotte, Lee, and Collier Counties, noting that the CAC has spoken on this issue in depth.

Mary Ellen Kiss commented on Item 13, noting that the CAC as a whole is against any notion of a consolidation.

Joseph Olive commented on Item 10-E, FDOT Report regarding the “No Fishing Signs” on US 41 Peace River Bridges. He stated that fishing is an integral part of Charlotte County's culture and that penalizing all fishers for the actions of a few is unfair. Mr. Olive presented petitions signed by approximately 220 people urging the County and FDOT to reach a resolution allowing fishing on the US 41 bridges.

Frank Hommena commented on Item 10-E, FDOT Report regarding the “No Fishing Signs” on US 41 Peace River Bridges. Mr. Hommena noted that he has owned a local fishing business for over 40 years. He commented on low income households that rely on sustenance fishing for nutritional purposes, as well as that the lack of piers has reduced tourism in the area by limiting access to fishing opportunities.

Harry Metzger commented on Item 10-E, FDOT Report-No Fishing Signs on US 41 Peace River Bridges. He mentioned that without access to piers and now without access to the bridge to fish from, residents must travel outside the county for fishing access.

Commissioner Tiseo raised the question of whether it would be wise to move the “No Fishing Signs” agenda item, noting that many members of the public had taken time away from work to attend and that moving the item might allow them to return more quickly. Commissioner Constance recommended continuing with the agenda as presented, based on staff's recommendation.

6.1. Public Meeting: FY 2026/2027 – FY 2030/2031 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Roll Forward Amendment

Mr. Gurram introduced the item, explaining that this item requires a public meeting due to it being a formal amendment to the TIP Document. He mentioned that this amendment was brought to MPO staff from FDOT and includes a roll forward report including projects in the previous state fiscal year that were not commenced, have uncommitted portions of projects that have started and have funds remaining on completed projects. These projects automatically roll forward in FDOT's Work Program and must be accounted for in the MPO TIP.

Chair Constance opened the meeting to the public to discuss the TIP Roll Forward Amendment. No member of the public commented on this item.

Commissioner Tiseo made a motion to close public comments. Commissioner Doherty seconded the motion, which was approved unanimously.

Commissioner Doherty made a motion to approve the TIP Roll Forward Amendment. Commissioner Thornberry seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion was approved unanimously.

7. Consent Agenda

a. Approval of Minutes: May 18, 2026 MPO Board Meeting

Commissioner Doherty made a motion to approve the consent agenda. **Commissioner Tiseo** seconded the motion, and the motion was approved unanimously.

8. Chairs' Reports

a. MPO Board Chair's Report

Chair Constance mentioned his intent to comment on agenda items 10E, 11, and 13 but allowed agenda item 10E to be moved up in the agenda to talk about during the Chair's Report. Chair Constance noted that he had a lengthy discussion with FDOT staff regarding the "No Fishing" signs. He explained that FDOT's concerns stemmed from reports of anglers leaving bait and other non-organic debris on the bridge. He also mentioned that MPO Board members were not notified in advance about the installation of the signs. Chair Constance acknowledged that recent weather events have limited many residents' ability to fish elsewhere, making the bridge one of the few accessible locations. He recommended that FDOT take another look at the issue and consider the possibility of reopening the bridges for fishing.

At this point, Commissioner Tiseo requested to move Item 10-E forward for discussion, and the MPO Board members unanimously agreed.

10. FDOT Report – FDOT Led Discussion – E. No Fishing Signs on US 41 Peace River Bridges

Chair Constance noted that the "No Fishing" signs on the US 41 Peace River bridges were installed without prior discussion with the County BCC or staff. He suggested designating one bridge for fishing and the other for pedestrians to separate the uses and reduce conflicts.

Jamie Driggers stated that FDOT is working with County staff to address the issue through education and enforcement. He emphasized maintaining pedestrian access and safety, as the walkways are intended for pedestrian use. Commissioners Tiseo and Doherty agreed that fishing should continue to be allowed while ensuring pedestrian safety, likely through increased enforcement of existing littering laws.

Chair Constance reiterated his proposal to designate one bridge for pedestrians and the other for fishing. Commissioner Doherty responded that both walkways are intended for pedestrians and instead supported adding anti-littering signage and reminding fishers to yield to pedestrians.

Commissioner Thornberry noted that unsecured vehicle loads also contribute significantly to bridge litter and asked Mr. Driggers what prompted FDOT's decision. Mr. Driggers stated that FDOT received one formal written complaint and numerous verbal complaints regarding fish remains on

the walkways creating hazardous conditions.

Vice-Mayor Polk emphasized that many residents rely on the bridges for sustenance fishing and that restricting access creates a hardship. She also noted the absence of trash receptacles on or near the bridges, making cleanup difficult. Commissioner Tiseo commended FDOT for working with the County to resolve the issue. Chair Constance stated that the County Attorneys, the City of Punta Gorda, and FDOT should work together to determine how littering ordinances will be enforced. David Moscaso said he would provide the Board with information on applicable local and state ordinances.

John Elias stated that FDOT has a contractor responsible for maintaining its assets, including the bridges, and that the parties would need to reach an agreement regarding future bridge maintenance. Commissioner Tiseo noted that the bridges are FDOT assets and that the Board's role is limited to recommending removal and replacement of the signs.

8. Chairs' Report

a. MPO Board Chair's Report

Chair Constance mentioned his intention to not participate in the consolidation study of Lee, Collier and Charlotte in any capacity. He stated that the Charlotte County – Punta Gorda MPO has performed well as its own entity.

b. Citizens' Advisory Committee (CAC) Chair's Report

Dianne Quilty reported on the CAC meeting from July 15, 2026. She mentioned the in depth discussion that occurred regarding the question of American citizenship as a requirement to serve as a volunteer on the committee. Ms. Quilty mentioned that after the discussion at the meeting, the CAC recommended the Board approve the bylaws as amended to include language only requiring members be full time residents of Charlotte County.

c. Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) Chair's Report

Robert Fakhri reported that the TAC participated in the selection process of the General Planning Consultant Services procurement process and that all four firms are qualified to perform work for the MPO. Mr. Fakhri also mentioned that they discussed the consolidation study.

d. Bicycle/Pedestrian Advisory Committee Chair's Report

Mr. Gurram reported on behalf of Laura Rossi who could not attend the meeting due to a pre-existing conflict. He mentioned that the BPAC reviewed all information mentioned by CAC and TAC chairs as well as remediation strategies for the lack of quorum at BPAC meetings.

9. Local Government Reports

a. Charlotte County Airport Authority

Commissioner Thornberry reported from the Airport Authority Report which is available [here](#).

Chair Constance asked about the Airport Long Range Plan and the inclusion of plans for general aviation. Commissioner Thornberry stated that the plan highlights general aviation and a dedicated space for these noncommercial flights.

b. City of Punta Gorda

Vice-Mayor Polk reported from the City of Punta Gorda Report which is available [here](#).

Commissioner Thornberry noted the freeman house renovations are almost complete.

c. Charlotte County

Commissioner Tiseo reported from the Charlotte County Report which is available [here](#).

10. Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) Report

FDOT Led Discussion

PROJECT DESCRIPTION		DISCUSSION
A.	US 41 at Olean Boulevard	Reported that the project is completed and everything is installed. Possible removal for the next meeting.
B.	SR 776 at Flamingo Boulevard (Wayne Gaither -FDOT/ Robert Fakhri - Charlotte County)	The project is currently being reviewed and the responsibility of the county and they are awaiting for the developer to finish construction following the permit process. Commissioner Tiseo questioned if there are any hold ups at FDOT, of which FDOT staff in attendance was not aware.
C.	I-75 Possible New Interchange North of Kings Hwy Interchange (Wayne Gaither-FDOT)	No update currently. The Charlotte County – Punta Gorda MPO must work with the Sarasota/Manatee MPO to progress this project.
D.	US-41 at Carmalita St. Roundabout (Wayne Gaither-FDOT)	The roundabout has reduced crashes and fatalities and serious injuries. FDOT will continue to monitor and address issues with peak hour traffic causing bottlenecks in the roundabout.
E.	No Fishing Signs on US 41 Peace River bridge	This item was discussed earlier in the meeting.

Joint Local and FDOT Discussion

PROJECT DESCRIPTION		DISCUSSION
A.	Harbor View Road Combined Funding Strategies (Wayne Gaither-FDOT/John Elias/Robert Fakhri-Charlotte County)	Phase one construction to begin in 2027, phase 2 90% plans received in summer 2025 awaiting on ROW acquisition.

B.	<u>US 41 from Kings Hwy to Peace River Bridge Planning/Operational Improvements Study</u> (Wayne Gaither-FDOT/John Elias/Robert Fakhri-Charlotte County)	Work is ongoing. Public Works is looking to procure a consultant to begin plans.
C.	<u>Burnt Store Road – From Lee/Charlotte C/L to Wallaby Lane</u> (FDOT/John Elias/Robert Fakhri-Charlotte County)	Work is ongoing.
D.	<u>Burnt Store Road @ Home Depot</u> Signal/Access Management	County and City staff will continue to meet and better understand the issues in this area. Will be brought to the next County BCC Transportation Meeting in October. Vice-Mayor Polk noted that multiple commercial developments are planned for that area with the City. Commissioner Doherty recommended a sub-regional analysis that may be needed to better understand the flow of traffic in the area.
E.	<u>SR 776 @ Toledo Blade Intersection</u> Discussion	Work continues to progress. County is working in conjunction with FDOT. Commissioner Tiseo mentioned that this project has been long in the making and looks forward to it being completed.
F.	<u>SUN Trails Map</u> - Discussion	Mr. Gurram indicated that the map shown is updated with all sun trail projects within the County. Recommended to remove from future agendas until a change is made
G.	<u>US 41 @ Centennial Blvd/Flamingo Blvd</u>	Options are being finalized with the probable outcome to be right-in-right-out configurations and signalization at one of the intersections. Chair Constance noted that there may be a need for a US 41 Corridor Study to be completed, similar to Veterans Blvd. FDOT mentioned that a study may already be in place, they will share that information with the MPO.

City of Punta Gorda Led Discussion

	PROJECT DESCRIPTION	DISCUSSION
A.	<u>Crosswalks and ADA Projects</u>	Mr. Gurram indicated that the City staff provided an updated crosswalks and ADA projects and would differ any questions from the MPO Board to City Staff..

11. Citizens' Advisory Committee (CAC) Bylaws Amendment

Mr. Gurram introduced the item, explaining that the proposed bylaws amendment was presented to the CAC on March 4, 2026, when the committee voted to table it until the July 15, 2026 meeting to better understand the proposed citizenship requirement changes. At its July 15, 2026 meeting, the CAC recommended adopting the bylaws as presented with minor grammatical revisions. Mr. Gurram stated that the amendments align with the practices of other MPOs in Florida and nationwide and would help ensure the volunteer committee includes a diverse range of perspectives on transportation issues in Charlotte County.

Commissioner Doherty asked David Moscaso for the County Attorney's Office's input. Mr. Moscoso stated there is no legal requirement either to require American citizenship or to prohibit such a requirement, making the issue solely a MPO Board policy decision.

Commissioner Constance asked whether the committee has difficulty filling membership positions. Mr. Gurram stated there are currently no vacancies, but that vacancies and quorum issues have occurred in the past. He said the proposed change is intended to remove a barrier to serve on advisory committees and encourage diversification

Commissioner Doherty made a motion to approve the revised CAC Bylaws with the additional change to re-add the American Citizenship requirement, with authorization for staff to make non-substantive revisions as necessary. ***Commissioner Constance*** seconded the motion, which was approved unanimously.

12. 2026-2031 General Planning Consultant Services/Selection Committee Recommendation

Mr. Gurram introduced the item and outlined the procurement process. He explained that the purpose is to establish a prequalified list of consultants under contract with the MPO to perform work identified in the UPWP, including the LRTP, Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan, and other plans or major projects over the next three years. He stated that the selection committee, consisting of the three committee chairs and two MPO staff members, met on June 3, 2026, and recommended extending contracts to all four firms that submitted proposals, with work assignments to be issued through RFPs as projects become available. He noted that no work would be assigned immediately upon contract execution, but assignments are anticipated in the future.

Commissioner Doherty commented that this procurement process effectively prequalifies firms, eliminating the need to conduct a full procurement for each individual work order. Chair Constance asked which firms were under the previous GPC contracts. Mr. Gurram replied that the previous contracts included Kimley-Horn, VHB, and Benesch, and that only Kimley-Horn submitted a proposal as a prime consultant for the new contracts.

Commissioner Tiseo made a motion to approve the four professional consulting firms recommended by the committees, authorize staff to enter into contract with the selected firms, and authorize the MPO Chair to execute the GPC contracts with the selected consultants. ***Commissioner Doherty*** seconded the motion, and it was approved unanimously.

13. Charlotte-Collier-Lee Consolidation Study

Mr. Gurram introduced the item, explaining that the Consolidation Feasibility Study is required under State Budget Bill HB 5001E (General Appropriations Act). The legislation directs the MPOs of Charlotte, Lee, and Collier Counties to complete a study for submission to the State Legislature and Governor's Office by December 31, 2026. Due to the short timeline, FDOT Central Office will lead the study, with MPO staff providing necessary data. Mr. Gurram stated that the study will be developed as a business plan evaluating the costs, impacts, and feasibility of maintaining three separate MPOs versus consolidating into a single regional MPO. He emphasized that the Study will not make decisions on behalf of the MPO Board. He further informed that it is up to the Policy Board to make the decisions.

Chair Constance stated that he had distributed the 2025 City of Cape Coral resolution opposing consolidation between the Lee and Collier MPOs and encouraged MPO Board members to seek similar resolutions from their own local governing bodies. He reiterated his preference that the Charlotte County–Punta Gorda MPO not participate in the consolidation study.

He also emphasized that the Charlotte County–Punta Gorda MPO maintains an excellent working relationship with both the Lee and Sarasota MPOs, as well as with FDOT. Chair Constance cautioned that merging into a single, larger regional MPO could ultimately jeopardize the Charlotte County–Punta Gorda MPO's projects by placing them in competition with priorities from a much broader region.

Commissioner Tiseo asked whether participation in the consolidation study is required under HB 5001E, the General Appropriations Act. After reviewing the agenda item, he clarified that the study appears to be mandatory and requested legal confirmation on whether it is indeed a statutory requirement. David Moscaso stated that, because the legislation has already been enacted, participation is likely legally required; however, he will review the bill further and provide additional guidance.

Commissioner Tiseo further noted that, as an elected official sworn to uphold the law, he is obligated to follow statutory requirements. He emphasized that he would like to allow the study to proceed and expressed interest in understanding whether it ultimately identifies any benefits to consolidation. He reiterated that the study itself does not make recommendations to consolidate but simply evaluates the potential impacts.

Commissioner Doherty noted that, because the requirement is included in an appropriations bill, failure to participate could be viewed as a violation of State law and potentially jeopardize other funding. He also emphasized that he does not support consolidation into a single MPO. He noted that during his one-on-one meeting with staff, he expressed interest in allowing the study to move forward so he could better understand its findings.

Commissioner Tiseo pointed out the attachments included in the packets.

Commissioner Thornberry asked whether local funds would be required for the study. Mr. Gurram stated that FDOT Central Office will be leading the study and Central office has

retained Kimley-Horn to complete the study and that the MPO is not currently expected to contribute funding.

Vice-Mayor Polk agreed that the legislation appears to require completion of the study. Chair Constance requested additional information at the October MPO Board meeting regarding the study and what a consolidated three-MPO structure could look like.

Wayne Gaither explained that the State Legislature proposed a Lee-Collier MPO consolidation study in 2024, but it was not approved and was placed on hold after HB 5001E established the current three-MPO study. He noted that neither proposal included funding, making it difficult for MPOs to complete the work within the UPWP funding process. As a result, FDOT District One led the original effort, while FDOT Central Office is leading the current study. He reiterated that FDOT District One has no role in the current study.

At this time David Moscoso, MPO legal counsel, confirmed that under HB 5001E and 2067E appropriations, the MPOs of Lee, Collier, and Charlotte are required to complete a consolidation study.

Commissioner Tiseo noted that the study, as presented, did not appear favorable; however, he stated that he would still like to understand whether the consolidation study might identify any potential cost savings. Chair Constance responded that consolidation would not bring additional funding to the region. Commissioner Tiseo reiterated that the study is not recommending consolidation only by evaluating its implications.

Chair Constance then directed staff to provide MPO Board members with the reports from both the Lee and Collier MPOs for reference. Mr. Gurram added that the final consolidation study will be presented to the MPO Board at the special meeting on November 16, 2026, meeting.

14. Transportation Disadvantaged Service Plan/Coordinated Public Transit – Human Services Transportation Plan (TDSP/HSTP)

Mr. Yaxis introduced the informational item, explaining that the Transportation Disadvantaged Service Plan (TDSP) will be presented to the Local Coordinating Board (LCB) for final approval on September 3 and is being provided to the MPO Board for insight into the work being completed by MPO staff and Transit. He reviewed the TDSP process, explained the Transportation Disadvantaged program and eligibility, and summarized the estimated Transportation Disadvantaged population in Charlotte County and how it has changed since the 2021 major TDSP update.

15. Public Comments

Sam Besase commented on the consolidation study, indicating his reluctance to spend money to determine if there is the opportunity to save money.

Mary Ellen Kiss commented on the consolidation study, noting that at least 6 CAC members, had contacted the local state representatives in March 2026 to urge them not advance this bill forward. The requirement for the study was part of a transportation bill in the Florida Legislature and has since been moved into the Appropriations Bill for 2027 after the original bill not pass. Dr. Kiss indicated that none of the CAC members who had reached out to the legislators had heard back from their offices and that they had specifically requested that they withdraw the language of the legislation.

16. Staff Comments

Mr. Gurram provided staff comments, going over legislative updates since the previous MPO Board meeting and provided Board Members with a copy of tasks completed by staff between May 19, 2026, and August 3, 2026. He also again congratulated Dianne Quilty for her outstanding contributions to Charlotte County and recognized her as the recipient of the Peggy Walters Award.

17. Member Comments

Vice-Mayor Polk reported on her experience at the Metropolitan Planning Organization Advisory Council Meeting that she attended in Orlando on July 30, 2026. She noted that a large portion of the meeting was devoted to FDOT Target Zero and examining different strategies that local governments are implementing to get closer to this goal of zero fatalities and serious injuries on Florida roadways. Vice-Mayor Polk also highlighted their discussion on toll roads throughout the state, noting that toll roads have become a viable means of funding road projects and maintenance throughout the state.

Commissioner Tiseo thanked Dr. Kiss for her earlier comments on the consolidation study agenda item. He noted the struggles the Charlotte County BCC has had with the State Legislature recently and views current legislative moves as an attack on local governance.

18. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at **4:28 pm**.

The next MPO Board Meeting is a regular meeting on **October 5, 2026, at 2:00 pm**. The meeting will be held at the Charlotte County Administration Center, Room 119, 18500 Murdock Circle, Port Charlotte, FL 33948.