



# The Florida Senate

*Interim Project Report 2007-137*

*October 2006*

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Committee on Transportation

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## ENHANCING REGIONAL COORDINATION IN TRANSPORTATION DEVELOPMENT

### SUMMARY

County lines have long been readily-available reference points for the development of Florida's transportation infrastructure. Most transportation projects have been planned, designed, constructed, and maintained wholly within a single county. However, as the state's population has grown and become increasingly urbanized, economic activity has become largely indifferent to municipal and county jurisdictions. Many areas of the state are beginning to identify a larger-scale approach to future development, where regional economies transcend local and county concerns and the capabilities of individual local governments to address them. This report describes recent attempts to advance the regional approach to transportation development, identifies organizations, alliances, and partnerships engaged in activities impacting regional transportation development, and makes recommendations with the intent of enhancing regional coordination in transportation development.

### BACKGROUND

The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) is a decentralized agency. Planning, programming, and project management functions are dispersed throughout each of the seven geographic FDOT districts, as well as the Turnpike Enterprise. District staff work closely with Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) staff to develop and implement the transportation plans and programs for metropolitan areas. In urban and rural areas not administered by an MPO, the FDOT district identifies projects and develops schedules in consultation with County Commissions and within the limitations of the funds allocated to them. Some programs, such as the Strategic Intermodal System (SIS), are centrally managed by the FDOT.

#### **The Florida Transportation Plan**

The Florida Transportation Plan (FTP) is a long-range plan that identifies the goals and objectives for the next

20 years to address the needs of the entire state transportation system. It provides a vision for the state's transportation system and lays out a policy framework to achieve that vision. The FTP guides transportation decisions and investments based upon the prevailing principles of preserving the existing transportation infrastructure, enhancing economic competitiveness, and improving travel choices to ensure mobility. Toward these ends, the 2020 FTP established a number of objectives including the establishment, construction and management of a transportation system composed of corridors, facilities and services of statewide and regional significance.

#### **The Strategic Intermodal System (SIS)**

In 2003, the Legislature passed ss. 339.61 and 339.62, F.S., creating the SIS to consist of appropriate components of:

- The Florida Intrastate Highway System (FIHS);
- The National Highway System;
- Airport, seaport, and spaceport facilities;
- Rail lines and rail facilities;
- Selected intermodal facilities; passenger and freight terminals; and appropriate components of the State Highway System; county road system, city street system, inland waterways, and local public transit systems that serve as existing or planned connectors between the components; and
- Existing or planned corridors that serve a statewide or interregional purpose.

As designated, the SIS contains about 4,200 miles of the state's most important highways, representing about 3 percent of all of Florida's public roads. With few exceptions, the FIHS comprises the highway element of the SIS.

Recognizing the economic importance of interregional travel, the Legislature passed SB 1456 in 2004 to provide for the funding of the SIS. Section

339.135(4)a, F.S., establishes a minimum funding level of at least 50 percent of any new discretionary highway capacity funds to be used for SIS projects. Section 338.001(6), F.S., sets a minimum of \$450 million per year for FIHS projects.

### **Metropolitan Planning Organizations**

Metropolitan Planning Organizations are transportation policy-making organizations made up of representatives from local governments and transportation authorities. Florida currently has 26 MPOs, more than any other state. MPOs are given the responsibility of administering a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive process leading to the development of transportation plans and programs for urbanized areas of the state. Federal law envisions a cooperative urbanized area planning process that clearly recognizes the need to blend urbanized area priorities with those of national, statewide, and regional significance. To ensure the MPO process is integrated with the statewide planning process, federal and state laws give MPOs the responsibility to develop long-range plans identifying transportation facilities that should function as an integrated metropolitan transportation system, giving emphasis to those facilities serving important national and regional transportation functions. (See 23 USC 134(g)(2) and s. 339.175 (6)(a), F.S.)

Florida's MPOs are designated by an agreement between the Governor and the units of local government representing at least 75 percent of the population of that urbanized area including the central city or cities. The metropolitan planning area boundaries of an MPO must include the designated urbanized area and the contiguous area expected to become urbanized within 20 years, and may encompass the entire Metropolitan Statistical Area. The metropolitan planning area is determined by agreement between the Governor and the MPO.

Federal law (23 USC Sec. 134) and state law (s. 339.175, F.S.) requires an MPO be designated for each urbanized area containing 50,000 or more people as delineated by the United States Census Bureau. The federal law also contains additional provisions for metropolitan areas with a population of 200,000 or more. These areas are called transportation management areas (TMA). TMAs, which are represented by one or more MPOs, receive designated federal funding and have more autonomy in planning the use of those funds.

In accordance with federal and state law, each MPO prepares a fiscally-constrained long range transportation plan (LRTP) with at least a 20-year planning horizon. The LRTP, which is updated no less frequently than every five years, includes proposed long-range and short-range strategies and actions leading to the development of an integrated intermodal transportation system. Each year, the MPO develops a list of project priorities which is used by FDOT to develop its tentative Work Program which is in turn used by the MPO to develop the transportation improvement program (TIP). The TIP is a financially constrained five-year program covering the most immediate implementation priorities for transportation projects and strategies. The TIP provides detailed funding and scheduling information to implement the LRTP and must include all state and federally funded transportation projects. Regionally significant projects for which Federal Highway Administration or Federal Transit Administration approval is required must be included regardless of the funding source. Projects funded by state or federal dollars must be consistent with affected local government comprehensive plans.

Eight Florida MPOs administer the transportation planning process for more than one county. Fifteen MPOs contain more than one census-defined urbanized area, in whole or in part. Several counties have portions of two or more urbanized areas within their county boundaries. Fourteen MPOs are staffed by employees of a local government (13 county, 1 city). Five MPOs are staffed by employees of Regional Planning Councils. Four MPOs are independent agencies, and two are staffed by independent local planning departments or agencies.

Responding to the 2003 Legislature's direction in SB 676, the Florida Transportation Commission prepared the report "An Assessment of Florida's Regional and Intermodal Transportation Planning Process" (December, 2003). Based on an analysis of the transportation planning process in Florida and the best practices of MPOs around the nation, the report identified a number of possible improvements for enhancing regional coordination among Florida's MPOs including promoting the independence of MPO staff as separate from the affected local government.

### **FDOT Work Program Process**

Section 339.135, F.S., authorizes and establishes the guidelines for the FDOT to develop a State Transportation Work Program. The Work Program is the statewide project-specific list of transportation activities and improvements programmed by the

FDOT. To be included in the Work Program, a project must meet the objectives and priorities of the Florida Transportation Plan. Projects in metropolitan areas must have been developed in cooperation with the MPO. At the local level, projects in the program must be consistent to the maximum extent feasible with the capital improvement elements of the local government comprehensive plans. Development of the Work Program is undertaken based on a complete, balanced financial plan for the State Transportation Trust Fund (STTF) and other funds managed by FDOT. The FDOT Work Program reflects the priorities of MPOs (and counties in non-MPO areas), along with FDOT's centrally-managed programs in a five-year schedule of programmed transportation improvements. It is updated annually, resulting in a new fifth year of projects being programmed each year. Section 339.135 (4), F.S., provides the first 3 years of the Adopted Work Program stand as the commitment of the state to undertake transportation projects that local governments may rely upon for planning purposes. The Work Program also serves as the federally-required Statewide Transportation Improvement Program.

#### *FDOT's Investment Policy*

Section 339.135 (4), F.S., directs the FDOT to allocate a minimum of 50 percent of any new discretionary highway capacity funds to the SIS. The remaining percentage remains available for other state facilities. In recent years, FDOT has begun increasing its emphasis on regional and interregional travel by focusing resources on regionally significant facilities rather than on those facilities primarily used for local travel. Toward this end, FDOT has by agency policy, expanded the statutory 50 percent minimum allocation requirement by increasing SIS programming levels, moving towards an eventual goal of 75 percent of the discretionary funds available for the enhancement of transportation system capacity. Current allocation reflects approximately 62 percent of capacity funds on the SIS in fiscal year 2009/10. Based on current estimates, the transition to 75 percent will be achieved by fiscal year 2014/15.

FDOT's investment policy comprises the following tenets:

- FDOT will allocate 75 percent of discretionary capacity funds (with the exception of funds attributable to urbanized areas over 200,000 population and funds allocated for the Transit Program) to projects on SIS and Emerging SIS facilities; and
- FDOT will increase its emphasis on regional travel by placing a high priority on projects on

regionally significant facilities in the Other Arterial Program. The Other Arterial Program involves construction and improvement projects on roadways, which are not on the Florida Intrastate Highway System (FIHS).

Although the investment policy focuses on the SIS, all of the State Highway System remains eligible for funding through the Other Arterial Program. However, FDOT will place funding emphasis on those facilities that are regionally significant. Regionally significant transportation facilities include:

- Regional transportation corridors such as highway, waterway, rail, and regional transit corridors serving major regional commercial, industrial, or medical facilities; and
- Regional transportation hubs such as passenger terminals (e.g., commuter rail, light rail, intercity transit, intermodal transfer centers, etc.), commercial service and major reliever airports, deepwater and special generator seaports, and major regional freight terminals and distribution centers.

#### **Transportation Regional Incentive Program**

The Transportation Regional Incentive Program (TRIP) was created by the 2005 Legislature (SB 360) as part of major growth management legislation. The program encourages regional planning by providing state matching funds for improvements to regionally significant transportation facilities identified and prioritized by regional partners. Regional partners may be:

- Two or more contiguous MPOs;
- One or more MPOs and one or more contiguous counties that are not members of a MPO;
- A multi-county regional transportation authority created by or pursuant to law;
- Two or more contiguous counties that are not members of a MPO;
- MPOs comprised of three or more counties.

TRIP funds are used to match local or regional funds on a 50/50 basis or to match up to 50 percent of the non-federal share of total project costs for public transportation projects. In-kind matches such as right of way donations and private funds made available to the regional partners are also allowed. Federal funds attributable to urbanized areas over 200,000 population may also be used for the local/regional match for highway projects.

The purpose of the TRIP is to provide an incentive for regional planning; to leverage investments in regionally significant transportation facilities (roads and public transportation); and link investments to growth management objectives. The FDOT allocates funding available for TRIP by statutory formula to the districts (Equal parts of population and motor fuel tax collections). Using the prioritized list provided by the partnership, candidate projects are selected for funding by FDOT which may choose any project on the list.

To qualify for TRIP funds, partners must sign an interlocal agreement that:

- identifies the entity that will coordinate development of the regional transportation plan;
- delineates the boundaries of the regional transportation area;
- provides the duration of the agreement and how it may be changed;
- describes the planning process; and
- defines a dispute resolution process.

## METHODOLOGY

Staff reviewed Florida laws and federal laws relating to transportation planning and funding. In addition, staff interviewed FDOT personnel and other affected parties to identify strengths and weaknesses of ongoing regionalization efforts. Staff has also conducted a review of literature and best practices.

## FINDINGS

### **Regional Transportation Bodies and Partnerships**

Several MPOs have operated as regional planning organizations for years without statutory mandate. For example, the Sarasota-Manatee, First Coast and Metroplan Orlando MPOs were formed to administer the metropolitan planning process in urbanized areas stretching across multiple counties. The First Coast MPO is noteworthy in that its staff, once a department of the City of Jacksonville under the mayor, has become an independent agency to reduce the potential for any real or perceived pressure to favor the desires of the City over the needs of the larger area including the recently added St. Augustine Urbanized Area. Numerous regional bodies and partnerships have formed around the state to exchange information and, to some degree, coordinate transportation development projects.

Although many of these organizations have evolved informally over time, the financial incentive created by the TRIP has proved to be an effective catalyst to the

formal designation of many regional partnerships. To allow adequate time for new partnerships to form, FDOT held 50 percent of the appropriated TRIP funds in reserve for FYs 05/06 and 06/07 to allow sufficient time for agreements to be worked out and new partnerships to form.

### *Central Florida MPO Alliance*

Since its inception in January 2001, the Central Florida MPO Alliance has been a forum for addressing transportation challenges on a regional basis in a seven-county area. An outgrowth of the Orlando-Volusia MPO Alliance, which was instrumental in accelerating construction funding for the St. Johns River Bridge, the body is comprised of three Board members each from the Brevard MPO, the new Lake/Sumter MPO, METROPLAN ORLANDO, the Polk County Transportation Planning Organization and the Volusia County MPO.

### *South East Florida Transportation Council (SEFTC)*

The SEFTC is a regional organization created to foster regional transportation among the Southeast Florida counties of Palm Beach, Broward and Miami-Dade. The Council was created by an agreement among the respective MPOs and its membership consists of the chairs from each MPO. The Council coordinates its activities with FDOT, the South Florida Regional Transportation Authority (SFRTA), the regional planning councils and the adjacent counties. One of the first functions of the SEFTC is the adoption of regional goals and a regional transportation network. These items will be selected from the adopted long range transportation plan of each MPO. Regional transportation services and projects by the SFRTA will also be included. The SEFTC will develop regional project priorities for consideration in the use of the TRIP. In the coming months, the SEFTC will refine the regional network and the process for setting priorities. Coordination activities will be expanded and include consideration of issues of interest throughout the state. Support for the SEFTC's activities is provided by the three MPOs.

In addition to the numerous bodies and partnerships that have evolved at the regional level, Florida Statutes create a number of groups with regional transportation development responsibilities. Most are engaged in planning activities only. However, some have the authority to construct and operate regional transportation systems.

### *West Central Florida MPO Chair's Coordinating Committee (CCC)*

Section 339.175, F.S., generally defines the designation, composition, authority, powers, and responsibilities of Florida's MPOs. Additionally, s. 339.175(5)(h), F.S., creates a chair's coordinating committee (CCC) for the West Central Florida region composed of the MPOs of Hernando, Hillsborough, Manatee, Pasco, Pinellas, Polk, and Sarasota Counties. In addition, Citrus County, FDOT District Secretaries (District 1 and District 7) and the Regional Planning Councils are represented on the CCC in a non-voting capacity. The CCC is the state's only statutorily-defined regional partnership of MPOs. The CCC meets quarterly and has, as a minimum, the following four functions:

- Coordinate transportation projects deemed regionally significant by the committee;
- Review the impact of regionally significant land use decisions;
- Review all proposed regionally significant transportation improvement programs affecting more than one of the represented MPOs;
- Institute a conflict resolution process for the planning and programming of regionally significant projects.

The CCC has been instrumental in the development of a regional long range transportation plan and the coordination of other transportation planning products; however, each member MPO continues to develop an individual LRTP and separate list of project priorities.

Chapter 343, F.S., creates four regional transportation and transit authorities:

#### *South Florida Regional Transportation Authority*

The SFRTA coordinates transit and commuter rail planning in the three participating counties of Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach. The SFRTA was created in 2003, when the Legislature passed SB 686 which re-established the Tri-County Commuter Rail Authority as the SFRTA to provide a coordinated transportation system within the three counties in order to relieve traffic congestion and move residents and tourists more efficiently throughout the area. In addition, it was believed a single organization would improve the ability to draw down federal matching dollars for public transit, rather than competing for the funds separately.

Although the Tri-Rail commuter rail system remains the authority's primary focal point, the SFRTA is empowered to construct, finance, and manage a variety

of public transportation options as an integrated system. The SFRTA has numerous powers and responsibilities, including the power to acquire, sell, and lease property; to use eminent domain; to enter into purchasing agreements and other contracts; to enforce collection of system rates, fees, and other charges; and to approve revenue bonds issued on its behalf by the State Division of Bond Finance. The authority has a nine-member board comprising:

- A county commissioner from each of the three counties, selected by his or her peers;
- A citizen selected by each county commission representing civic and business interests of the community;
- One of the two affected FDOT district secretaries; and
- Two citizens appointed by the Governor who live in different counties within the SFRTA's jurisdiction, but not the same county as the FDOT district secretary.

The SFRTA has been influential in several regional public transportation development efforts including overseeing the completion of the double-tracking of the South Florida Rail Corridor used by Tri-Rail and the preparation of a regional Transit Development Plan. The SFRTA is currently working with FDOT to conduct the South Florida East Coast Corridor (SFECC) Transit Analysis Study. The scope of this study is to develop and analyze alternatives that potentially integrate passenger and freight transport along the SFECC, which is centered along the existing Florida East Coast Railway.

#### *Central Florida Regional Transportation Authority (aka LYNX)*

Originally founded in May 1972 as the Orange-Seminole-Osceola Transportation Authority, the agency has been doing business as "LYNX" since 1992. It became the Central Florida Regional Transportation Authority in March 1994. LYNX provides transit and other transportation services to Orange, Seminole and Osceola Counties; an area of approximately 2,500 square miles with a resident population of more than 1.8 million people. LYNX's 238 coaches supply more than 80,000 rides each weekday adding up to more than 140 million passenger miles annually. In addition to fixed-route transit services in the tri-county area, LYNX provides free downtown Orlando circulator, carpool and vanpool services, and door-to-door van paratransit service called ACCESS LYNX for medically qualified,

physically challenged customers. Additionally, LYNX provides the Road Rangers roadside assistance program on I-4.

*Tampa Bay Commuter Transit Authority (TBCTA)*

Originally created by the Florida Legislature in 1990 as the Tampa Bay Commuter Rail Authority for the purposes of developing and operating a commuter rail or ferry system, the authority was redesignated as the Tampa Bay Commuter Transit Authority in 2004. The authority board comprises elected and citizen representatives from Hernando, Hillsborough, Pasco, Pinellas, and Polk Counties, as well as the affected FDOT District Secretaries or their designees, and an appointee of the Governor. Manatee and Sarasota Counties were included in the membership in 2004. Representatives from each of the seven counties' local transit authorities serve as ex officio members. The authority has directed some organizational work and feasibility studies; however, the authority has been dormant for several years due to a lack of consensus among local authorities regarding the funding of a system, routes and design features.

*Northwest Florida Transportation Corridor Authority*

The Northwest Florida Transportation Corridor Authority (NWFTCA) was created by the 2005 Legislature to develop and adopt a Master Corridor Transportation Improvement Plan, by July 1, 2007, for "the US 98 Corridor System" - US 98 and all necessary feeder roads, reliever roads, connector roads, bypasses, approaches, bridges, avenues of access, hurricane evacuation routes, and any and all appurtenant facilities to facilitate maximum usage of and access to all existing, planned, and future transportation improvements within the US 98 Corridor through Escambia, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa, Walton, Bay, Gulf, Franklin and Wakulla Counties. The goals and objectives of the NWFTCA in the development of this Master Plan are to optimize mobility, traffic safety, hurricane evacuation routes, economic development potential, and community enhancement throughout the US 98 Corridor System.

Chapter 348, F.S., allows for the formation of expressway authorities within any county, or two or more contiguous counties. Typically, Florida expressway authorities have been formed within single counties with the power to develop, maintain, and operate an expressway system within the geographic boundaries of the county. Two exceptions merit further detail.

*Southwest Florida Expressway Authority*

The Southwest Florida Expressway Authority (SWFEA) is an 8-person body including transportation officials from Lee and Collier Counties, the role of which is to raise toll revenue to widen and improve major arteries throughout both counties. Of particular priority is the needed revenue to widen the I-75 freeway beyond the 6-lane expansion due to begin in March 2007. The SWFEA is given statutory authority to expand the system into Charlotte County with the consent of the Board of County Commissioners of Charlotte, Collier, and Lee Counties.

*Orlando-Orange County Expressway Authority*

The Orlando-Orange County Expressway Authority (OOCEA) was created statutorily to develop, maintain, and operate an expressway system in Orange County. Unlike other Florida expressway authority statutes, s. 348.754, (2)(n), F.S., gives the OOCEA the ability to develop, maintain, and operate transportation facilities outside the boundaries of Orange County as long as the county with jurisdiction for the location of the facility consents.

*Regional Planning Councils (RPCs)*

Regional Planning Councils are quasi-governmental organizations designated by ch. 186, F. S., to address problems and plan solutions of greater-than-local concern or scope, and are to be recognized by local governments as one of the means to provide input into state policy development. With regard to transportation-related issues, RPCs are empowered to provide technical assistance to local governments on growth management matters; coordinate land development and transportation policies in a manner that fosters region-wide transportation systems; review local government comprehensive plan amendments, evaluation/appraisal reports, and Developments of Regional Impacts for consistency with state and regional plans; and, review the plans of independent transportation authorities and metropolitan planning organizations to identify inconsistencies between those plans and applicable local government plans.

Recently, several RPCs have coordinated regional visioning initiatives. For example the North Florida Regional Council has created the Regional Community Institute of Northeast Florida, a 501(c)(3) corporation to provide oversight and guidance in the visioning process. Likewise, the South Florida RPC is collaborating in several separate initiatives in anticipation of creating a long-term regional vision.

**Other Regional Bodies**

Numerous regional bodies have formed and are continuing to form with an eye toward creating a regional vision for the future. These non-governmental organizations provide guidance to decision-makers in such areas as land use, transportation, and environmental issues. Often, the impetus for the formation of these advisory bodies has come from the business and institutional sectors. In many aspects, these regional visioning groups provide businesses and institutions with their most comprehensive venues for impacting the transportation planning process.

#### *MyRegion.org (East Central Florida)*

MyRegion.org is led by a large board of directors with business, institutional, and governmental representatives from Brevard, Lake, Orange, Osceola, Polk, Seminole, and Volusia Counties. MyRegion.org was started in early 2000. The stated goals of MyRegion.org are to:

- Organize and train regional leaders;
- Create educational support materials to guide regional efforts;
- Identify key issues and opportunities; and
- Nurture an understanding of regionalism.

One regional workgroup within the organization is currently developing an implementation plan integrating land use and transportation planning across seven counties.

#### *Sustainable Treasure Coast Committee*

The Sustainable Treasure Coast Committee (STCC) is a 37-member, three-county committee created to increase cooperation and coordination between St. Lucie, Martin, and Indian River counties. Created in 2004 by Executive Order No. 04-61, the committee was convened to bring together the range of diverse public, private, and non-profit interests, concerns and communities in the three-county Treasure Coast region. Membership of the STCC includes elected officials from Indian River, Martin and St. Lucie counties and municipalities, members from quasi-government, education, conservation, business and regional interests of the Treasure Coast. Members have been divided into five subcommittees (Natural Systems, Built Environment, Economic Diversity/Prosperity, Social Vision and Rural Lands) to consider, evaluate, and make recommendations concerning these issues of importance related to long-range planning to assure sustainable growth and development in the three-county area.

#### *Tampa Bay Partnership*

The Tampa Bay Partnership is a non-profit organization supported by the financial commitments of over 150 private and public organizations committed to promoting the region as a destination for business relocation and expansion. The Tampa Bay Partnership collaborates with the counties of Hernando, Hillsborough, Manatee, Pasco, Pinellas, Polk and Sarasota and three metropolitan service areas with several key cities. The partnership has identified transportation as the organization's highest priority and supports the creation of a regional transportation authority.

#### *Enterprise Florida*

Enterprise Florida, Inc., is a public-private economic development partnership. The organization's mission is to diversify Florida's economy and create better paying jobs for its citizens by supporting, attracting and helping to create businesses in innovative, high-growth industries. Though a statewide organization, Enterprise Florida advocates a focused regional approach to strategic planning with significant efforts made in rural areas of critical concern.

#### **FDOT's Long Range Objectives**

In the recently updated 2025 FTP (adopted by FDOT in December 2005), FDOT and its statewide partners have acknowledged both the importance of a robust system of interregional corridors and the potential failure of the current SIS to meet travel demand due to capacity constraints. The 2025 FTP states:

FDOT should work with partners to develop statewide criteria for identifying and developing new SIS corridors that connect economic regions and are coordinated with regional and community visions. Emphasis should be given to corridors serving fast-growing and economically distressed areas. FDOT also should develop statewide policy guidance to assist regions and local governments in identifying policies for effective planning of new regional and local corridors when required to meet mobility needs, including how the corridors connect to the SIS and enhance community livability.

#### **Conclusions**

##### *Regional Coordination is Increasing*

During the most recent decennial redesignation of the state's MPOs, data taken from Census 2000 indicated many of the state's urbanized areas were growing towards or merging with other urbanized areas, resulting in larger but fewer metropolitan areas or regions. In response, FDOT strongly encouraged the regional coordination of the transportation planning

process and was largely successful in instilling the need for enhanced regional coordination and partnering for MPOs. A minimum of \$600,000 in federal planning funds are distributed to the MPOs for regional coordination activities using a formula jointly developed by the MPOs and FDOT.

As a result of the TRIP, many new regional partnerships have been formalized and now identify regional project priorities. However, the efficacy of the program has been questioned due to limited funding (an estimated \$135 million per year for FYs 07/08 through 14/15) and the limited ability of local governments to provide required matching funds. Further, though discouraged by FDOT, the broad statutory criteria defining TRIP partnerships could allow subsets of existing regional partnerships or redundant partnerships to form with the intent of identifying sub-regional priorities for TRIP funding. In addition to being counter-productive to more comprehensive regional coordination, such sub-regional or redundant partnerships may further diminish the limited program funds available to partnerships better suited to accomplishing the goal of a coordinated transportation planning process.

Other regional coalitions have evolved over time and continue to form to create more comprehensive visions for a region's future development and quality of life. These regional visioning bodies, often initiated by chambers of commerce and other business and institutional leaders, are not regional partnerships as defined by the TRIP; however, they can provide needed input from traditionally under-represented segments of the community.

*Business/Institutional Involvement Could be Improved*  
Federal metropolitan planning laws and regulations emphasize the role of locally elected officials and the involvement of the public in the transportation planning process. Public participation is arguably an MPO's most important function and MPOs have been very successful in affording private citizens input in the decision-making process. However, many MPOs lack meaningful participation with the institutional and business interests influencing their area for at least two reasons. First, the public involvement plans of many MPOs have been developed and implemented with the goal of maximizing the ease with which private citizens can voice their concerns. Typically, a public hearing is held to announce the MPO's intent to adopt a given plan or program and garner input. In these venues, a homeowner's concern is often noted in the same capacity as that of a major regional employer.

Secondly, the propensity for many MPOs to focus primarily on the transportation systems solely within their jurisdiction is not conducive to the flow of useful information from larger regional employers and institutions. These interests are often physically located outside of the MPO's boundary while their impacts are widespread throughout the region. Further, large institutions are often more concerned with regional transportation issues, not simply the local projects which can dominate the inherently parochial public involvement process.

#### *Regionalism Does Not Diminish MPO Authority*

Federal law gives MPOs abundant authority in determining future transportation development within their designated planning areas. This is particularly true of projects with regional significance. By federal regulation (see 23 CFR 450.324) all regionally significant projects for which approval from the Federal Highway Administration or Federal Transit Administration is required must be included in the TIP. Irrespective of where the impetus for transportation development originates and regardless of how it is funded, regionally significant projects with certain environmental impacts or connections to Interstate Highways and other federal-aid highways will require the affected MPO to include the project in its long range plan and TIP in order to proceed.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Legislature should consider fostering the formation and continued evolution of regional visioning bodies serving as venues for institutional/business involvement in the transportation planning process.

The Legislature should consider legislation providing for the independence of MPOs, with staffing separate from county or city governments.

The Legislature should examine the funding mechanisms available to local governments which could provide the matching funds for TRIP projects.

The Legislature should consider increasing the funding of the TRIP to provide continued incentives for, and to broaden the scope of regional coordination in transportation development. The Legislature may also choose to consider changes to the TRIP to discourage sub-regional or redundant partnerships in areas already served by a regional partnership from being eligible for program funding.