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February 17, 2014

Secretary Ananth Prasad
Florida Department of Transportation
605 Suwannee Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0450

RE: Comments on Florida's Transportation Planning Process for Non-Metropolitan Areas

Dear Secretary Prasad:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the Florida Department of Transportation's documented process for transportation planning for non-metropolitan areas. Florida's regional planning councils have enjoyed a strong partnership with the Department and its district offices. In fact, many of the councils are currently assisting your staff with Future Corridors briefings taking place in their regions with local government officials and private sector representatives.

The value of regional partnerships and regional visions to guide future growth and implement regional transportation priorities is clearly stated in the Department's documented process. These values are also evident in the 2060 Florida Transportation Plan (FTP). It recognizes the need for transportation agencies and decision-making processes to be "reinvented to strengthen regional coordination, reduce fragmentation, eliminate duplication, and increase efficiency." The 2060 FTP also states that the "current fragmentation in transportation decision making responsibilities and processes is one of the most significant challenges" to its implementation. It further recognizes the need to implement a "21st century governance model to reduce fragmentation and improve the quality and efficiency of transportation decision making." Among the 2060 FTP's strategies to improve regional decision making is the strengthening of regional transportation planning and priority setting in rural areas.

In February 2012, Dr. Ruth Steiner, Department of Urban and Regional Planning, University of Florida, completed a report commissioned by the Department, titled *Regional Cooperation in Transportation Planning*. In the report, Dr. Steiner stated that the strongest voice in Florida's transportation planning remains with the Department's districts and central office, adding that there are, therefore, missed opportunities for local vetting and support of statewide projects and interlocal coordination. Among Dr. Steiner's recommendations for strengthening regional transportation planning in Florida was the "creation of RPOs [regional planning organizations] for rural transportation planning using existing regional planning councils where possible."

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The Apalachee Regional Planning Council and West Florida Regional Planning Council have been under contract with the Department since 2005 and 2006, respectively, to serve as the Department's liaison with certain counties not represented by a transportation planning organization. The new federal surface transportation authorization law, *Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21)*, goes a step further by authorizing the following: State's may establish and designate regional Transportation Planning Organizations to enhance the planning, coordination and implementation of long-range plans and Statewide Transportation Improvement Programs with an emphasis on addressing the needs of non-metropolitan areas. There are currently 32 states with Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (see <http://www.ruraltransportation.org/about-rtpos/rtpo-states/>).

The Department's documented process for transportation planning for non-metropolitan areas does not recognize the role played by the West Florida Regional Planning Council and Apalachee Regional Planning Council and should be amended accordingly. In addition, while it might otherwise be accurately documented, the current process does not embrace the need for reinvention, increased efficiency, improved quality, or strengthening of transportation decision making for rural areas, as called for in the 2060 FTP. The process is also inconsistent with the recommendations in Dr. Steiner's report, which were based on regional best practices and examples from other states.

Attached is a paper that was submitted by the Florida Regional Councils Association to the Department in June 2013, recommending the creation of regional transportation planning organizations in rural Florida, which we are resubmitting for the record. While the Department may not wish to pursue statutory revisions, precedent has been set by the Department through its contract with two of Florida's 11 regional planning councils, for strengthening and improving the rural consultative transportation planning process. Among the many benefits of utilizing regional transportation planning organizations identified in the paper is the following: Regional transportation planning organizations in rural areas will support the Florida Department of Transportation 2060 FTP by alleviating fragmentation of governance and providing a broader geographic perspective of desired development patterns, economic opportunities, and environmental stewardship with which to influence decisions about the location and character of transportation and other investments for regions.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide input and offer these recommendations. We look forward to further strengthening our partnership with the Department.

Sincerely,



Brian D. Teeple, AICP
Chair, Florida Regional Councils Association
Executive Directors Advisory Committee

BDT/sc

Attachment

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cc: Bob Romig, Florida Department of Transportation
Jim Wood, Florida Department of Transportation
Huiwei Shen, Florida Department of Transportation
Melanie Carr, Florida Department of Transportation
Chris Holley, Florida Association of Counties
Chris Doolin, Small County Coalition
Rob Vickers, CDM Smith
Amie Longstreet, CDM Smith

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLANNING ORGANIZATIONS IN RURAL FLORIDA

June 2013

RECOMMENDATION:

Amend Chapter 339, Florida Statutes, to require the establishment of multi-county regional transportation planning organizations in non-metropolitan (rural) areas, the provision of funding by the Florida Department of Transportation to support such organizations and the designation of regional planning councils to provide staff services for such organizations.

BACKGROUND:

Collaborative and cooperative transportation planning is currently available to 42 Florida counties. However, 25 rural Florida counties do not have a state designated transportation planning organization. Florida remains one of the few states that do not cover all counties in a state designated multi-jurisdictional transportation planning process.

Since the 1990s, federal and state legislation and guidance have focused on rural transportation planning and improved cooperation and coordination among transportation planning agencies to ensure effective regional transportation planning. The need for **regional transportation planning in rural areas** has continued to assume a higher level of interest at the federal level as cited in the new federal surface transportation authorization law *Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21)*.

As it relates to statewide planning, MAP-21 includes the following provision: **States may establish and designate regional Transportation Planning Organizations to enhance the planning, coordination and implementation of long-range plans and Statewide Transportation Improvement Programs with an emphasis on addressing the needs of non-metropolitan areas.**

By the Florida Department of Transportation adopting the 2060 Florida Transportation Plan *Horizon 2060* developed by a Steering Committee representing business, rail, ports, aviation, transit, logistics, environmentalists and government at the local, regional and state level, Florida set a new emphasis on regional transportation decision-making and governance. This approach outlined the following principles that support regional transportation planning organizations in both metropolitan and rural areas.

- **Strengthen regional transportation planning and priority setting in rural areas.**
- **Provide financial incentives and technical assistance to help Florida's metropolitan planning organizations, transit agencies and other entities transition to a regional model.**

As noted in Regional Cooperation in Transportation Planning, a report published by the Florida Department of Transportation in February 2012, regional integration of transportation planning can build capacity and further State policies and programs.

BENEFITS:

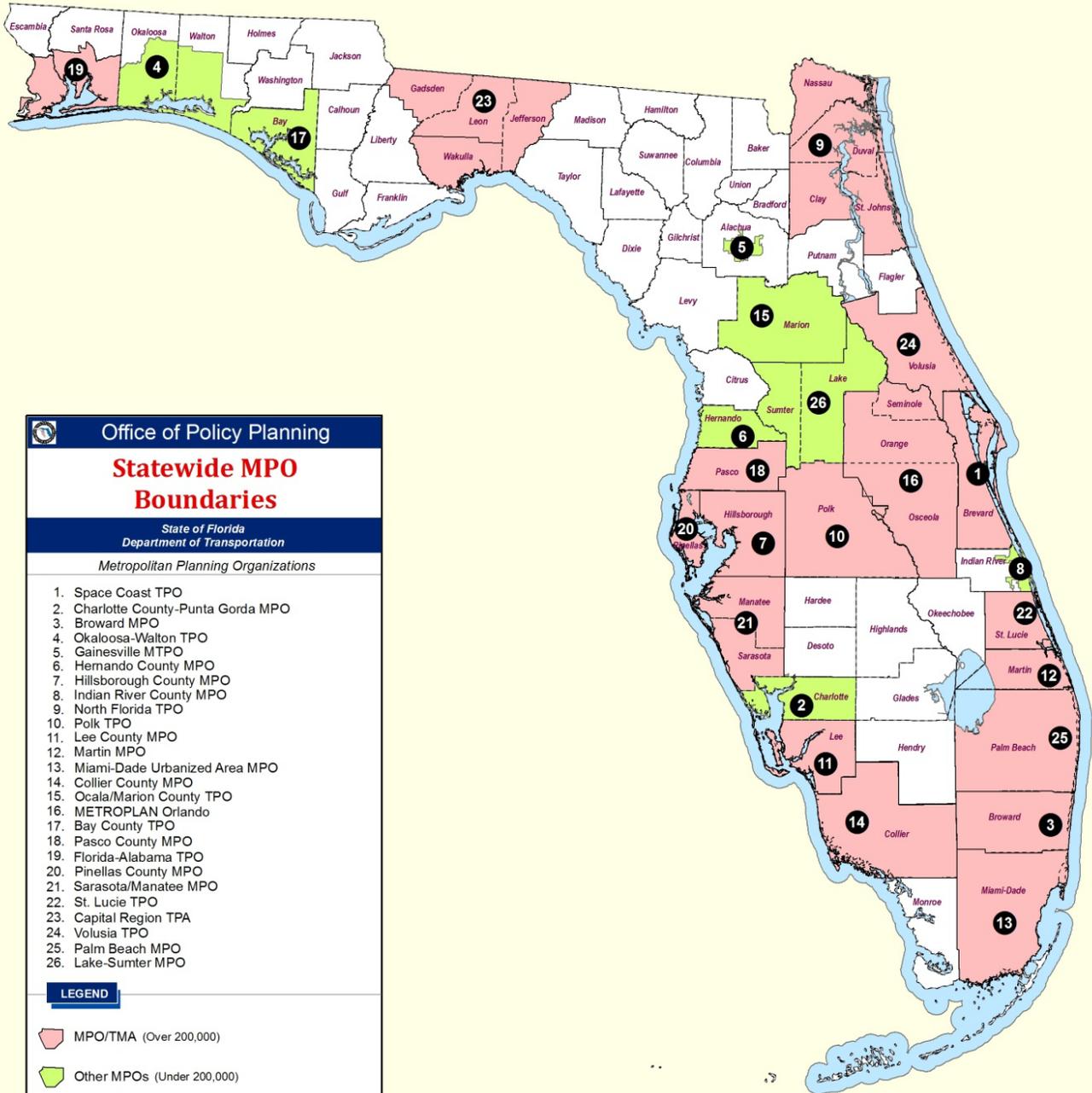
- Regional transportation planning organizations in rural areas will **provide rural local elected officials the same authority currently afforded to metropolitan local elected officials to determine priorities for federal and state funded transportation projects in their communities** in cooperation with the Florida Department of Transportation.
- Regional transportation planning organizations in rural areas will support the Florida Department of Transportation 2060 Florida Transportation Plan by alleviating fragmentation of governance and providing a broader geographic perspective of desired development patterns, economic opportunities, and environmental stewardship with which to **influence decisions about the location and character of transportation and other investments for regions.**
- Regional transportation planning organizations in rural areas will increase the global competitiveness of Florida's rural areas through **improved transportation connectivity for people and freight to emerging regional employment,** manufacturing and distribution centers having access to continental and world markets.
- Regional transportation planning organizations in rural areas will **enhance the quality and efficiency of regional transportation planning and priority setting in rural areas** by consolidating the existing and future transportation planning processes for regions.
- Regional transportation planning organizations in rural areas will further **strengthen the working relationships of the local governments in regions** while fostering cooperative regional decision-making.
- Regional transportation planning organizations in rural areas will enable transportation planning to **support implementation of regional visions** including new corridors to move people, freight and key infrastructure for the regional economy of the future.

STATEWIDE METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATIONS:

The attached map depicts the current metropolitan planning organizations and designated transportation management areas in Florida.

Metropolitan Planning Organizations and Designated Transportation Management Areas

(As of July 18, 2012)



Office of Policy Planning

Statewide MPO
Boundaries

State of Florida
 Department of Transportation

Metropolitan Planning Organizations

1. Space Coast TPO
2. Charlotte County-Punta Gorda MPO
3. Broward MPO
4. Okaloosa-Walton TPO
5. Gainesville MTPO
6. Hernando County MPO
7. Hillsborough County MPO
8. Indian River County MPO
9. North Florida TPO
10. Polk TPO
11. Lee County MPO
12. Martin MPO
13. Miami-Dade Urbanized Area MPO
14. Collier County MPO
15. Ocala/Marion County TPO
16. METROPLAN Orlando
17. Bay County TPO
18. Pasco County MPO
19. Florida-Alabama TPO
20. Pinellas County MPO
21. Sarasota/Manatee MPO
22. St. Lucie TPO
23. Capital Region TPA
24. Volusia TPO
25. Palm Beach MPO
26. Lake-Sumter MPO

LEGEND

MPO/TMA (Over 200,000)

Other MPOs (Under 200,000)

MPO/TPO Identification Number