



HERNANDO-CITRUS METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION (MPO) BOARD

Minutes of May 7, 2026

DRAFT

The Hernando-Citrus Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Board held a regular public meeting at 1:30 p.m. on Thursday, May 7, 2026, at the Brookville City Hall Council Chambers, 201 Howell Avenue, Brooksville, Florida. The meeting was publicly noticed on the Hernando County, Citrus County, and Hernando-Citrus MPO websites.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Rebecca Bays, MPO Vice Chair, Citrus County Commissioner
Diana Finegan, Citrus County Commissioner (arriving later in the meeting)
Brian Hawkins, Hernando County Commissioner
Jerry Campbell, Hernando County Commissioner
Gene Davis, Councilman, City of Inverness
Robert Holmes, Councilman, City of Crystal River
Louis Hallal, Brooksville City Council
Elisa Joyner, Non-Voting Advisor, Florida Department of Transportation, District 7

MEMBERS ABSENT

John Allocco, MPO Chair, Hernando County Commissioner
Steve Champion, Hernando County Commissioner

OTHERS PRESENT

Bob Esposito, MPO Executive Director
Mary Elwin, MPO Coordinator
Joy Turner, MPO Executive Assistant
Holly Kowalczyk, Florida Department of Transportation, District 7
Suzanne Ziegler, Florida Department of Transportation, District 7
Loren Hughes, Florida Turnpike Enterprise

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER

- MPO Board Vice Chair, Rebecca Bays, called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m.
- The Pledge of Allegiance and the introductions of the Board and staff followed the Invocation.
- A quorum was declared, and Ms. Turner noted for the record that the public notice for the meeting was posted in accordance with the adopted policies.

APPROVAL/MODIFICATION OF AGENDA

Motion: A motion was made by Commissioner Hawkins to approve the agenda. The motion was seconded by Councilman Hallal and the motion passed 6-0.

CONSENT ITEMS

Mr. Esposito provided an overview of the three items on the Consent Agenda which were:

1. Review and Approval of the February 5, 2026, Meeting Minutes of the Hernando-Citrus Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Board
2. Annual Joint Certification of the Hernando-Citrus MPO by the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT)
3. Approval of Resolutions 2026-2 and 2026-3, and Authorization for the MPO Executive Director to Execute Fiscal Year 2027 Grant Award Agreements for Citrus and Hernando Counties from the Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged

Motion: A motion was made by Commissioner Hawkins to approve Consent Agenda Items 1 through 3. The motion was seconded by Councilman Hallal and the motion passed 6-0.

ACTION ITEMS

1. Review and Adoption of the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) for Fiscal Year 2027 – Fiscal Year 2028 by Resolution 2026-1 and Approval of the Florida Department of Transportation/Metropolitan Planning Organization Agreement

Ms. Elwin reviewed the agenda item and the staff recommendation. Commissioner Hawkins noted for the public that Federal and State grants fund the UPWP. In response to Commissioner Hawkins' questions, Ms. Elwin explained that the "soft match" listed in the UPWP comes from toll revenue credits, also known as Transportation Development Credits, which are generated from tolls collected when individuals travel on the State's toll road system. These credits are used to meet the 100% funding requirement of the UPWP and fund capital matches such as the transit buses used in the Hernando County and Citrus County Transit systems.

Councilman Hallal asked what UPWP funds may be used for, and Ms. Elwin confirmed the "PL" funds are strictly for the MPO's transportation planning activities.

Motion: A motion was made by Commissioner Hawkins to adopt the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) for Fiscal Year 2027 – Fiscal Year 2028, authorize the MPO Vice Chair to execute the associated Resolution 2026-1, authorize the MPO Chair and the MPO Executive Director to execute the FDOT/Metropolitan Planning Organization Agreement in the amount of \$1,651,496, and authorize the transmittal of the documents to the Florida Department of Transportation for execution. The motion was seconded by Councilman Hallal and the motion passed 6-0.

2. Discussion of the Bicycle/Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC)

Mr. Esposito reviewed the agenda item and the staff recommendation. Commissioner Hawkins asked how open volunteer positions are advertised. Mr. Esposito and Ms. Elwin explained that vacancies are posted on the MPO website, through the Hernando and Citrus County Public Information Offices, on social media, local radio, county newsletters, and WWJB radio public announcement spots.

Councilman Hallal expressed surprise that, despite the number of local bike clubs, there has been limited interest in serving on the BPAC. Ms. Elwin noted that many bike paths have already been built and that the BPAC has largely achieved its intended objectives. She added that when issues arise, residents are eager to get involved, but when things are functioning well, there is less urgency for public participation. She commended the MPO Board for its work on the trails and suggested that the lack of recent engagement may likely reflect overall public satisfaction.

Ms. Elwin also noted that conducting joint meetings with the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) and the Bicycle/Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC) has been effective, and that existing members have provided strong involvement. Councilman Holmes reported that the CAC seat for Crystal River is vacant and said he would notify the City Manager.

Commissioner Campbell expressed appreciation for the willingness of volunteers to serve. He asked whether the Sheriff's Office positions would continue to be represented on the CAC, and staff confirmed they would, emphasizing the importance of understanding the challenges e-bikes pose to the community. Councilman Davis reported receiving numerous complaints about e-bikes but felt that any meaningful enforcement changes would need to come from the state legislature. Mr. Esposito encouraged members to reach out to state legislators.

Commissioner Bays noted that the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) can enforce regulations on the trails, and that Captain Shuster is the appropriate contact for Citrus County. Commissioner Campbell said he would identify the appropriate FWC contact for Hernando County.

Ms. Elwin concluded by noting that additional documents are affected by this action and that the agenda item would be returned to the Board for further review and questions.

[It is noted for the record that MPO Board member, Citrus Commissioner Finnegan, arrived at the meeting.]

Motion: A motion was made by Commissioner Hawkins to support the MPO staff recommendation to proceed with restructuring the committees allowing for BPAC members to serve on the CAC, preparing the necessary updates to the MPO's Public Participation Plan, and updating CAC Bylaws. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Campbell and the motion passed 7-0.

Commissioner Hawkins asked MPO staff to email him the list of open positions and stated he would reach out to several individuals to help fill the vacancies.

PRESENTATION

Presentation by the Center for Urban Transportation Research (CUTR) on the Annual Update for the Hernando County (TheBus) FY2025-FY2034 Transit Development Plan (TDP)

Jonathan Roberson, AICP, Research Associate at CUTR, presented the Annual Update for the Hernando County Transit Development Plan (TDP) for FY2025-FY2034, highlighting progress made since the plan's adoption. He noted that the County has maintained existing service levels and expanded its network by adding four fixed routes along with the required $\frac{3}{4}$ -mile ADA paratransit service. Over the past year, Hernando County also purchased new vehicles to support these routes, modernized its scheduling system for both ADA paratransit and fixed-route services, and prepared to install real-time information screens on its larger buses.

Looking ahead to FY2026-FY2027, the County plans to introduce two additional fixed routes. Route 10 will operate along Anderson Snow Boulevard, Barclay Avenue, and Sunshine Grove Road, while Route 11 will run along US 19 to the Citrus County line, where it will connect with Citrus County Transit's Orange Line. In FY2029 or later, the County anticipates adding another zonal route similar to the downtown Brooksville service, though the specific location has not yet been identified.

Several major capital priorities will continue into FY2026 and beyond, including ongoing bus stop improvements and development of a new maintenance and operations facility. The County will also procure design and engineering services for bus stop upgrades, construct additional shelters, and continue purchasing new and replacement vehicles.

Another key initiative over the next few years is a comprehensive marketing update. This effort will include refreshed route schedules, improved route information, a redesigned website, and expanded outreach. The County also plans to secure additional support for planning, design, and engineering activities associated with its capital program.

Within the next five years, a new transfer facility could significantly reshape system operations. If constructed, the facility would likely require a redesign of the overall route network to optimize connections and improve efficiency.

The TDP is updated every five years, with annual progress reports completed in the interim. It guides decisions about project selection and prioritization within the Hernando-Citrus MPO's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and must remain consistent with local government comprehensive plans and the MPO's Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP).

Commissioner Hawkins requested data on ridership for Hernando County's TheBus, particularly the Mermaid Route. He noted that with rising driving costs and limited parking at Pine Island, he is hopeful that ridership will increase and that the route will not experience empty buses, as the Mermaid Route was introduced both to alleviate parking issues at Pine Island and to serve the community along Shoal Line Boulevard. Ms. Lollie reported that March ridership increased by 10% over February, and ADA ridership increased by 9%. She agreed to forward TheBus operations report to MPO staff for distribution to the MPO Board. Councilman Davis requested a similar operations report for Citrus County Transit, and Ms. Elwin confirmed that MPO staff would obtain and forward that report as well.

Commissioner Hawkins emphasized that there may be a need to shift resources from underperforming routes to support routes experiencing higher demand. Commissioner Campbell asked whether TheBus has permission to install signage directing riders to park at the Walmart parking lot. Ms. Lollie explained that while the parking lot is public, neither TheBus nor Hernando County can place signage on Walmart property encouraging riders to "park here and ride." Discussion followed regarding alternative messaging to inform the public about available parking options and how the Mermaid Route provides access to Pine Island. Councilman Davis added that many Citrus County residents are not familiar with the transit services available in their county.

Commissioner Hawkins then asked whether Hernando County's TheBus could support the YMCA's People Helping People program by delivering weekly food boxes during the summer to transportation-disadvantaged residents. Mr. Scott Herring, County Engineer/Public Works Director for Hernando County, responded that Ms. Lollie would need to determine whether participating in such a program would comply with Federal Transit Administration (FTA) guidelines. He added that he has been in discussions with County Administrator Rogers and Hernando County Health and Human Services regarding how the county might support this effort and expressed support for any supplemental services TheBus could provide.

CITIZEN COMMENTS

Mr. Bob Morgan, a Hernando County resident, provided a handout to the MPO Board containing Hernando County TheBus ridership information that he retrieved from the Hernando County Delegation on Government Efficiency (DOGE) Committee website. He clarified that he was not attending the

meeting as a representative of DOGE, but solely as an individual citizen. Mr. Morgan noted that, similar to the data presented earlier in the meeting, ridership from 2019 through 2025 has increased by 5.6%. He shared that he presented the same information to the Hernando County Board of County Commissioners at their March 10, 2026, meeting and suggested that the County consider exploring alternative transit methods, such as micro-transit and ride-share vouchers, to provide more efficient transportation options rather than adding additional buses and routes. He emphasized that offering transportation options to residents remains important.

Commissioner Campbell thanked Mr. Morgan for his comments and expressed support for continuing discussions about smaller vehicles and opportunities to explore micro-transit. He noted that other counties are evaluating similar options and that he continues to monitor their progress in implementing alternative transit models.

Councilman Hallal asked whether all Hernando County buses are uniform in size and whether using smaller buses on less productive routes could result in cost savings. Ms. Lollie explained that while smaller buses can be appropriate for certain routes, they also present challenges. She noted that smaller buses require more frequent refueling due to their limited fuel tank capacity, which can reduce operational efficiency.

MPO DIRECTOR COMMENTS

Mr. Esposito shared the following updates:

- The Board has been provided with two versions of the draft annual List of Priority Projects (LOPP): a red-lined version showing all edits and a clean draft for both Construction and Transportation Alternatives (TA) projects. The proposed draft was reviewed by the committees on April 23 and will be presented to the Board on June 4 for adoption and incorporation into the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). It is also available on the MPO website for public review.

The MPO is proposing the following approach to the LOPP:

- Maintain the current list without expanding it, while identifying cost-feasible, smaller-scale improvements that can move forward (e.g., turn signals, added turn lanes, intersection upgrades).
- Shift some larger, locally focused projects to a secondary list to position them for advancement if local or state funding becomes available.
- Reduce the number of projects on the TA list by removing items unlikely to receive TA funding.
- Note that the total annual allocation for TA projects is approximately \$513,000 (\$343,000 for Hernando County and \$170,000 for Citrus County).
- Streamline and update the TA LOPP with additional project information to support Board decision-making.
- Reminder: Projects seeking Safe Routes to School funding must meet several prerequisites, including right-of-way availability and letters of support from school superintendents and principals.

Additional Updates:

- The draft Letter of Understanding (LOU) provided by FDOT for County Line Road has been reviewed by Pasco County and is currently under review by Hernando County. It is scheduled to go before the Board of County Commissioners on June 9, 2026.
- County Line Road (Hernando and Pasco counties) has been added to the Sun Coast Transportation Planning Alliance (SCTPA) Regional Priorities List as the #2 and #3 priority projects for FDOT District 7. Barclay Avenue in Hernando County is ranked as the #1 regional priority. The Regional Priorities List is scheduled for adoption in June 2026. The Three Sisters Trail in Citrus County is the SCTPA's #1 Multi-Use Trail priority for District 7. *Note:* FDOT District 7 receives approximately \$7 million annually in TRIP funding.

- Local municipalities should receive email notifications from FDOT as projects enter the design phase. This is the appropriate time for cities and counties to request additional improvements, rather than waiting until the project's design is completed or it nears construction as plans cannot be changed.
- As part of a resurfacing project on US 19 in Crystal River, a pedestrian hybrid beacon will be installed at the Crosstown Trail crossing.
- An audible pedestrian signal (APS) has been warranted at SR 50/Cortez Boulevard and US 41/Broad Street. FDOT will coordinate with Hernando County regarding concurrence and implementation. Currently, there are no APS installations in Hernando County, so this would be the first, both countywide and within the City of Brooksville.
- MPO staff attended the Florida Metropolitan Planning Partnership (FMPP) meeting on Wednesday, April 29, in Orlando. Mr. Esposito attended the Metropolitan Planning Organization Advisory Council (MPOAC) meeting on Thursday, April 30, also in Orlando.
- Mr. Esposito reminded the MPO Board that meetings are conducted only when business items require action, such as the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), which must be submitted to FDOT by May 15, 2026. He thanked the Board for their attendance to ensure quorum. He also noted that the June 4, 2026, MPO Board meeting will be necessary to meet several critical deadlines, including adoption of the FY2027–FY2031 TIP and LOPP, approval of the FY2026–FY2030 TIP Amendment for use of FTA 5307 funds, and acceptance of the traffic counts and level of service reports for Hernando and Citrus counties, as well as the Complete Streets and Congestion Management Plan. He further noted that the July 2, 2026, MPO Board meeting will likely be cancelled.
- The Sun Coast Transportation Planning Alliance (SCTPA) will meet in Lakeland on Friday, June 5, to review and adopt regional priorities for member jurisdictions. Commissioner Allocco plans to attend. *[Subsequent to the MPO meeting, the June 5th meeting of the SCTPA was cancelled.]*

In response to Commissioner Bays' question regarding the bridge on SR 200, Suzanne Ziegler, Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) District 7 Liaison, confirmed that the bridge project, which moved from page 1 to page 3 (Production) of the draft List of Priority Projects (LOPP), includes Right-of-Way (ROW) acquisition in the Tentative Work Program, currently programmed for 2029. Construction, which is not yet programmed in the Tentative Work Program, would occur approximately two to three years after acquired ROW. She added that she would reach out to the project manager for additional information on the bridge's design and placement.

Ms. Ziegler also confirmed that Walt Eastmond, County Engineer/Technical Services Director for Citrus County Public Works, is working with FDOT's Safety and Traffic Operations teams to review concerns regarding the short left-hand turn lane at US 44 and Homosassa Trail. Commissioner Bays acknowledged the update and noted that a large development is planned just east of the area, along with a future VA clinic to the west. Ms. Ziegler stated she would provide an update on the progress of that request.

Commissioner Bays acknowledged that FDOT is also working on intersection improvements at US 41 and Gobbler Road, even though the intersection does not currently warrant a traffic signal.

Councilman Hallal expressed concerns about the rust patina running down the concrete pillars of the Good Neighbor Trail bridge at SR 50, noting that the bridge is less than six months old. He asked FDOT to review whether the bridge was properly sealed, as the City of Brooksville will be responsible for its maintenance and the rust staining is not aesthetically acceptable. Ms. Ziegler stated she would have someone investigate the issue and provide an update to the MPO Board.

Commissioner Campbell commended MPO staff for their efforts to hold meetings only when business warrants it, noting that the time savings and efficiency are greatly appreciated. He also thanked FDOT for its

support and participation in helping Pasco and Hernando counties move forward with expanding County Line Road from two lanes to four lanes. He further expressed his personal preference that the next section of County Line Road be expanded from two to four lanes rather than pursuing any expansion to six lanes.

Suzanne Ziegler will provide an update on Small County Outreach Program (SCOP) funding availability for CR 470 from N. Apopka Avenue to SR 44 (FDOT Project ID 450593-1), in Citrus County, in response to Commissioner Bays's inquiry.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

There were no further comments from the Board.

ADJOURNMENT AND NEXT MEETING

The next regular meeting of the Metropolitan Planning Organization Board is scheduled for Thursday, June 4, 2026, beginning at 1:30 pm, in the Brooksville City Hall Council Chambers, 201 Howell Avenue, Brooksville, Florida.

Motion: A motion was made by Commissioner Hawkins to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Campbell and the motion passed 7-0.

Vice Chair Bays adjourned the meeting at 3:10 p.m.