Yorkshire/Raintree Interchange Planning

December 2022

Sarasota/Manatee Metropolitan Planning Organization

Yorkshire/Raintree Interchange Planning
December 2022

BACKGROUND Ideas for a new I-75 interchange in North Port have been considered for almost two decades. The most recent effort began in the last half of 2017 after Hurricane Irma focused attention on the need for more evacuation routes As a result, the Yorkshire/Raintree interchange was a discussion item on the January 2018 joint meeting agenda of the Charlotte County/Punta Gorda Metropolitan Planning Organization and the Sarasota/Manatee Metropolitan Planning Organization.

The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) presented the state and federal requirements for interchange development, and a lengthy debate about the merits and drawbacks of Yorkshire vs. Raintree followed. While Raintree may provide the most direct route for evacuation, Yorkshire might have the most potential for economic development.

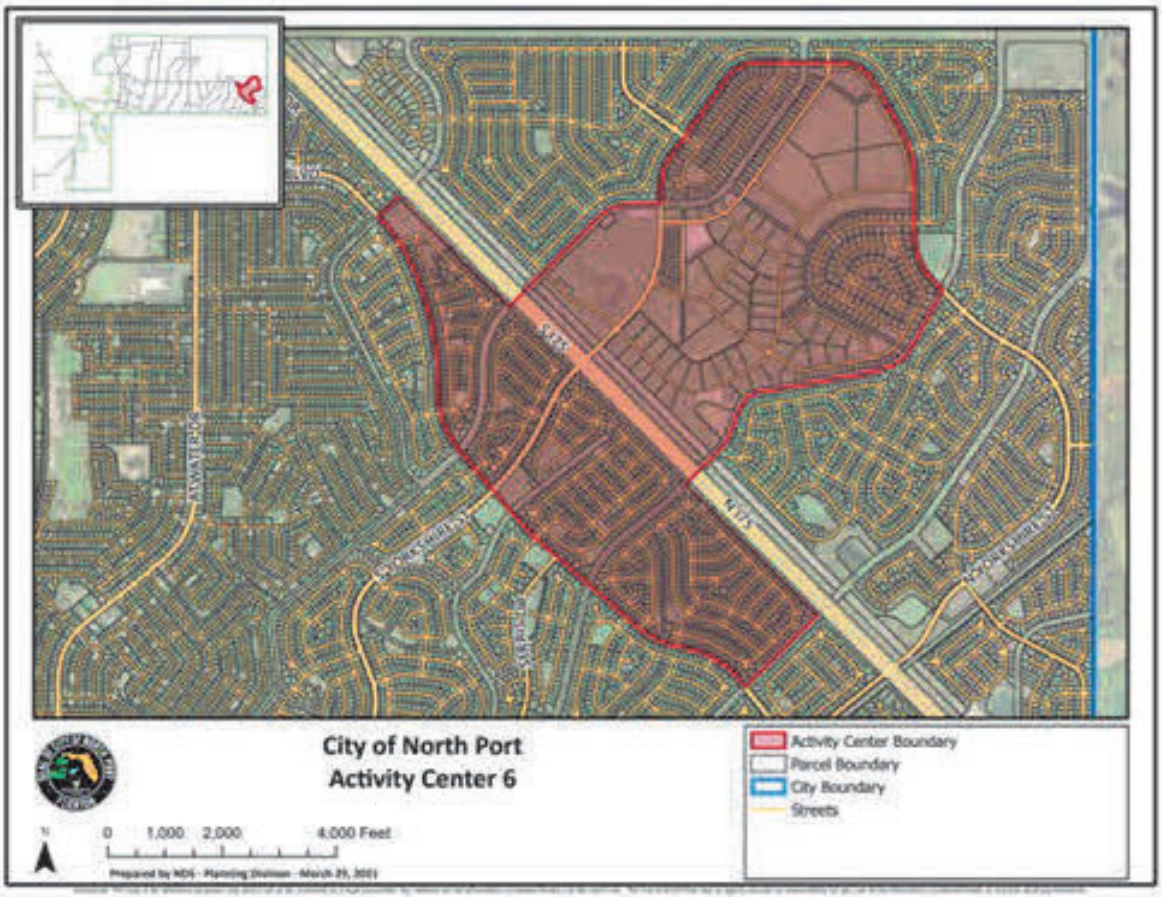
FDOT also made it clear that, to move forward, the local jurisdictions, including Charlotte and Sarasota Counties, the City of North Port, and both MPOs, would need:

- **UNIFIED APPROACH**: Work together to reach consensus and present a unified approach for FDOT consideration,
- **MPO PLANS:** Prioritize the interchange in both MPO Long Range Transportation Plans (LRTP),
- **LOCAL PLANS:** Include the interchange and connecting local roads in all city and county planning documents,
- **INFRASTRUCTURE:** Develop and construct the supporting roadway and utility infrastructure, and then, in the future,
- **NEXT STEPS:** Demonstrate the current and future traffic volume to successfully complete the Interchange Justification Report (IJR) required by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).

UNIFIED APPROACH Over the next year, the stakeholders concluded that it was most important to agree on the need for an interchange and not let the specific location be a barrier to gaining FDOT support. Ultimately, FDOT would need to develop the IJR for review by FHWA. At the next joint meeting of the MPOs in January 2019, the two boards presented a common message, and FDOT asked that both MPOs make formal, written requests for FDOT to review the potential need for an interchange and a possible location. On the afternoon of the board meeting, the MPOs hosted a transportation workshop for Southwest Florida which began the two-year process of developing the 2045 Long Range Transportation Plan.

Sarasota County, Charlotte County, and the City of North Port acknowledged many years ago the importance of an interchange at this location and worked together to add it to both MPO's long range plans. All three have continuously supported the interchange as a needed evacuation route. They also recognize that the city's designated Activity Center will support industrial, office, and commercial development, providing value-added employment opportunities as both counties continue to see high levels of population growth year after year.

North Port is planning for the continued growth of its platted lots as the population of the city moves eastward. Sarasota County has worked with the Economic Development Corporation (EDC) to identify additional areas for business parks and light industrial and office space to support the county's growing population. The North Port Activity Center 6 will provide a non-residential framework of support and tax base diversification, not only for North Port, but for regional residents in Charlotte, Desoto, and Sarasota Counties as well. Sarasota County Planning, Transportation Planning, and Economic Development departments are in full support of advancing the Yorkshire/Raintree interchange.



The Sarasota EDC has identified the Yorkshire/Raintree area as the only real opportunity for future industry in Sarasota County

In February 2019, at a joint meeting of the Charlotte and Sarasota County Commissions, FDOT made a presentation on their upcoming Southwest Connect Interstate Program which would analyze future I-75 capacity needs, express lanes, managed lanes, and interchanges. The Central Corridor Study was started in early 2020 and included the area between the Lee/Charlotte County line north to River Road. With complementing written requests from both MPOs in hand, FDOT committed to include a feasibility study for an interchange between King's Highway and Toledo Blade. Preliminary study information will be presented to the MPOs in early 2023 and the final report should be available by summer 2023.

On June 9, 2022 the two MPO's hosted a meeting in North Port to review the interchange plans that were approved by their boards as part of their 2045 Long Range Transportation Plans. Planning, economic development, and other staff from Charlotte, Desoto, and Sarasota Counties, and the City of North Port participated in the meeting where all organizations had an opportunity to report their current planning activities and their support for the future interchange. It was agreed that the group would continue to meet periodically and would report back to their respective elected representatives.

At a joint meeting of the North Port City Council and the Sarasota County Commission on July 14, 2022 it was again agreed that both jurisdictions would support the proposed interchange plan outlined by their respective MPOs. Both jurisdictions supported the recommendations to update their internal plans for consistency and to begin planning the supporting infrastructure. Support for the plan was also affirmed at the Charlotte County/Punta Gorda Metropolitan Planning Organization meeting on July 18, 2022. Following Hurricane Ian, the City of North Port and Charlotte County adopted a joint resolution on November 22, 2022 affirming their support for an interchange in the Yorkshire/Raintree area.

MPO PLANS In October 2020 each of the MPO Boards adopted their 2045 Long Range Transportation Plans, including the Yorkshire/Raintree Interchange. Both 2045 long range plans connect either Harbor Blvd or Veteran's Blvd in Charlotte County to Hillsborough or Raintree Blvd in North Port to provide a direct route to the future interchange location. In addition, the Sarasota/Manatee plan includes widening Raintree to four lanes from Harbor Blvd at the Charlotte County line to Blueleaf Dr just north of I-75 and extending Raintree as a two-lane road from Blueleaf to the Desoto County line. Although the interchange is outside the authority of the Charlotte County/Punta Gorda MPO, they included the interchange as a project on their needs list. The Sarasota/Manatee MPO identified potential funding for the first three phases of the interchanges in their plan.

Sarasota/Manatee MPO 2045 Cost Feasible Plan Technical Report (pages 5-26 and 5-55)

COMMERCE CONNECTORS The MPO has identified the need for two new interchanges on I-75 to serve as commerce centers that will support the community's vision of a diversified economy. Because these projects have not been prioritized in the SIS plan, the MPO has elected to invest Other Roads (OR) funds in the early phases of both projects.

The development of the local road network in North Port, funded through the FDOT Partnership Program, along with the city's designated economic development area will create the demand for the important Yorkshire/Raintree interchange. This interchange will spark the potential for commercial development on the northeast side of I-75 as well as providing a new evacuation route for southern Sarasota and Charlotte counties.

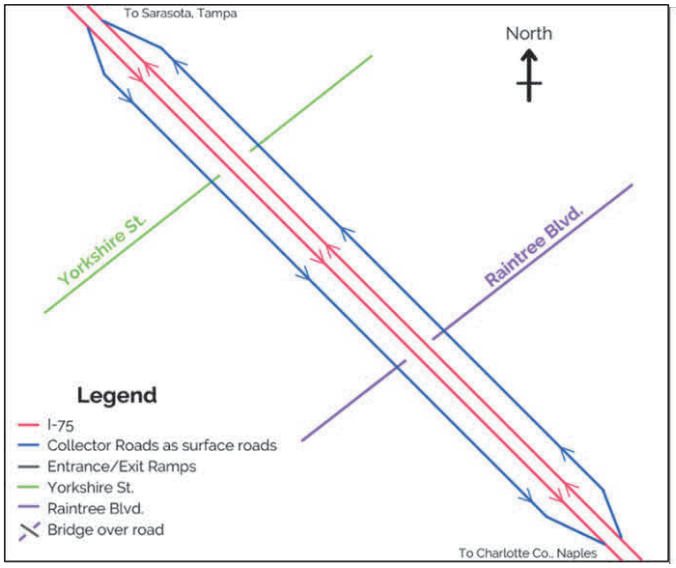
FACILITY	FROM/TO	TYPE	LOCATION	2026-2030		2031-2035	
I-75	Yorkshire/Raintree	New Interchange	North Port	PD&E	$2,824M	ROW	$48,846M
				PE	$8,472M		

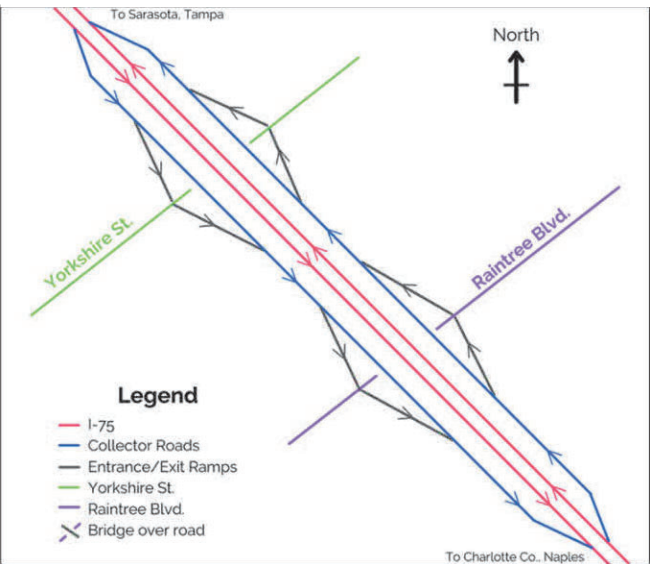
In January 2021, the adopted LRTP plan for Yorkshire/Raintree was presented at the annual joint meeting of the two MPOs with clear support from elected officials at the meeting. The plans were also presented at a Charlotte County Commission meeting in early February. Over the next few years, the development of the local roads across county lines could be submitted for TRIP funds and supporting drainage infrastructure could be considered for legislative appropriations.

As proposed by FDOT staff and adopted by the MPOs, one potential interchange concept includes Yorkshire AND Raintree, supporting multiple planning objectives and combining traffic volume from surrounding roads. Vehicles traveling south on I-75 would exit at Yorkshire and enter on Raintree. Those traveling north would exit at Raintree and enter at Yorkshire. This would be accomplished by having connecting roads between Yorkshire and Raintree parallel to I-75. These collector/distributor roads, often abbreviated as C/D roads, are one-way roads next to a highway through areas where closely spaced major arterials are present. With new developments, these roads sometimes include utilities.

C/D facilities allow a single exit ramp to distribute vehicles to two or more crossing arterials or collect vehicles from several crossing arterials, so that they can enter at a single entrance ramp. While this design helps to limit highway access points, it does require more right-of-way. C/D roads meet safety and congestion management goals because they:

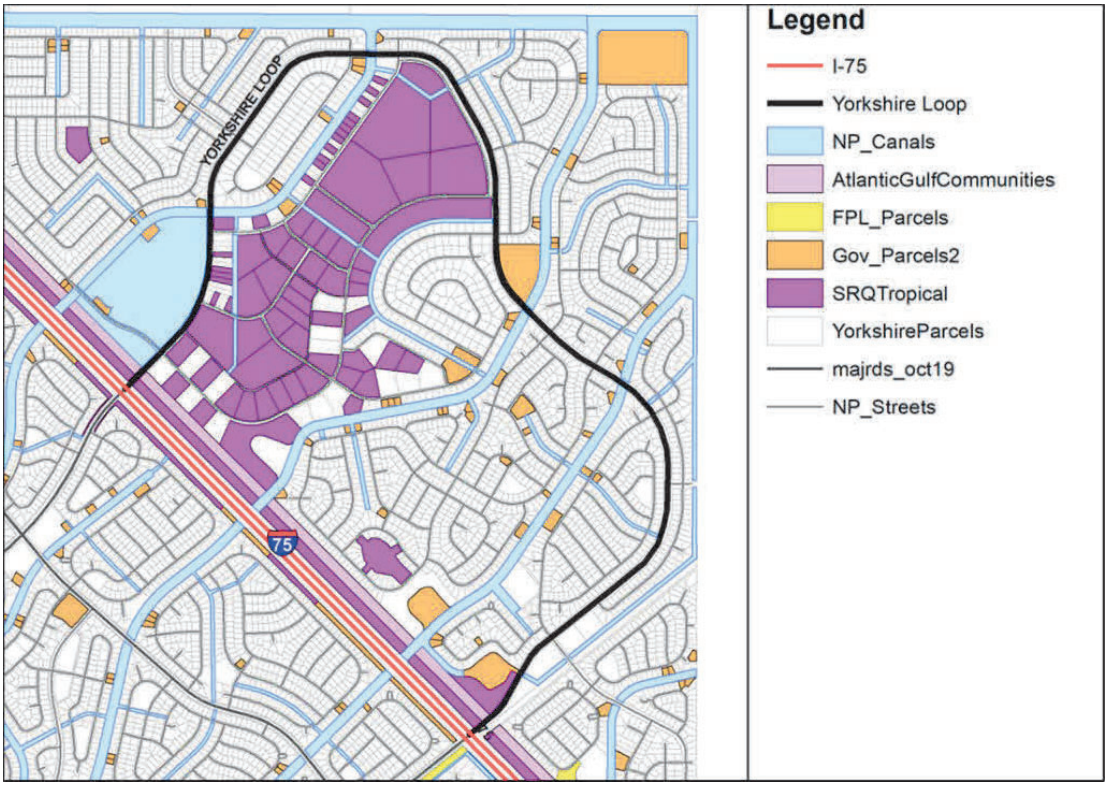
- Improve safety through reductions in highway main line merging and weaving intensity.
- Increase traffic flow and speed on freeways and their entrance and exit ramps.





Northeast of I-75, all adjacent right-of-way is owned by SRQ-Tropical Land. Additional right-of-way north of I-75 is owned by Atlantic Gulf Communities Corp. On the Southwest side of I-75 the right-of-way is owned by either SRQ-Tropical Land or the North Port Road and Drainage District. Florida Power and Light (FPL) also owns right-of-way and adjacent land between Raintree and King's Highway.

SRQ-Tropical Land owns much of the commercial land in the north part of the activity center and has a vested interest in road access and utilities. FPL has partnered with communities, using public and/or private land, for solar equipment that then provides power back to the community. This partnership could be especially interesting in conjunction with autonomous/electric freight operations. Florida Statute allows FDOT to advance public/private partnership projects and this is the best opportunity for accelerating the interchange.



F.S.334.30 (1) Public-private transportation facilities. ...The department may advance projects programmed in the adopted 5-year work program or projects increasing transportation capacity and greater than $500 million in the 10-year Strategic Intermodal Plan...

In August 2022, FDOT began discussions of potential projects for their 2050 Strategic Intermodal System Long Range Plan. This plan is prepared with the MPOs to address major highways and other regionally significant state infrastructure. The plan has three sections for each FDOT district: First five years, second five years, and needs list. The Yorkshire/Raintree Interchange was included in the first draft list of potential projects for the Sarasota/Manatee MPO and it will be essential for the interchange to be listed in the FDOT SIS 2050 Long Range Plan on one of the three lists.

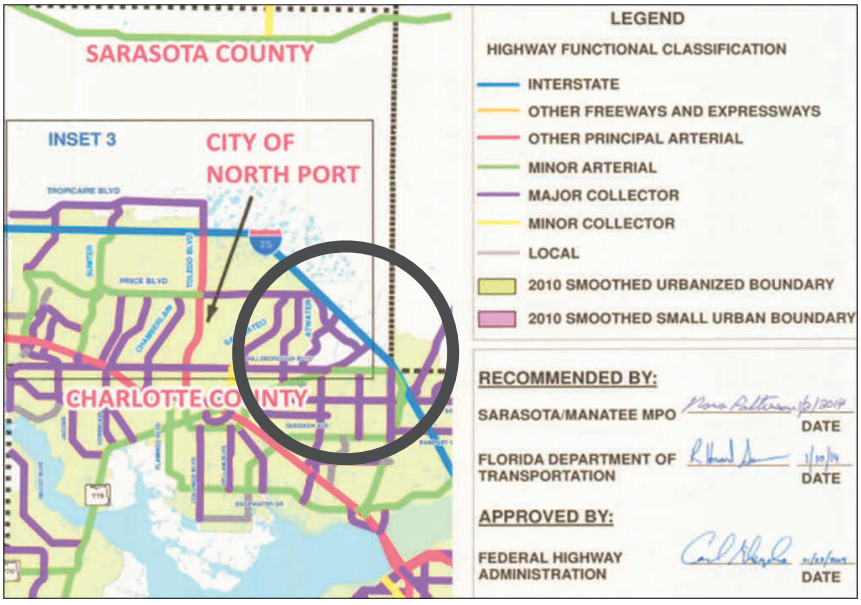
By the end of 2023, the MPOs will begin developing their 2050 long range plans. The widening of Raintree and the connection across county lines can be advanced along with the I-75 Yorkshire/Raintree collector/distributor interchange. If local jurisdictions have developed plans and set aside local funding for development of Yorkshire, they could consider submitting improvements/widening of Yorkshire Blvd from Veteran's Blvd. in Charlotte County to Langlais Drive north of I-75 in Sarasota County for inclusion in the 2050 plans for TRIP or MPO matching funds. Stakeholders will need to secure support from Desoto County and work with the Heartland Regional TPO to add the northern connections in their 2050 plan.

The MPOs, the counties, and North Port will need to work closely with FDOT to update the Urban Boundaries and Functional Classification of the supporting roadways. The Functional Classification of roadways are critical for Federal-Aid eligibility (roadways, bridges, and transit projects) and are assigned into systems according to the character of service they provide in relation to the total roadway network.

Every 10 years following the Census, FDOT (in coordination with FHWA and local partners) is required to update Urban Boundary and Functional Classification for the State of Florida. FDOT Districts and local partners use the census information to adjust the 2020 Urban Area boundaries around current land use conditions. FDOT expects to receive the proposed urban boundaries in winter 2022 and conduct the review in 2023. These adjustments will be reviewed by Central Office and submitted for approval by FHWA.

In 2024, FDOT Districts will collaborate with local partners to inventory roadways and update existing roadways in the Roadway Characteristics Inventory (RCI) system with proposed functional classifications in relation to the new urban area boundaries. New classifications are finalized and submitted to FHWA for approval after the FHWA urban area boundary adjustments are finalized.

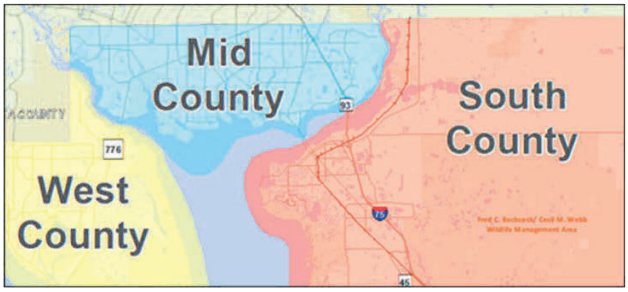
Based on the 2010 census, the small triangle bordered by Hillsborough, Yorkshire, and I-75 is considered rural and outside the urban boundary. Everything north of I-75 in Sarasota County is considered rural, but the bordering corner of Charlotte County is inside the urban boundary. In rural areas, state guidelines only allow interchanges with 6-mile spacing so bringing this area inside the urban boundary is crucial.



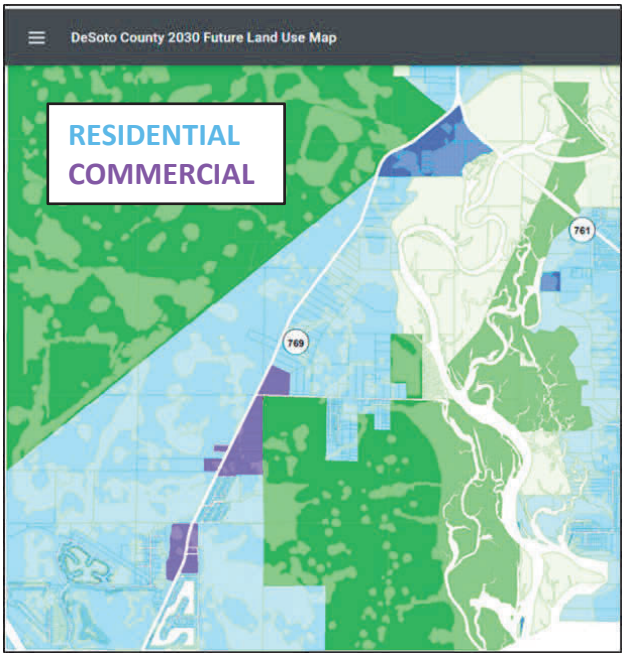
Functional Classifications range from local (smallest), to collectors, then to arterials, up to interstates (largest). Veteran's Blvd is only a minor arterial which is currently the highest classification in the area. The only principal arterials are US 41 and Toledo Blade.

LOCAL PLANS

Sarasota County's population will surpass a half million with a higher concentration of working age residents in Bradenton and North Port. On May 26, 2022 the US Census Bureau released a list of the fastest growing cities and North Port was ranked number nine out of 19,500.



Charlotte's mid county area adds over 23,000 residents, 9000 jobs, and 17,000 housing units. The estimated traffic from this growth indicates Kings Highway will fail by 2038 – a clear case for adding a new interchange. The combined population of Charlotte's mid- and west- county grows to almost 175,000 highlighting the need for additional transportation infrastructure and connectivity.



By 2045, Desoto County will add about 8000 residents and 1300 jobs. Planned residential growth is concentrated in the southwest corner of the county bordering Charlotte and Sarasota. To support this growth, Kings Highway will be widened to four lanes north to Peace River Street.

It is important for FDOT to see the local infrastructure and the interchange discussed in comprehensive plans, capital improvement programs, and other planning and zoning documents. Charlotte, Desoto, and Sarasota Counties, plus the City of North Port can include the interchange on their annual project priorities list submitted to the MPO in the fall. Because I-75 is part of Florida's Strategic Intermodal System (SIS), funding is from a separate source and will not compete with local projects. All the proposed transportation facilities could be included in economic development, emergency management, and water management plans. Elected officials might include them in their community goals and objectives, strategic plans, or long range plans.

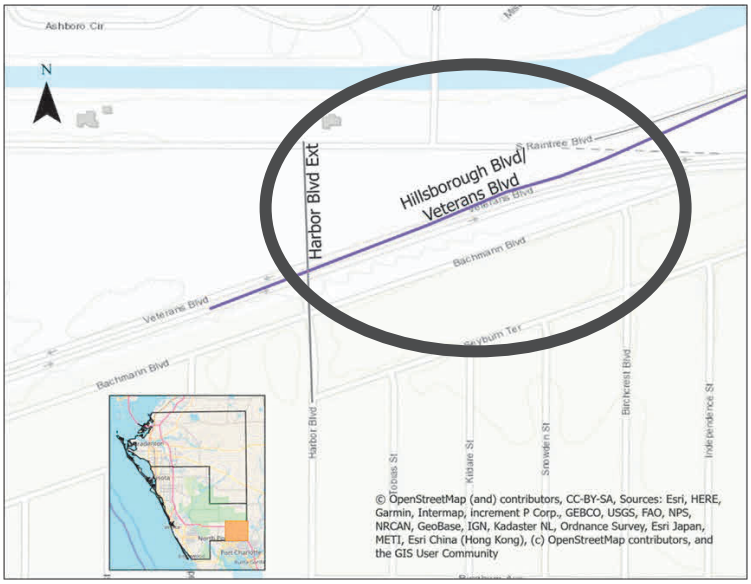
With the potential for commercial development and job creation, it is essential for the economic development organizations and chambers of commerce to prioritize the local connecting infrastructure and the interchange in their strategic plans. Including logistics and distribution as a target industry for the area will support FDOT's freight goals for southwest Florida. Currently, there is minimal truck staging south of Hillsborough County and very limited locations for future autonomous and electric trucking and distribution points. In FDOT's review, there are no freight activity centers between Clark Road in Sarasota and the Punta Gorda Airport.

Supporting the project as an evacuation route is another opportunity. Discussion of adding this route for the safety of the citizens could be included in hurricane preparedness and emergency management briefings to generate community interest. There is also the potential to gain support from homeowner's associations, civic groups, and non-profit agencies engaged in storm recovery.

The local governments, EDCs, and chambers can also garner support by including the transportation network in their legislative agendas and involving their government relations staff. Engaging the legislative delegations in both counties and the congressional office can help to advance the project. In an election year, the importance of the project can be addressed in candidate briefings, and questions about project support could be included in candidate debates. Having multiple organizations with a common theme presenting at the annual legislative delegation meeting elevates the importance of the project to the whole community.

INFRASTRUCTURE The local infrastructure will need to be developed first to generate the future traffic volume and to successfully complete the IJR for FHWA approval. These projects will support the development of the interchange:

- Connecting Raintree Blvd. across the county line to Veteran's or Harbor Blvd. Charlotte County has taken steps to preserve the potential corridors bordered by Veteran's, Harbor, and Hillsborough Blvds. and both MPOs have this project funded in their long range plans. Charlotte County and the City of North Port will need to submit this to respective MPOs during the fall 2022 call for projects and consider local funding to make this eligible for TRIP funding.



- Widening Raintree from the county line connection to the first cross street north of I-75. This road provides a straight and shorter distance to I-75. The corridor has 80 feet of right-of-way, three single access points to residential developments, and one intersection at Price Blvd. At the southern end, there are 17 individual lots bordered by a canal on the north and Raintree Blvd on the south. Two are owned by the City of North Port, each is valued at about $8000, and none have any structures, but future development of these lots could impede the flow of traffic. The City of North Port will need to identify local funds to support this project and can also submit this to the MPO during the fall 2022 call for projects to be considered for matching state or federal funds.

- Extending Raintree north from I-75 across the Desoto County line and making a connection to King's Highway. Desoto's largest planned residential development is the area on either side of King's Highway between the Peace River and the Sarasota County Line. It is expected that King's Highway will be widened from I-75 to Peace River Street to accommodate this growth causing the King's Highway interchange to fail by 2038. The City of North Port can seek matching funds from the MPO at some point in the future but working with Desoto County to prioritize the northern connection will need to come first.

- Widening Yorkshire Blvd from Veteran's Highway to the first cross street north of I-75. Although this route to I-75 is a longer distance, it has the advantage of 100 feet of right-of-way. There are 19 single access points into residential neighborhoods (4 in Charlotte County), two intersections at Pilgrim Road and Price Blvd, and no residential lots facing the road. This project is not currently in either MPO plan, so it should be submitted for inclusion in the 2050 plans. In the meantime, because it crosses the county line, it would be eligible for matching funds through the TRIP program.

- Developing plans for the local collector/distributor roads parallel to I-75 between Yorkshire and Raintree. On the northeast side of I-75, all right-of-way properties are owned by SRQ-Tropical Land LLC from south of Raintree to the canal several miles north of Yorkshire. Additional right-of-way on this side of I-75 is owned by Atlantic Gulf Communities Corp. On the Southwest side of I-75 the right-of-way is owned by either SRQ-Tropical Land LLC or the North Port Road and Drainage District.

  SRQ-Tropical Land LLC owns a significant number of commercial and residential parcels in the proposed North Port activity center. Accelerating development of the activity center by building the road and utility infrastructure provides the perfect opportunity for a public/private partnership. With the vacant land in and around the area, there is also the potential for partnership with FPL to develop solar energy.

- Improving Veteran's Boulevard from east US-41 to King's Highway. An FDOT study of this corridor was completed in December, 2022. The overall objective of the study was to improve mobility, safety, reliability, and connectivity for people who drive, walk, bike, and use transit within the study corridor. Based on future traffic projections, the short term plans include a signal or roundabout at the intersection of Veteran's Blvd and Harbor Blvd. As these recommendations move from planning to design, it will be important for Charlotte County and the MPO to make sure that any short term improvements support the long term vision of connecting across county lines.

NEXT STEPS Many of the steps for success have already been identified in the previous sections of this document. Current partners need to build a coalition of stakeholders and communicate with them often for consistency and continuity. Jurisdictions may want to consider identifying one person or position to provide staff support for organizing meetings, keeping minutes, following up on commitments, providing regular communications, and reporting to elected officials at least annually. Term limits elevate the importance of identifying new commission and council member champions every few years.

For 2023, here is a suggested list of actions:

- Update all local planning documents to include the interchange and supporting infrastructure.
- Identify, plan, and budget local and matching funds for connecting infrastructure.
- Request FDOT funds for the Raintree/Veteran's/Harbor connection and Raintree widening in the MPO annual call for projects.
- Include Logistics and Distribution as EDC and Chamber of Commerce target industries.
- Add Yorkshire/Raintree and supporting infrastructure to legislative agendas.
- Review and update the FHWA/FDOT urban boundaries and functional classifications to ensure eligibility for federal funding.
- Identify local and state incentive opportunities and begin discussion with major landowners regarding right-of-way.
- Work closely with FDOT to add the interchange as a project priority in the 2050 Strategic Intermodal System plan which is the first step towards funding the IJR and the future interchange.

REFERENCES/LINKS

- Charlotte County-Punta Gorda Metropolitan Planning Organization 2045 Long Range Transportation Plan
- Charlotte County-Punta Gorda MPO and Sarasota/Manatee MPO Joint Meeting; January 2021; Yorkshire/Raintree Adopted Plan presentation; **VIDEO** at 34:35
- Enterprise Florida; Florida's Major Industries; Logistics and Distribution
- FDOT District 1 Freight Resources
- FDOT District 1 Regional Planning Model Networks

  FDOT Freight Mobility and Trade Plan
- FDOT Southwest Connect I-75 Central Corridor; I-75 from north of Bayshore Road (SR 78) in Lee County to south of the River Road (SR 777) interchange in Sarasota County, approximately 45 miles in length.
- FDOT Strategic Intermodal System Cost Feasible Plan; 2029-2045
- FDOT Systems Implementation Office; Interchange Access Request
- FDOT Urban Boundary and Functional Classification Process; Decennial review, 2020 U.S. Census population and urban boundary data
- FHWA Highway Functional Classifications; Definitions and Classifications
- Heartland Regional Transportation Planning Organization 2045 Long Range Transportation Plan
- Heartland 2060: Building a Resilient Region
- How to Fix Congestion; Texas A&M Transportation Institute; Transportation Policy Research; Collector-Distributor Roads
- Sarasota County Commission Joint Meeting with Charlotte County Commission; February 28, 2019; FDOT Southwest Connect presentation; **VIDEO** at 40:40 minutes
- Sarasota/Manatee Metropolitan Planning Organization 2045 Cost Feasible Plan Technical Report; Commerce Connectors, page 5-26;
- Sarasota/Manatee Metropolitan Planning Organization 2045 Long Range Transportation Plan
- U.S. Census; Fastest Growing Cities are Still in the West and South; May 26, 2022
- Veteran's Boulevard Corridor Planning Study; December, 2022

CONTACTS

Ryan Brown, Planning Manager, ryan@mympo.org
Sarasota/Manatee Metropolitan Planning Organization
941-359-5772
8100 15th Street East
Sarasota, FL 34243-3248
www.mympo.org

Leigh Holt, Senior Planner, lholt@benesch.com
Benesch
321-302-5848; 813-224-8862
1000 N Ashley Drive, Suite 400
Tampa, FL 33602
www.benesch.com