



## 8 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

### 8.1 CONSIDERATION OF TEA-21 PLANNING FACTORS

With the update of the Sarasota/Manatee 2030 Long Range Transportation plan starting in early 2004, the project was developed and adopted under the rules and policies of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century, or TEA-21. The U.S. Congress passed, and the President signed into law, the re-authorization of TEA-21 in the summer of 2005. However, the 2030 LRTP was substantially complete at that time, and ultimately was adopted by the MPO in November 2005. Thus, while the LRTP is consistent with the provisions of the new SAFETEA-LU federal transportation law, its process was designed to reflect the then-current guidance under TEA-21.

The following metropolitan planning factors were considered in the 2030 LRTP process:

1. Support the economic vitality of the metropolitan area, especially by enabling global competitiveness, productivity, and efficiency

The 2030 LRTP evaluated the transportation accessibility considerations for critical existing and emerging employment centers in the Sarasota/Manatee area, and developed needed and financially feasible projects to sustain and grow these areas. These locations included Port Manatee, the Sarasota-Bradenton International Airport, the downtowns along US 41 and the emerging economic centers along I-75. Additionally, the plan evaluated regional transportation connections between Sarasota/Manatee and the greater Tampa Bay area to the north, and Charlotte County to the south. Focus group discussions with freight, economic development and workforce interests helped understand barriers and challenges related to the transportation system's ability to support economic competitiveness in the region. Projects like the Port Manatee connector, bus service improvements on US 41, University Parkway and Fruitville Road, the Ft. Hamer bridge and the US 41 bypass in Venice provide important economic benefits for the region. Additional improvements in the financially feasible plan provide enhanced access to the interstate system and creation of more capacity on parallel roads to the interstate to support the region's economic vitality. Although only widening the southern section of I-75 through Sarasota County to six lanes is financially feasible, the plan calls for major capacity improvements to I-75 to meet the growing demand for travel in this critical regional corridor.

2. Increase the safety and security of the transportation system for motorized and nonmotorized users

The principal consideration for safety and security in the Sarasota/Manatee region is hurricane/emergency evacuation. The Englewood Interstate Connector project is a principal means of ensuring better access from southern Sarasota County to the interstate. Similarly, enhancements to east-west capacity in Manatee County provide better access to evacuation routes. The plan identifies a bicycle/pedestrian trails network system that will provide better on- and off-road facilities to enhance safety for non-motorized forms of transportation. Specific projects like the planned capacity and livability enhancements to 15th Street East, for example, will dramatically improve safety for many workers and the transportation disadvantaged who



walk or bicycle along this narrow, heavily congested roadway serving the airport industrial area north of University Parkway.

### 3. Increase the accessibility and mobility options available to people and for freight

During development of the LRTP update, two focus group discussions were held with freight/goods movement interests to understand issues and needs for better mobility and access. The plan mapped key freight mobility corridors and in the selection of financially feasible projects, established priority ranking criteria that considered whether a project improved access to freight/employment hubs, as well as the statewide Strategic Intermodal System. Highly ranked projects supporting these objectives included University Parkway, Moccasin Wallow Road, the Ft. Hamer bridge and Rye Road in north Manatee County, and interstate access improvements in south Sarasota County.

The 2030 LRTP advances a number of public transportation projects designed to improve inter-county connectivity of bus service between the Manatee and Sarasota County transit systems. Financially feasible connections between the two systems on Longboat Key, US 41, Honore Avenue and Lockwood Ridge Road should be made or enhanced. Additionally, the plan identifies financially feasible transit projects that improve regional accessibility for express bus transit along University Parkway and I-275, linking Manatee with expanding employment opportunities in Pinellas County.

### 4. Protect and enhance the environment, promote energy conservation, and improve quality of life

The 2030 LRTP was developed following implementation of the State of Florida's new Efficient Transportation Decision-Making (ETDM) process, which included environmental streamlining provisions designed to flag environmental and socio-cultural effects of proposed transportation projects early in the planning process. The LRTP update process screened all candidate projects for funding that were included in the draft 2030 Needs Plan, and highlighted significant environmental and socio-cultural effects of those projects. Along with using transportation investments to enhance community livability, environmental preservation and energy conservation were key objectives for the plan, approved by the MPO.

Energy conservation was promoted in the 2030 LRTP through development of a more balanced transportation system. Unlike previous LRTPs developed by the MPO, this was a modally-balanced plan update that included system plans for transit and bicycle/pedestrian mobility and access that integrated transportation projects with local and regional land use patterns. The development of a grid-like transit route network and a series of multi-use paths will contribute to the overall quality of life and reduced energy consumption in both counties.

### 5. Enhance the integration and connectivity of the transportation system, across and between modes, for people and freight

Connectivity was a major focus of the 2030 LRTP. As a two-county MPO with signed interlocal planning agreements with the West Central Florida MPO Chairs Coordinating Committee (CCC) and the Charlotte-Punta Gorda MPO, there is a heightened sense of importance regarding inter-county connections for all modes. The LRTP was developed against the backdrop of the state's Strategic Intermodal System, which is



aimed at improving statewide economic competitiveness. The Sarasota/Manatee MPO developed a Joint Regional Multi-modal Transportation Network with the Charlotte-Punta Gorda MPO and the CCC, designating key corridors for regional access. Planned improvements to regional transit service and highway capacity will further contribute to multi-modal mobility across county lines and throughout the region.

#### 6. Promote efficient system management and operation

The 2030 LRTP reflects previous planning efforts by the MPO and continues to advance the development of an Advanced Traffic Management System (ATMS) in both Manatee and Sarasota Counties. The ATMS will improve regional system management and operations through coordinated, real-time traffic signal information. Additionally, the MPO has established a Public Transportation Task Force, which is responsible for coordinating regional transit improvements, including development of more efficient inter-county service and system administration, and reporting recommendations to the full MPO. The Task Force has been instrumental in improving the bus operations between the two counties and coordinated service planning.

#### 7. Emphasize the preservation of the existing transportation system

With such rapid growth to the north and east of the established urban core areas in the Sarasota/Manatee region, there is a need for an expanded transportation system. However, the 2030 LRTP also recognizes the importance of redeveloping the downtowns and providing opportunities for residential and non-residential growth in those areas where transportation access is very high. The LRTP planning process developed objectives and evaluation factors that emphasized maintaining and enhancing the existing transportation facilities and services in these core areas. Access to existing economic generators like Port Manatee and the Sarasota-Bradenton International Airport will be enhanced through improvements to existing facilities and development of limited access road corridors that preserve the viability of both port facilities.

Furthermore, the plan calls for preserving the existing but little-used CSX/Gulf Coast Railroad rail line through Manatee and Sarasota Counties as a future passenger rail or bus rapid transit corridor. Although not financially feasible or with sufficient transit-supportive land uses at this time, the rail corridor connects downtown Sarasota and downtown Bradenton (along with Venice and Palmetto) through the older, established parts of both counties. These areas are largely industrial, but redevelopment and high regional housing costs are likely to result in more mixed-use development and higher residential densities in these areas for higher forms of transit to be more viable in the future.

#### Consistency with SAFETEA-LU

In terms of consistency with SAFETEA-LU, implementation of the LRTP's public participation plan included visualization strategies and extensive use of the project website on the Internet. Visualization techniques included development of four alternative land use scenarios that employed the use of the CorPlan scenario planning tool to assign alternative future land use categories to different geographic areas, and evaluate their impact on transportation needs. This is described in the Needs Assessment section of the



report. Plan view illustrations were created of each scenario, along with GIS-based maps showing how and where alternative land use patterns – densities, land use type, etc. – were applied to the two-county region.

The plan included extensive outreach and dialogue with stakeholders and regional transportation planning interests, ranging from transportation disadvantaged groups to freight/goods movement interests, and geographically-based interests. Consultation with these various providers, advocates and users of the transportation system greatly influenced the shape and direction of the LRTP and its list of projects.

Finally, safety was considered in the planning process through public participation (primarily focus groups) and by identifying road segments and intersections where high traffic volumes, substandard or inadequate design, and redevelopment pressure was creating potential for increased crashes. Recommendations were developed for the ATMS, enhancements to 15th Street East and capacity improvements to help improve safety for the traveling public.

## **8.2 FINAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Despite serious funding challenges to meet the area's future transportation needs, the adopted 2030 Long Range Transportation Plan improves mobility for all users and promotes development of a more balanced transportation system. The plan places an emphasis on regional connections and access to economic centers through such projects as the Port Manatee connector and University Parkway. The major shortfall of \$2.7 billion in highway and transit funds for needed projects may limit or redirect future growth and will likely shift more responsibility to private sources or tolls to address future needs. Further, given the importance of I-75 to the two counties as its emerging central corridor much like US 41 was 50 years ago, the region's economic vitality depends on its ability to meet future travel needs.

It is also critically important that land use decisions need to match transportation decisions to better achieve system goals and preserve current investments. While the MPO does not have any responsibility for land use planning or decision-making, the MPO is the forum where the two counties' elected officials gather to discuss regional transportation and growth issues, and the MPO Board should be part of that dialogue. The bottom line is that the MPO's role is ultimately to ensure the viability of its transportation investment decisions into the future, and the only way for that to happen is to fully coordinate land use and transportation planning activities. The MPO must become an active voice for where transportation and land use decisions intersect, particularly in suitable redevelopment areas such as along US 41 and access to the downtowns, and within the I-75 corridor.

Key issues and recommendations concerning the region's transportation future will need continued attention. These include the following:

The vast shortfall in transportation funding with regards to the infrastructure needed to provide basic service over the next 25 years. This shortfall can be addressed through a variety of methods including land use policy changes, finding additional financial resources and changing encouraging alternative modes of transportation



The region will need to push for full funding of the recommended I-75 improvements through the Strategic Intermodal System. Currently, the state has only committed to widening the interstate to six lanes. To meet anticipated demand, the road will need to be widened to 10 lanes, ideally with these additional four lanes designated as special use lanes to better manage the operations of the roadway and encourage its use as a regional facility.

The state should fund the University Parkway improvements as well as the Port Connector using SIS funds as both of these facilities are important to the region and State of Florida.

SIS facilities should also include transit improvements. The transit services operating in SIS corridors will need to be regional express bus routes, potentially using the special purpose lanes on I-75, and supported by strategically located park and ride lots.

The MPO will need to add to the current list of regionally significant transportation facilities as the region rapidly grows and new roads are built. Candidates include Honore Avenue, Lakewood Ranch Boulevard, Lorraine Road and University Parkway, among others.

Sarasota and Manatee Counties, as well as the region's municipalities, will need to change their land use policies to meet the transportation funding realities. Policy changes may include requiring more mixed-use focal points, serving those areas with improved transit access, and providing for improved connectivity through mandating more local and connector streets in new and current developments.

Large-scale new development occurring the north and eastern high growth areas of both counties should follow general guidance for regional activity center criteria to reduce vehicle miles of travel: 1) regional transportation access; 2) multiple interconnecting streets to balance traffic and provide accessibility to surrounding land uses; 3) access within 15 minutes travel time from high growth residential areas; 4) ability to improve jobs-housing balance, including a range of income levels to meet housing affordability goals; 5) provide income-generating employment uses sufficient to attract workers, drive the regional economy and support related business; and 6) provide the template for effective transit service by ensuring access for future transit options

A continued focus on redeveloping established urban areas, especially those along the US 41 corridor and in the core parts of each downtown, will be critical to accommodating the continued regional growth. These areas are generally better able to receive these new residents and jobs due to their connected street networks and proximity to job centers.

Finally, it must be recognized that this 2030 LRTP should be amended sometime in 2006 to account for revised revenue projections from federal and state sources. In addition, there are on-going discussions at the local level about ways to fund the shortfall to address priority un-met transportation needs, particularly in Manatee County. Transportation planning is a continuing process, and the data, analysis and public input has laid a good foundation for a productive ongoing dialogue between elected officials, citizens, industry and interest groups to meet the Sarasota/Manatee region's mobility and accessibility needs.

