

# 2023

POLK TRANSPORTATION  
PLANNING ORGANIZATION

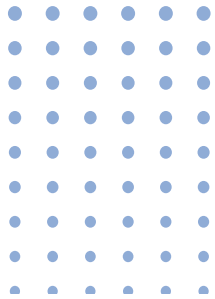
## YEAR IN REVIEW



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## ABOUT POLK COUNTY



## TPO PRIORITY TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS AND FDOT WORK PROGRAM



In 2023, there was significant coordination between the **Polk Transportation Planning Organization (TPO)** and **Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT)**, and as a result many of the TPO's priority projects were included in the FDOT's Draft FY 2025 – 2029 Work Program.

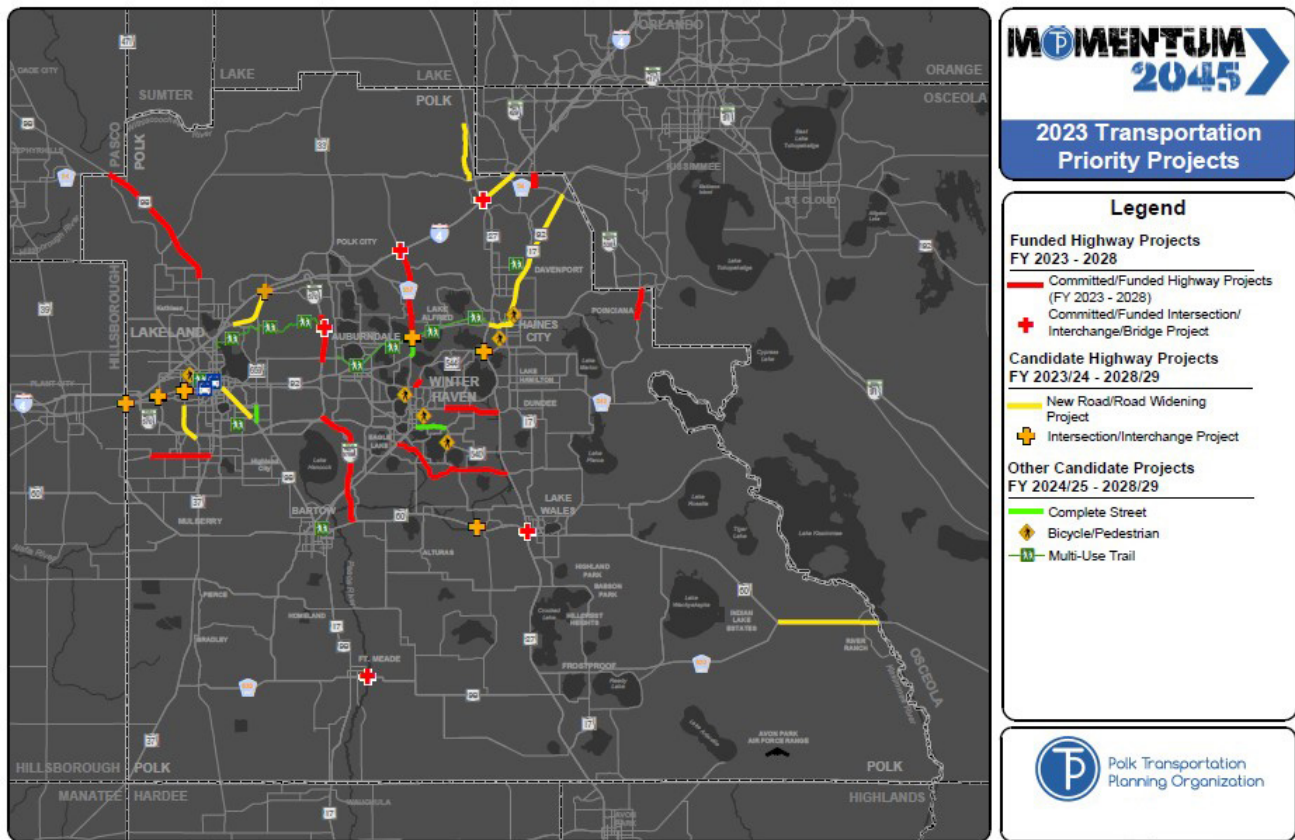
At their June 8, 2023 TPO Board Meeting, the Board approved the **2023 Priority Transportation Projects for Polk County**. The adopted list includes **34 projects** requesting nearly \$1-billion dollars in funding. These projects consist of candidate highway, intersection, transit, bicycle, pedestrian and multi-use trail projects.

The number one priority of the Polk TPO includes the advancement of funding for the reconstruction of the **Interstate 4 at State Road 33 interchange (Exit 38)**. This project also includes the **widening of State Road 33 south of the Interstate to north of Old Combee Road**. Along with Exit 38, the TPO's priorities also included the **widening of Interstate 4 to 10 lanes in northeast Polk County from US 27 to the Osceola County Line**. Both of these projects are part of Governor Desantis' **Moving Florida Forward Initiative** and were funded by the FDOT to the tune of \$197 million for Exit 38 and State Road 33 widening in fiscal year 2024, and \$635 million for the widening of Interstate 4 beginning in fiscal year 2027.

The TPO's priorities also include requests for funding on **State Road 60** in eastern Polk County consisting of a **rail overpass west of Lake Wales** and the **two- to four-lane widening of the highway east of CR 630 to the Kissimmee River**. This is the last remaining two-lane portion of the State Road 60 in Polk County and is a critical project intended to improve the safety of the roadway and help with hurricane evacuations along Florida's east coast. Of these two projects, FDOT awarded construction funding for the rail overpass west of Lake Wales in fiscal year 2028 at nearly \$70 million.



Other highway priorities include portions of **US 98 (Bartow Road)**, **US 92 (New Tampa Highway)** and **State Road 33 in Lakeland**. In the Winter Haven area and northeast Polk County, **US 17/92 widening in Haines City and Davenport** continues to be a priority. The TPO requested funding for a **Project Development and Environmental (PD&E) Study**. Also, the **State Road 544 corridor between Winter Haven and Haines City** is a TPO priority project, along with a request for funding to help construct the **North Ridge Trail adjacent to US 27 in northeast Polk County**.



The TPO's priorities included a request for funding of the design phase of the **Lakeland Intermodal Center near Downtown Lakeland**. The Lakeland Intermodal Center will be a state of the art transit terminal for the Citrus Connection, with a new transportation center for Citrus Connection staff, a parking garage supporting potential future SunRail commuter rail service, a relocated AMTRAK Station, as well as planned redevelopment activity around the RP Funding Center convention center and arena complex. While funding was not awarded this year, the Polk TPO will continue to coordinate with the Citrus Connection and The City of Lakeland in order to obtain funding for this project.

Several sidewalk, multi-use trail and complete street projects were adopted by the TPO as priorities. In particular, the TPO is trying to complete the **Fort Fraser Trail between Lakeland and Bartow**, and two projects were awarded funding for construction by the FDOT in fiscal year 2026. This includes funding for the **Glendale Street Trail in south Lakeland** and the **Fort Fraser Trail overpass of State Road 60 (Van Fleet Drive) in Bartow**. These two trail projects, along with the **Fort Fraser Trail Extension between Glendale Street and US 98**, which will be under construction in the next year, will provide a continuous trail network between downtown Lakeland and downtown Bartow, which has been a goal of these communities for nearly 30 years.

# LAUNCH OF VISION ZERO CAMPAIGN

## *CREATING SAFE STREETS FOR ALL* ::::::::::::::

In 2022-23, the Polk TPO launched the **Vision Zero campaign**, a critical effort focused on eliminating traffic fatalities and serious injuries on our roads. Vision Zero is an important step toward creating safer streets for all road users, including pedestrians, cyclists and drivers.



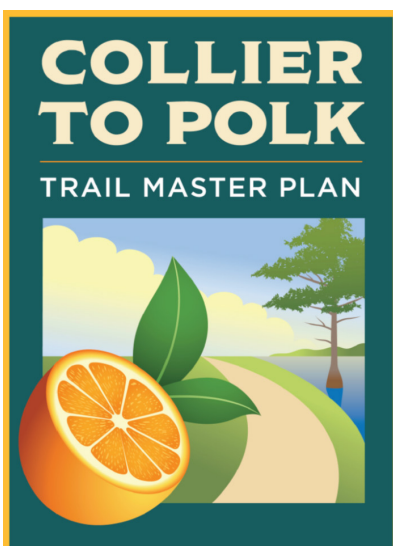
To engage community residents and share ideas, a **Vision Zero Task Force** was established. It includes members from TPO member municipalities and agencies, representatives from various historically under-represented communities and the public at large. The task force met on August 8 and November 14 (2022) to discuss issues and strategies to make Polk roadways safer for road users.

In 2023, the TPO completed the **Vision Conditions Assessment Report**. This report identified high injury roadways and intersections, and outlined strategies and actions to help achieve our goal of zero fatalities or serious injuries on our roads.

As a result of these efforts, in 2023, Polk County was awarded \$720,000 in federal funds under the **Safe Streets For All Road Users** ("Safe Streets 4 All") grant, to prepare a **Vision Zero Action Plan**, which will fine-tune specific strategies and actions to help achieve our goal of zero fatalities or serious injuries on our roads. This project will position the county and participating municipalities to apply for implementation funds to build the needed improvements.

# NEW PRIORITY TRAIL CORRIDOR

## *BETWEEN POLK AND COLLIER COUNTIES* ::::::::::::::



At their August 2023 meeting, the Polk TPO Board approved TPO Resolution 2023-10 supporting a proposed priority trail corridor between Polk and Collier Counties. The proposed route is largely based on existing trail corridors in the region. However, this designation would give special standing to the corridor and would make candidate trail projects along the corridor eligible for **Florida SUN Trail** funding. In Polk County, the **Peace River Greenway** would be one of the featured trails along the proposed route. The Polk TPO has coordinated with FDOT, Collier MPO and Heartland TPO on this effort. The Florida Greenways and Trails Council is expected to take action on the proposal later this fall.

# BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN SAFETY EDUCATION PROGRAM



The Polk TPO has prioritized many transportation projects for the purpose of improving bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure in Polk County. In 2020, the TPO began the first **Safe Routes To School (SRTS)** educational program of its type funded in Polk through the FDOT. This project was implemented with \$200,000 in FDOT funds. The purpose of the project is to supplement the SRTS safety education currently offered by Polk County Schools for kindergarten through eighth grade.

In 2023, Polk TPO collaborated with Polk County Public Schools, Polk Vision and other stakeholders to launch the **Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Education program** and established the program's website.

The TPO established the website [www.polksafety.org](http://www.polksafety.org) and branded materials which can be used by all schools in Polk County. The materials are presented in grade-appropriate clusters, in a virtual experience. Polk County Schools, which have more than 100,000 students and ranks as the seventh largest district in Florida, will be providing safety instruction to students based on these materials for four days during the 2023-24 school year.

## TRAILS FORUM

## *POLK COUNTY PARKS AND URBAN TRAILS*



Polk TPO celebrated **Greenways and Trails Month** and the kickoff of FDOT's **Mobility Week** with the **Polk County Parks and Urban Trail Community Event** held at the Bike Shop of Winter Haven. The event featured county and city trail experts engaging in conversations with residents about local and county trail networks. Helmet fittings and a prize of a bike rental was included in the event, with the mayor of Winter Haven choosing the winner of the bike rental.





# MPOAC MEETING

## *TOUR OF SUNTRAX* :::::

The **Florida Metropolitan Planning Organization Advisory Council (MPOAC)** is comprised of the staff directors or their designees from all the MPOs/TPOs in Florida, plus elected officials who represent each of the MPOs/TPOs boards in the state. The MPOAC has been meeting quarterly for more than 30 years to carry out its mission.

The MPOAC's mission is to improve transportation planning and education by engaging and equipping its membership to deliver results through shared innovations, best practices, enhanced coordination, communication and advocacy.

These meetings are usually held in Orlando; however, the MPOAC held its Fall 2023 meeting at the **SunTrax facility** in Auburndale.

Polk TPO, along with others present, was invited to tour SunTrax during the MPOAC Advisory Committee Meeting. It was a chance to learn about the facility and the opportunities available for innovative vehicle testing. SunTrax is the first facility in the United States exclusively tailored for combined testing of autonomous vehicles and standard automobiles at a single site. It is also one of the world's few highway-speed tracks equipped for tolling simulation.



# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FORUM

## *TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT* :::::

Polk TPO, the Central Florida Development Council and the FDOT District One representatives hosted an **Economic Development Forum** in August. The forum welcomed members of the economic development community to a discussion on the various economic benefits of extending SunRail into Polk County and ways of integrating land use and transit planning.

Featured speakers included Dan Gallagher, AICP, Senior Transportation Planner (Burgess & Niple, Inc.) and Scott Pringle, Assistant Vice President, WSP Director of Florida Transit and Rail.



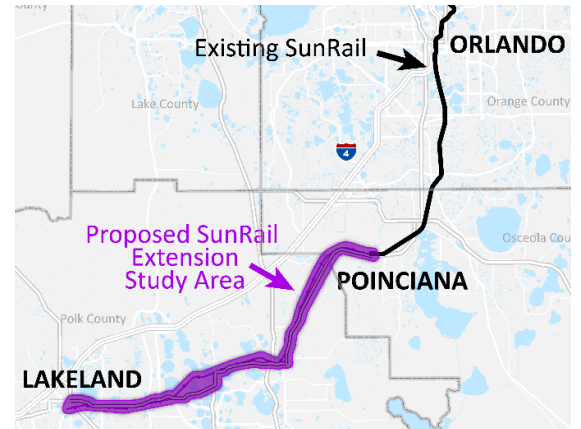
# SUNRAIL EXTENSION

## TCAR STUDY EVALUATION ::::::::::::::

The **Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) District One** has prepared a **transit concept alternatives review (TCAR)** study to evaluate the extension of **SunRail** into Polk County.



The western limits of SunRail’s service currently end in Poinciana just east of the Polk/Osceola County Line. The TCAR Study evaluated CSX’s A Line, which runs along US 17/92 and traverses the Polk County communities of Davenport, Haines City, Lake Alfred, Auburndale and Lakeland. The completed study represents more than a year of work and numerous meetings, as well as significant public involvement and outreach. At their October meeting, the Polk TPO Board adopted TPO Resolution 2023-11, which accepts the findings of FDOT’s TCAR Study and requests FDOT to further evaluate the concept.



# FEDERAL CERTIFICATION REVIEW

## TOUR OF PROJECTS IN LAKELAND ::::::::::::::

Polk TPO had it’s **Transportation Management Area (TMA) federal certification review** site visit in September 2023. It was a two-day event in which staff from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) visited to review the transportation planning process of Polk County.

Staff members from Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), CitrusConnection and the Polk TPO had a great discussion with federal partners on a range of transportation issues including best practices of the region, transportation plan financial constraints, transit elements and the TPO organizational structure.

The event also included the federal partners visiting various sites to see some of the notable projects of Lakeland and CitrusConnection.

The federal certification review takes place every four years. A Transportation Management Area (TMA) is designated by the U.S. Secretary of Transportation for an urbanized area with a population of at least 200,000.



# POLK TPO BOARD



The TPO Board is comprised of elected officials, including all five county commissioners and representatives from 15 of the 17 municipalities in Polk.

The TPO Board adopts and maintains a long-range multi-modal transportation plan that includes highway, public transportation, passenger rail, pedestrian, bicycle and multi-use trail improvements. It establishes local priorities for the use of federal and state funds on transportation projects. Annually, the Board adopts a Transportation Improvement Program that includes the FDOT's Five-Year Work Program and implements the long-range plan.

## **Chairperson, Commissioner Jack Myers, Auburndale** **Vice Chairperson, Commissioner Trish Pfeiffer, Bartow**

Commissioner Martha Santiago, Polk County  
Commissioner Neil Combee, Polk County  
Commissioner Bill Braswell, Polk County  
Commissioner Rick Wilson, Polk County  
Commissioner George Lindsey, Polk County  
Mayor Bill Mutz, Lakeland  
Commissioner Samuel Simmons, Lakeland  
Commissioner Sara McCarley, Lakeland

### **South County Block:**

Commissioner Jim Watts (Alternate), Fort Meade  
Mayor Jon Albert (Alternate), Frostproof  
Commissioner Collins Smith (Alternate), Mulberry

### **Advisory Members**

L.K. Nandam, FDOT District 1 Secretary  
Parag Agrawal, Polk TPO Executive Director  
Elizabeth Voss, Polk TPO Attorney

Commissioner Chad McLeod, Lakeland  
Commissioner Bill Read, Lakeland  
Commissioner Mike Musick, Lakeland  
Commissioner Brian Yates, Winter Haven  
Mayor Pro Tem Nat Birdsong, Winter Haven  
Commissioner Jack Hilligoss, Lake Wales  
Commissioner Roy Tyler, Haines City

### **East County Block:**

Commissioner Jeremy Clark (Voting Member), Davenport  
Mayor Joe LaCascia (Alternate), Polk City  
Mayor Michael Kehoe (Alternate), Lake Hamilton  
Commissioner Nancy Daley (Alternate), Lake Alfred  
Commissioner Willie Quarles (Alternate), Dundee