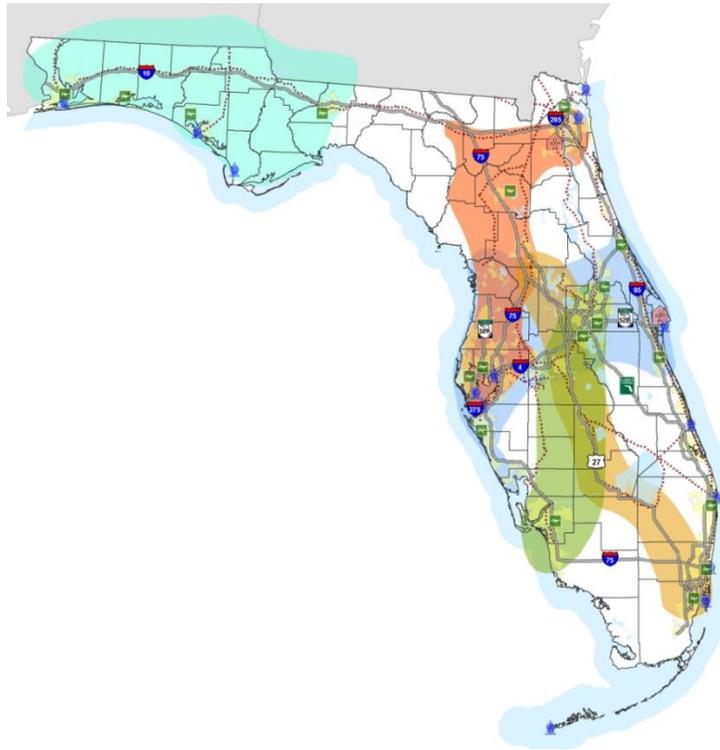




## Importance of the FDOT Future Corridors Initiative to Everglades Restoration 1000 Friends of Florida \* September 2013



### Future Corridors Initiative Defined:

- FDOT Secretary Prasad's "Florida's 21st Century Transportation Vision" called for planning a transportation system that maintains economic competitiveness by meeting today's needs as well as needs for decades to come – corridors are proposed in all of the remaining large natural areas and open space in Florida;
- In 2006 FDOT developed the Future Corridors Action Plan, which provided policy direction for a statewide network of high-speed, high-capacity corridors critical to the state's continued growth over the next 50 years; and
- This plan was shelved for the duration of the Crist administration due to sprawl, overall costs, benefits to large property owners, failure to prioritize existing congestion areas, and potential adverse impacts to the Everglades. It has been revived under Governor Rick Scott.

### Everglades Implications:

- The magnitude (see above map) of this project is enormous – it essentially covers the entire state in five corridor study areas that could open up hundreds of thousands of acres for development with new or expanded roads, interchanges, and other transportation options (corridor study areas are listed below);
- 1000 Friends of Florida's Board of Directors has identified this initiative as the number one issue of concern for the future, especially the two (2) study areas that include the Heartland Expressway, due to the major direct and indirect impacts over an extended period of time;
- Failure to properly coordinate, mitigate, and if necessary, litigate, to protect important natural areas, wildlife corridors and water resource areas will severely impact northern, central and southern Everglades restoration projects due to water quality, water quantify, ground disturbance and/or fragmentation of important wildlife and habitat corridors;

- Conservation groups must engage early in the complex planning and evaluation processes so that a strong conservation priority has been established as these study areas are considered which involves a multi-year process for each study area;
- It is critical to engage FDOT as early as possible to include conservation evaluation principles, especially with the initial corridor assessments, so that an appropriate evaluation regime is established (see FDOT Corridor Plan Evaluation Criteria where the principles developed through 1000 Friends leadership are already in place and agreed to by FDOT); and
- 1000 Friends understands and is prepared to lead conservation groups in evaluating and influencing this process, including involvement in related key policy issues.

#### **Other Key Policy Issues and Coordination Opportunities:**

- Consistency with statewide and regional visions and plans including the Department of Economic Opportunity Strategic Plan, and the Florida Chamber Foundation's Six Pillars Strategic Plan;
- Linkage to local government comprehensive plans, sector plans, rural land stewardship areas, developments of regional impact, etc.;
- Coordination with Cooperative Conservation Blueprint and statewide and regional land conservation and ecosystem plans; potential approaches for reaching consensus and defining mutual commitments on corridor alignment and surrounding land uses in sensitive areas, building on the Wekiva Parkway model;
- Integration of corridor concepts into regional, local transportation and land use plans; and
- Partnership opportunities with public and private landowners and utilities to reserve right of way.

#### **Corridor Study Areas:**

Study areas are listed below where FDOT could develop new or transformed corridors. These study areas represent regional roadway pairs not well connected today, or where existing facilities do not have the capacity to support anticipated growth in demand over the next 50 years. The initial study areas include:

- **Tampa Bay to Northeast Florida:** corridor is based on increasing safety and congestion concerns along I-75 north of Wildwood, and the need to improve connectivity for people and freight. An initial step is to evaluate potential operational improvements to I-75 as well as potential extensions of the Suncoast Parkway or Florida's Turnpike to ensure connectivity in the southern portion of the study area. The full study area includes a possible new connection between the Suncoast Parkway and I-75 in the Gainesville/Ocala area, and enhanced connectivity between Gainesville/Ocala and the Jacksonville area;
- **Tampa Bay to Central Florida:** this corridor explores ways to better connect Tampa Bay to Central Florida. This emerging "superregion" is now the 10<sup>th</sup> largest region in the United States, with forecasts of strong growth over the next 50 years. This study will build upon visioning processes in both Tampa and Central Florida. Alternatives may include operational improvements and express lanes along I-4, parallel corridors for some segments of the study area (it includes the 250,000 acre Deseret Ranch) and alternative modes including SunRail extensions, and the All Aboard Florida high speed rail project;
- **Southeast Florida through the Heartland to Central Florida:** The Heartland region has potential for increased freight flows from the Southeast Florida ports, connecting to several major freight/distribution sites in the region (CSX Winter Haven Inland Logistics Center (ILC) and other potential ILCs around Lake Okeechobee). FDOT is studying the existing US 27 corridor from Miami-Dade to Marion Counties to maximize the use of this facility; and
- **Southwest Florida through the Heartland to Central Florida:** In conjunction with a just completed US 27, FDOT will examine the need for a more direct connection between Southwest Florida and Central Florida. There may be a need to provide an alternative to I-75 to improve connectivity and mobility for both people and freight. The solution for this study area could involve a connection to US 27, as well as additional east-west connectivity. The Heartland 2060 process directed by the Central Florida Regional Planning Council will help guide this study area as well.