

Meeting Minutes

Subject: Florida Freight Advisory Committee Meeting

Date: Thursday, March 20, 2025

Location: FDOT D2 Urban Office, Jacksonville, FL

Time: 10am – 2pm

Theme: Strong Economy & Supply Chain

Online Attendance		In Person Attendance	
Alissa Penaloza	Julia Davis	Aubrey Brown*	Joe Arbona*
Amanda Tyner	Justin Scott	Bob Ledoux*	John Dohm*
Andrew Uhlir	Kadian Foster	Bruce Lyon*	Laura DiBella*
Angela Kaufman	Kevin C. Walford*	Carolina Resende	Melissa Smith
Carlos Castro	Matt McIntosh	Daniel Fetahovic	Nick Primrose*
Chelsea Favero	Ron Gogoi	Diana Elsner	Paul Newtonson
Cindy Mitchell	Sandra Villard	Elizabeth Bower	Robert Midgett*
Dave Hutchinson	Sarah Van Gundy	Gretchen Winters*	Steven Bostel*
Eugene Jules	Scott R. Ferry	Holly Cohen	
Gary Kramer	Seckin Ozkul*		
James Brown Jr	Stanley Rigaud		
Jill Nobles	Victoria Williams		

*Committee Member

I. Call to Order

Nick: Call to order – roll call to check attendance.

Last FLFAC meeting was on July 2024 – had a motion to approve the meeting minutes available online on the FDOT website. Motion approved by John and seconded by Robert. All in favor said “aye”, no one opposed.

Also took a moment to approve the 2024 Freight Mobility and Trade Plan (FMTP). Thanked everyone for the participation as this committee plays a large role in the FMTP development. Between Fall 2021 and Spring 2023 this committee helped develop the supply chain network solution framework, which was shared with the internal project advisory committee and for consideration.

In December of 2023 this committee completed an online survey to suggest the weights for the different freight mobility trade plan prioritization process. In Spring 2024, this committee participated in the public comment period for the full draft plan, and edits were made based on the FLFAC feedback. The plan will receive annual updates to the investment plan and the network presentation as needed so the FMTP remains a dynamic document.

With that, there was a motion to approve the 2024 FMTP. Motion approved by John and seconded by Robert.

II. Welcome and Housekeeping

Daniel: Welcomed and thanked everyone for joining the meeting in Jacksonville or online.

Agenda was introduced, along with a mention of Mentimeter questions and participation using phones. Daniel encouraged participants to raise their hands and contribute as much as possible throughout the meeting.

The theme for this meeting was “Economy and Supply Chain”. The FDOT compass was presented and shown that the supply chain is instrumental to the FDOT vision.

Thanked participants and committee members for their help with the FMTP and much more. Such help has allowed FDOT to capture critical challenges, including trade imbalance, congestion, truck parking availability, safety concerns due to user and modal conflicts, and various other types of supply chain disruptions. Furthermore, it has helped FDOT identify strengths, such as strong market demand, public and private sector collaboration, and freight assets. Encouraged participants to share insights on a variety of topics.

Nick: Shared some thoughts on current events surrounding the United States and how this can impact Florida. The number one topic Nick brought up was tariffs. Not only the tariffs that are being imposed on China, but the reciprocal tariffs with some other nations, for which the impact is not known yet. Nick views this as a part of a larger plan. He thinks reciprocal tariffs are part of a negotiation strategy. The trade war with China is making manufacturing companies shift their production out of China to other countries like Vietnam, South Korea, Taiwan, Japan, etc.

Nearshoring and reshoring. During COVID, the United States had to rely heavily on manufacturing plants in Asia, and there were weeks of wait to get the products. That showed how the supply chain was fragile. With that, there is room to shift manufacturing and trade patterns, with a move toward reshoring production to the U.S. mainland and nearshoring to Latin America and the Caribbean. This approach could reduce supply chain disruptions and dependence on distant international suppliers. As trade routes transition from east-west to north-south corridors, Florida’s freight infrastructure is positioned to play a more prominent role in cargo movement.

Laura: agrees with Nick on the current events info: tariffs and how this impacts the economy. Also agree that tariffs can largely impact the economy, and there is a need for a broader discussion of a larger risk element for many companies that want and need to do business in the United States. She is expecting to see new facilities in Florida but mentioned that this also means more support will be needed regarding supply chain infrastructure and needs.

III. Current Events & Legislative Updates

Holly: Recap of programs impacted by recent legislative sessions.

2023 legislation addressed the growing gap between demand and supply for construction aggregates, which are essential for roadway development. As infrastructure projects accelerate to alleviate congestion and support growth, the need for construction materials has increased. In response, a SIS dedicated program was launched to expand capacity and improve the movement and storage of construction aggregates. The first round of awarded projects included contributions from Capital Asphalt, CSX, Florida Gulf & Atlantic RR, JAXPORT, and Port Tampa

Bay. A second round of applications is under review, and additional announcements are expected soon. The next application cycle is anticipated to open around July 2025.

ILC infrastructure support program originally ran from fiscal year 2014 to 2020 before experiencing a funding gap. The program was recently funded through legislation at \$15 million annually for fiscal years 2025 to 2030. It continues to be coordinated in partnership with Florida Commerce, which plays a key role in evaluating the strategic importance of proposed projects. Funded initiatives under this program have included site access improvements, road and rail connections, truck loading ramps, and transloading facilities, all aimed at enhancing intermodal efficiency.

Both SIS and ILC programs are managed out of the Seaport Office with support from various other offices. There is a dedicated page on the seaport page for these programs.

Melissa: provided legislative updates, highlighting two legislative bills—Senate Bill 1662 and House Bill 1397—currently moving through the legislative process. The legislation also introduces several initiatives under the themes of workforce and innovation, operational enhancement, modes of transportation, and efficiency and accountability.

Diana: introduced Mentimeter and how to access it.

First question: What industry are you in?

A diverse set of responses was received, including transportation, real estate, government, seaport, railroad, supply chain, training, economic development, TPO, academy, distribution, seaport, spaceport, freight, and others. Many participants identified with multiple sectors, indicating the interconnected nature of freight and supply chain work

Second question: Any trends you're watching that impact freight?

Responses included: tariffs, international trade, funding, grants, population increases, back hauls, space activity growth, truck parking, development, trade war, workforce, AI, industrial development, commercial space growth, road improvement funding, 20-30s leaving Florida, costs of living, federal funding program changes and delays, e-commerce, short and long hauls, curbside management, automation, environmental rules, cost of infrastructure, technology, autonomous vehicles effects on freight, and others.

Robert: Highlighted the aging workforce. He noted the significant demographic shift caused by retiring Baby Boomers and a smaller pool of younger workers entering the logistics and warehouse workforce. Workforce shortages are expected to persist and affect all aspects of freight handling, even when freight volumes are high. Even with successful reentry training programs, the supply of qualified workers is still not meeting demand.

Nick: Agreed and expanded on the need to “make supply chain jobs sexy” for younger generations. He emphasized that the perception of skilled trades and logistics jobs plays a major role in recruitment. Many high school students associate these careers with unattractive or physically demanding work, without realizing the potential benefits.

Melissa: Confirmed that FDOT is actively partnering with the Department of Corrections and workforce development institutions to create career pipelines. She stressed the importance of:

- Identifying in-demand roles (e.g., warehousing, warehouse management).

- Establishing certification programs with local colleges and trade schools.
- Creating pathways for incarcerated individuals to receive these certifications while still in custody, so they're ready for employment upon release.

Bruce: Mentioned that 20- 30-year-olds is the only population range decreasing in the state.

Nick: This is a national issue impacting all sectors, including freight. Also noted his involvement with the St. Johns River State College Board, which has observed that while the state is educating students, it is not retaining them. He stressed the need for industries to rethink recruitment and outreach strategies.

Gretchen: Confirmed the visibility challenge. Her agency used to get 30–40 applicants per pilot position. Recently, only 19 applicants applied for the same roles, signaling a drop in awareness and interest among the younger generation. She emphasized the need for better exposure to such careers.

Robert: Highlighted the case of Walmart's truck driver recruitment as a clear example of the industry adapting to labor shortages:

- Previously, Walmart required five years of experience and over a million miles without a wreck to even be considered.
- Now, Walmart is hiring directly from the street and has raised the starting salary to \$98,000 for new drivers.
- Despite this, labor shortages persist.

Nick: suggested the state explore ways to:

- Introduce freight and supply chain concepts in high school curricula.
- Establish FDOT- and DOE-sponsored programs in high schools, possibly as part of magnet or career academies.

Melissa: There is interest in introducing this concept at the high school level, potentially in collaboration with the Department of Education and other agency partners. The approach could mirror efforts currently underway in aviation workforce development.

John: Reflected on the mistake of waiting until late high school or college to engage students. He emphasized:

- The importance of targeting 9th and 10th graders, not just seniors.
- The need for proactive outreach to both students and existing workers.
- A shift in approach: instead of hosting job fairs and hoping people come to the state, go to truck stops, visit dispatchers, and meet people where they are.

Bob: Shared a concern raised by a colleague from another state about the potential impacts of autonomous trucks on short-line railroads. With legislation being proposed, stakeholders are unsure how the future of freight transportation will unfold. There's a growing fear that autonomous technology could displace traditional jobs, but there is little clarity or consensus. The uncertainty makes it difficult to advise students on future career paths in freight.

Melissa: Emphasized the need to start conversations early about industry changes and how they may affect future careers. She mentioned FDOT's efforts to launch a research institute.

Aubrey: Provided insight from the railroad industry, which was once considered a highly desirable, lifelong career path. Current statistics show:

- The average age in the railroad industry is 55+.
- Tenure has traditionally averaged 30–40 years.
- Today companies are hiring weekly classes of 50 workers, but less than 50% are retained.
- New hires are deterred by the 24/7 shift schedules.
- The industry is not yet close to autonomous operation, making these workforce issues urgent and unresolved.

Highlighted a freight efficiency concern — many trains entering Florida are loaded, but leave empty. He acknowledged that Florida’s geography, particularly the peninsula south of Orlando and Tampa, poses logistical challenges. However, North Florida presents a strong opportunity for outbound freight.

He encouraged identifying:

- Locally produced goods that can be exported via rail.
- Ways to capitalize on Florida’s own infrastructure instead of outsourcing freight capacity to other states.
- Protecting Florida’s freight assets by improving utilization, particularly for backhaul opportunities.

Nick: Acknowledged the comment and flagged the backhaul topic for further discussion after lunch.

Gretchen: Returned to the earlier theme of student engagement and workforce recruitment, and highlighted the value of simulations to help students visualize career options in freight.

Laura: Emphasized starting outreach early, not just in high school but potentially in middle school.

Robert: Mentioned emphasis on college degrees, resulting in a shortage of hands-on, skilled labor. There is a need to refocus the education system toward technical and vocational skills to meet industry demand.

Nick: Agreed and praised recent efforts to increase investment in state colleges, certification programs, and apprenticeships; moving away from the traditional overreliance on four-year degrees.

Third question: What are you watching this session in Florida?

Answers include: Economic development, infrastructure funding, rural bill, safety bills, HB1125, SB1662, liability bills, grant/ funding needs, freight initiatives proposed, mitigation of truck crashes, freight data, vertiports, truck volume, and infrastructure improvements.

Bruce: mentioned HB1125 and its impact on regional planning councils. This could force them to operate with no clear structural or financial support from the state.

Laura: Acknowledged Bruce's concerns. In her experience, some planning councils have become major bottlenecks in land use and permitting when a company needed to move quickly to develop agricultural land for industrial use but was delayed.

Bruce: Emphasized the need for state funding to be tied to measurable results. Programs that do not deliver should be re-evaluated, while successful initiatives should receive support.

Nick: Mentioned the manufacturing bill to provide incentives statewide. Includes revised incentive structures to promote manufacturing within Florida.

IV. Impacts of Economic/Supply Chain Disruptions

Daniel: Mentioned last year, there were a few disruptions in the state that were detrimental to business and this running of operations: a labor union strike in October, last year's cyberattack that impacted all airports across the country, and parts of north Florida had a foot of snow.

FDOT is continuing to explore recommendations for mitigating the impacts of future disruptions. Trying to address needs in advance: staging, crucial route, law enforcement, traffic management, etc. The state is engaging actively on a national level to discuss these crucial issues.

Fourth question: What major disruptions or changing conditions have affected how you operate your modes and supply chains over the past 5 years?

Nick: Unlike hurricanes—where recovery timelines are relatively predictable—some of the recent disruptions, such as strikes, lacked a clear reopening plan, adding another layer of complexity for freight coordination and recovery. Discussions with FDOT led to new planning efforts focused on managing surges in truck traffic post-disruption.

Aubrey: mentioned the railroad impact they had from flooding. These disruptions can happen unexpectedly and be extremely costly. In Florida, Class I railroads are privately maintained, so there's no public funding available to help rebuild these assets, adding complexity to disaster recovery.

Daniel: He asked if these non-weather-related disruptions should be explicitly included in emergency response strategies. Should we be preparing for other events as well? Should we put these in our action plans?

Aubrey: emphasizes that labor disruptions are a national issue

Fifth question: What new disruptors are you facing?

Nick: Along with material availability, Concerns about long lead times for essential materials like aggregate, which is becoming scarcer.

Steven: Mentioned the project at Space Canaveral. This can put additional strain on the already tight concrete and aggregate market, labor, and later on can disrupt steel supply, etc.

Aubrey: There are opportunities to move more cement by rail, but railcar and equipment shortages limit how much can be transported. Even with multiple unit trains per day, rail capacity is maxed out.

Nick: Noted that FDOT is working to make the Construction Aggregate Program a continuous initiative rather than one that sunsets after five years. This effort is critical given the persistent shortage of aggregate materials needed for infrastructure projects statewide.

John: Emphasized that one of the most critical constraints to attracting new industry in Florida is electric power availability. Despite Florida's excellence in transportation connectivity, manufacturers and data firms hesitate to invest if utilities are lacking.

Nick: Agreed. If a manufacturer cannot get reliable access to power or water, the deal falls apart. This is an emerging bottleneck that needs attention in economic development conversations.

Steven: Mentioned LNG demand surge.

Nick: Thinks there is potential for a "renaissance" in LNG, which could revitalize energy investment in Florida after the political changes and past pauses that happened regarding LNG infrastructure and federal policies.

Aubrey: Mentioned rail availability, and they are working with other companies to try and haul gas and fuel by rail.

Aubrey: Shared insights on freight movement and waste logistics in Miami-Dade County. From Miami to Homestead, it is nearly impossible to find suitable industrial space. As a result, new freight and logistics infrastructure may need to be located further inland. Noted that truck rates become inefficient at that distance, so rail coordination is essential.

Laura: Brought attention to pipeline infrastructure. Access and availability influences where major facilities can be located.

Sixth question: Of all disruptions, which are the most impactful?

Aubrey: Mentioned fuel movement as a continuous problem and they want rail to be part of the solution. There are a lot of potential and opportunities including jet fuel disruption.

Seventh question: How are you looking ahead to prepare for disruptions?

Nick: Posed two questions to the group: Is FDOT doing a good job in convening the right stakeholders? Are local planning efforts (workshops, scenario planning) sufficient to keep everyone informed and aligned?

Robert: Responded that the state needs to engage more directly with county development offices. He gave the example that 12 car washes were built within one mile over the past six months close to him in an area where they are projecting water scarcity. Local land use decisions are often made without full visibility into infrastructure constraints or alignment with state planning.

Bruce: Local commissioners and communities express opposition to truck traffic, and a push back related to freight corridors and supply chain needs, but still want the benefits of freight movement.

Aubrey: Mentioned the rail safety aspect.

Melissa: Discussed rail safety and public awareness, emphasizing that driver behavior and public education are critical.

Aubrey: He emphasized the importance of developer-led safety commitments and a proactive approach. Government allowed construction of houses on both sides of the tracks, schools, but no one was addressing crossing safety impacts.

Eighth question: What can FDOT do to mitigate disruptions?

Nick: Discussed needs for emergency routes, such as use of shoulders for extra capacity.

Gretchen: Shared an emergency evacuation experience and need for continued innovation and planning in emergency evacuation logistics.

V. Break for Lunch

VI. Truck Parking Updates

Marie: Truckers cannot find a place to park. Drivers often take over an hour to find parking, which affects Hours of Service (HOS) compliance and driver pay. A 2023 utilization study found peak demand occurs overnight, Tuesday–Thursday.

Parking needs vary across the state. Some need overnight options, other rest areas, etc., and some might face zoning restrictions.

The state now has a truck parking working group, represented by various departments across the state, including maintenance, design, planning, etc. – Goal to build a comprehensive program, to make the program consistent statewide.

The group is developing guidelines, incorporating truck parking into existing documents.

FDOT has 6 completed projects and has over 30 projects on the list to get done for truck parking. Truck parking concept for maintenance is similar to rest areas. Including basic rest area amenities – vending, bathroom, trash cans, etc.

Overview of FDOT’s TPAS (Truck Parking Availability System).

Design manual freight chapter under development: Back-in parking specifications, potential adjustments to ramp design at rest areas, most cost-effective construction materials for truck parking, etc.

Introduced FDOT’s dashboards, currently under development, which includes:

- Utilization monitoring: to determine what is parked there and overparking
- Project and funding tracking: show what projects are funded, live status, etc. to help know the needs
- Some of this data is fluid so might not be public. However, the aim is to improve transparency and help FDOT prioritize project, helping with data informed decisions.

Looking ahead: Create a master plan – show the importance of truck parking; coordinating with partner states, and guide investments.

VII. Empty Backhaul Updates

Holly: Florida remains a consumer-heavy state, meaning many goods are imported, but not enough is produced or exported, resulting in trucks entering the state full but often leaving partially full or empty, and a significant imbalance in freight flow and utilization. This issue has been consistently flagged during updates to the Freight Mobility and Trade Plan (FMTP).

FDOT partnered with the Transportation Data and Analytics Office to develop a methodology for estimating backhaul volume. The methodology was able to capture some differences, including when trucks might not be fully weight loaded, but hit volume capacity load.

The most recent analysis shows that the problem remains largely unchanged over the years. Northbound backhaul rates are around 50%, meaning half of the trucks leave the state underutilized. This is lower than some other reports might show (e.g., 75%), but still a major inefficiency in Florida's freight system.

Daniel: How do we leverage this in an opportunity for FL? How do we turn this weakness into an opportunity while we work on legislative bills?

Nick: Shared an example: a shipper abandoned Jacksonville in favor of Savannah, because at Jacksonville, they bear the entire cost of the inbound ship, while in Savannah, costs are shared through a more balanced inbound/outbound flow. Whether through incentives, subsidies, or policy, Florida must improve its outbound freight competitiveness.

Aubrey: Investments might be one of the ways to improve that. Savannah's growth was not natural but was strategically driven by subsidies and incentives.

Nick: Blank checks are not the answer, but what can we do?

Aubrey: Florida performs well across many metrics, but without strategic freight and industrial investments, the state risks being left behind in national and global freight competitiveness.

Nick: FL does not have a major manufacturing company. Florida is the third-most populous state, and JAXPORT is the third-busiest auto-handling port, yet companies must bring cars back into Florida empty because there's no domestic vehicle production.

Laura: FL is more reactive than proactive to get the land ready for projects. Raised concerns about perception and communication failures. Although many sites have potential, the resources aren't available to activate them quickly.

Aubrey: Change the marketing around the state. Many outside Florida now believe Florida is focused only on tourism.

Melissa: Mentioned that there are different programs, we might need more education around these programs.

John: The state still lacks the unified infrastructure strategy needed for sustained, industrial-scale economic development. Past development succeeded because industrial investment came first, followed by residential growth — not the other way around.

Laura: Need to focus on space and airspace. She believes airspace has many more opportunities as FL is already a leader. FL is still trying to pursue EV, AV, etc., and other technologies and opportunities that are widely available.

Nick: Noted that Florida's challenge is not a lack of opportunity, but rather, Florida must figure out how to unify investment across multiple regions with different strengths.

John: Florida is uniquely positioned to become the capital of reverse logistics in the United States. Combine Florida's consumer-centric economy with new investments in return logistics and circular supply chains.

VIII. Public Comments

Nick: called for public comments.

No public comments.

Ninth question: Any agenda topics/speakers you would recommend for our next meeting?

IX. Member Comments

Nick: called for members' comments.

Gretchen: mentioned hurricanes and fuel impact.

Kevin: Are we getting back to making it more frequent?

Bruce: Offered to do a tour around if they want to do a meeting around D1/ industrial park.

John: There is a need for the state to think about future needs, if what we're doing today will serve us in 20/30 years.

Steven: suggested a longer meeting – all day long.

Joe: Keep the rural parts of the state in mind – mentioned Savannah project was rural but they had lots of incentives

Laura: More into the space and defense topics

X. Adjourn

Nick: If we have no other questions or comments, do I have a motion to adjourn?

Gretchen approved and Joe seconded.