

## CITY OF GAINESVILLE STAFF ANALYSIS

**Legistar No: 160199**

**Title: I-75 Relief Task Force**

**Sponsor: Mayor Poe**

**City Staff Contact: Teresa Scott, Director of Public Works  
Debbie Leistner, PW Planning Manager**

---

**Summary of Issue** Discuss potential impacts of the proposed relief strategies to the I-75 corridor and actions needed.

**History/Background Information** At the June 27, 2016 meeting of the Metropolitan Transportation Planning Organization (MTPO) the City Commission directed staff to determine the potential effects of the I-75 relief strategies on the City.

The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) has established a task force to evaluate alternatives for congestion relief and enhanced safety along the I-75 corridor targeting improved mobility and connectivity between Tampa Bay and Northeast Florida. The task force efforts build upon a concept study performed by FDOT in 2013 that identified needs such as: growing demand for freight mobility; need for congestion relief as delays along the major corridors continue to grow; need for increased roadway capacity; and, need to reduce crash rates and crash severity. The study recommended further evaluation of a multimodal corridor option emphasizing its “*potential to provide significant relief to I-75 while also improving connectivity to growing urbanized areas and creating economic development opportunities in rural areas*”. As depicted in Appendix A, the I-75 Relief Task Force had identified an area of opportunity in western Alachua County for roadway enhancements, generally located between I-75 and US41, and an area of opportunity for rail enhancements in eastern Alachua County. This proposal generated significant local opposition.

The proposed improvements were not consistent with the MTPO’s 2040 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) which envisions “*multimodal transportation strategies and priority investments to support and strengthen the area’s economic vitality and improve the connectivity of people and freight*”<sup>1</sup>. The 2040 LRTP emphasizes opportunities to enhance capacity of corridors and improve connectivity to *existing or planned* commercial/economic centers, and that promote efficient system management and operation decreasing travel distances between residential and employment/service centers. Furthermore the 2040 LRTP encourages consistency with local comprehensive plans to foster efficient land development patterns and to reduce

---

<sup>1</sup> MTPO, 2040 Long Range Transportation Plan; online at <http://www.ncfrpc.org/mtpo/LRTP.html>

adverse impacts on the environment. The FDOT proposed area of opportunity was located outside of the metropolitan area boundary (see Appendix B), and it was expected to foster sprawl that is inconsistent with local priorities.

### *New Highways and Sprawl*

Land use and transportation are intrinsically related: “*growth and land development should be considered in the context of the transportation systems that enable them... [as coordination results in] greater efficiencies (lower public cost on infrastructure, lower private cost on transport) and a reduction in external public costs (e.g., congestion, air pollution, ..., and other purported problems of low-density, auto-oriented development)*”<sup>2</sup>. The literature indicates that there are significant impacts associated with the implementation of new highways especially in underdeveloped areas, resulting in a spread of urban growth to the periphery of urban centers and redirection of funding and resources<sup>3</sup>. The strong correlation between road network expansion and land development deserves close attention in order to promote smart growth and support coordinated and sustainable development patterns. A national comparison of compact growth versus sprawling development patterns shows that “*sprawl produces a 21% increase in amount of undeveloped land converted to developed land... and approximately a 10% increase in local road lane-miles. Furthermore, sprawl causes about 10% more annual public service (fiscal) deficits ... and 8% higher housing occupancy costs*”<sup>4</sup>.

Although the cost burden associated with the provision of infrastructure and services to support a potential westerly expansion would be borne by Alachua County, the City could see potential economic impacts as development could divert to cheaper lands outside of City limits, detracting from the City’s economic development goals and objectives.

### *Recent Actions:*

On June 21, 2016 the Alachua County Board of County Commissioners submitted a letter to the chair of the I-75 Relief Task Force affirming its position in support of investments that enhance capacity of the existing transportation system and that advance local priority projects such as the SW 62<sup>nd</sup> Blvd extension, versus building new roadways in rural western Alachua County (see Appendix C). In addition, the County recommends a focus on rail enhancements to serve passenger and freight needs between Tampa Bay and Northeast Florida. The County’s letter opposes the proposed ‘area of opportunity’ in western Alachua County citing environmental concerns as well as concerns associated with the potential premature inducement of land development in the area, creating sprawling conditions and fragmenting the community.

<sup>2</sup> American Planning Association. (2006). *Planning and urban design standards* (1st ed.). Hoboken, N.J: John Wiley & Sons.

<sup>3</sup> Gutfreund, O. D. (2004). *Twentieth-Century Sprawl: Highways and the Reshaping of the American Landscape*. New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>4</sup> Burchell, R. W. and Mukherji, S. (2003). Conventional Development versus Managed Growth: The Costs of Sprawl. *American Journal of Public Health*, 93(9), 1534-1540.

On June 29, 2016 the MTPO submitted a letter to the chair of the task force (see Appendix D) expressing support for implementation of projects that are consistent with the 2040 LRTP and that advance projects on the local transportation system.

On August 11, 2016 the task force held its last meeting in Ocala to conclude the evaluation process and complete the report that will be submitted to the FDOT secretary on October 1, 2016. The final recommendation of the task force removes the western corridor from consideration at this time and focuses on projects to enhance capacity, operations and safety of the existing roadway systems, emphasizing the I-75 corridor alignment as the top priority. The areas of opportunity initially defined (as shown on Appendix A) will be removed from the final report.

As a parallel effort to improve operation and safety, and reduce congestion along the I-75 corridor between Wildwood and Alachua County, FDOT has submitted a grant application to the Federal Highway Administration for funding for the implementation of a multimodal integrated corridor management system that would focus on operational and technology enhancements along I-75 and other local corridors. The grant award notification is expected by October 2016. The City Commission supported this initiative (Legislative Item No. 160128, June 16, 2016) and submitted a letter of support (see Appendix E).

### **Options**

- A.** Provide a letter to the chair of the I-75 Relief Task Force in support of the Alachua County Board of County Commissioner's position against the implementation of a new corridor in western Alachua County, and outlining the benefits and funding needs associated with other local projects, such as the SW 62<sup>nd</sup> Blvd extension, that aligns with the goals and objectives of the task force.
- Pros** Maintain consistency with locally adopted plans and enhance visibility of local projects that need additional funding.
- Cons** None.
- B.** Do nothing.
- Pros** No effort needed at this time as the MTPO and Alachua County already expressed local opinions about the options under consideration. In addition, at its last meeting in August 11, 2016 the task force amended its recommendations removing the areas of opportunity from consideration at this time.
- Cons** Potential missed opportunity to voice opinion on an important issue that may affect the City in the long term.

**Staff Recommended Option** The General Policy Committee hear a presentation and discuss what action to take in response to the I-75 Relief Task Forces draft recommendations.

**Attachments/References**

2040 Long Range Transportation Plan; online at <http://www.ncfrpc.org/mtpo/LRTP.html>

I-75 Relief Task Force documents: <http://i75relief.com/taskforce.html>

I-75 Relief Corridor Report: <http://i75relief.com/docs/081216/7-27-16%20Draft%20TF%20report%20for%20Aug%2012%20mtg.pdf>

Appendix A: I-75 Task Force Area of Opportunity Map

Appendix B: MTPO Boundary

Appendix C: Letter from Alachua County Board of County Commissioners

Appendix D: Letter from the MTPO

Appendix E: Letter from City Commission in support of FDOT grant application