

Highlands
Transit Plan



Highlands County Transit Development Plan

2025-2034

Adopted October 2, 2024

Prepared by





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1 Introduction

This study was initiated by the Heartland Regional Transportation Planning Organization (HRTPO) to prepare a Transit Development Plan (TDP) for Highlands County. This TDP is titled the Highlands Transit Plan and will help establish a strategic vision to guide the planning, development, and implementation of public transportation service in Highlands County over the next ten years (2025-2034).

The Highlands Transit Plan includes the following key elements:

- Evaluation of the study area’s population and economic profile
- Assessment of existing public transportation options
- Summary of public involvement and community outreach efforts and input received
- Identification and prioritization of public transportation service and capital needs
- Ten-year service, financial, and implementation plan

TDP Requirements

The Highlands Transit Plan is required for Highlands County to be eligible for state public transportation funding. According to Rule 14-73.001, Public Transit, of the Florida Administrative Code (FAC), the TDP (or annual update thereof) must be the applicant’s planning, development, and operational guidance document to be used in developing the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and FDOT’s Five-Year Work Program.

The current TDP requirements were updated and adopted by FDOT on July 9, 2024, and include the following:

- The TDP must be completed at least once every 5 years, covering a ten-year planning horizon with an annual TDP update that includes any modifications and progress of the previous year’s program.
- A public involvement plan must be developed and approved by FDOT or be consistent with the approved Metropolitan/Transportation Planning Organization’s (MPO/TPO) public involvement plan. The HRTPO is the TPO serving the Sebring-Avon Park Urbanized Area within Highlands County.
- A Relationship review to other plans, including the Florida Transportation Plan, local government comprehensive plans and MPO/TPO plans, among others.
- A detailed coordination program defining collaborative participation and consistency in developing and implementing both the TDP and LRTP with the local MPO, as well as other related MPO multi-modal planning and programming.
- Estimation of the community’s demand for transit service (ten-year annual projections) using the planning tools provided by FDOT or a demand estimation technique approved by FDOT must be included.
- An assessment of the extent to which the land use and urban design patterns in the provider’s service area support or hinder the efficient provision of existing and future transit services.
- A Ten-Year Operating and Capital Program.



TDP Checklist

This ten-year plan meets the requirements for a TDP in accordance with Rule Chapter 14-73, FAC. To best illustrate this compliance, Table 1 presents a list of TDP requirements from Rule 14-73.001 and indicates where each item is located in this ten-year plan.

Table 1: TDP Checklist

Required TDP Elements	Location in the TDP
Public Involvement Process	✓ Section 7
Relationship Review to Other Plans	✓ Section 5
Metropolitan Transportation Planning Process Coordination Program	✓ Section 2
Demand Estimation	✓ Section 9
Land Use and Corridor Development Assessment	✓ Section 6
Ten-Year Operating and Capital Program	✓ Section 11
Governing Board Adoption	✓ Section 7

Organization of the Highlands Transit Plan

Section 2 briefly describes the Metropolitan Transportation Planning Process Coordination Program. This program is the method through which all transportation projects are planned and executed through the HRTPO. This section describes points where the Highlands Transit Plan coincides with the coordination program and how these fit together cohesively for a streamlined execution of transportation projects.

Section 3 provides an abbreviated description of the study area, which is all of Highlands County. This includes a review of existing conditions, a physical description of the county, and some mobility characteristics in the area. Other socio-demographic and economic factors are considered as well.

Section 4 describes the existing transportation services in the study area as well as characteristics of the levels of service or demand that may be associated with them.

Section 5 describes the TDP’s relationship to other plans, ensuring that the plan is in line with the Florida Transportation Plan’s (FTP) vision and that the document forms an integral part of the metropolitan planning process.

Section 6 assesses the land use configuration in the study area, examining land use plans in the study area and evaluating corridors that have been identified in the metropolitan planning process.

Section 7 describes the public participation process as stipulated by the HRTPO and the various public outreach opportunities that have led to the TDP.

Section 8 reviews all of the plans and findings from the processes that have led to the TDP and generates three transportation options for the implementation of a transit service in Highlands County.

Section 9 provides information about the service demand that can be expected from the transportation options that have been identified.

Section 10 provides a discussion of the transportation options evaluating all the components that support a transit scenario. A list of supporting projects is prioritized for implementation in the Ten-Year Program.

Section 11 describes the Ten-Year Operating and Capital Program, including projects, costs, and other important programming needs for the ten-year planning horizon.



2 Metropolitan Transportation Planning Process Coordination Program

The TDP rule emphasizes a coordinated and integrated approach among various planning entities, including state and local governments, public transportation operators, and other stakeholders. Specifically, the TDP rule asks that the TDP be linked to the local Metropolitan Transportation Planning Process Coordination Program which includes several plans or programs, such as the Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), and the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP). The rule requires that the TDP be updated every five years in coordination with the development of the local TPO/MPO's LRTP and will use comparable baseline year and future year data in its analyses.

The Highlands Transit Plan has been developed in such a way that it is in coordination with the 2045 LRTP. The LRTP uses a performance-based planning process where the TPO is required to set performance targets.

The LRTP covers a planning horizon of at least 20 years and includes specific performance measures and targets related to safety, infrastructure condition, congestion reduction, system reliability, freight movement, environmental sustainability, and project delivery efficiency. The LRTP includes a financial plan detailing how projects and programs will be funded and implemented. It needs to be consistent with other state and local transportation plans to ensure a cohesive and integrated approach.

The HRTPO also develops the TIP which lists federal, state, and locally funded projects on an annual basis and across all modes of transportation. The inclusion of a transit network in the TIP would be the introduction of a new type of project with a distinct project phasing from roadway or trail projects. These projects generally include Project Development and Environment, Design, Right of Way Acquisition, and Construction phases, while transit networks may not observe most of these phases for a given project.

Additionally, the HRTPO develops the UPWP which describes the transportation planning projects to be performed within the HRTPO area, by summarizing planning tasks, defining deliverables and respective timelines, proposing budgets using federal and other funds, and estimating the cost for each identified task.



3 Baseline Conditions

The Baseline Conditions analysis reviews the study area in the context of the TDP and documents existing base data to gain an understanding of the environment in which the transit system is operating. A detailed analysis of the Baseline Conditions can be found in the Baseline Conditions Technical Memo in Appendix A of this document. Highlights from this tech memo are summarized below.

Study Area Overview

The Highlands Transit Plan study area encompasses all of Highlands County, with a focus on the Sebring-Avon Park Urbanized Area. This includes the incorporated areas of Sebring, Avon Park, and Lake Placid. Highlands County, the 14th largest county in Florida by area, is known for its lakes, the Sebring International Raceway, and various arts and cultural events. The county covers over 1,100 square miles, with 92% being land.

Population Profile

Between 2000 and 2020, the county's total population grew by 15.87%, with similar growth rates in unincorporated areas. Lake Placid saw the highest growth rate at 41.5%, though it had the smallest population base. The cities experienced a 14.44% growth rate. The unincorporated areas added more residents than the cities.

From 2000 to 2020, the percentage of younger residents (15 and younger) increased by 7.87%, while households with no vehicles decreased by 21.32%. Older residents (65 and older) and households below the poverty level increased by 29.44% and 18.2%, respectively. Minority populations, including Black/African American and Hispanic, also increased. The data suggests an increasing portion of household income is spent on transportation.

Urbanized areas like Sebring, Avon Park, and Lake Placid have high concentrations of population, including younger and older residents, minorities, low-income households, and households without vehicles. The age distribution shows a decrease in residents 17 or younger and an increase in those 65 and older since 2000. By 2035, the population of those aged 0-17 is projected to increase by 32%, and those 80 and older by 53%.

Income distribution indicates that the largest income bracket is households earning \$50,000-\$74,999, with 28% of households earning less than \$25,000 annually in 2020, aligning with the federal poverty level. Lower-income households are more dependent on public transportation due to fewer vehicles per household.

Population and housing densities for Highlands County were calculated for 2020 and projected for 2030. Population density is shown as population per acre, with low-density areas (0-1 persons per acre) mostly in unincorporated regions. The highest densities (5-6 persons/acre and 5-6 dwelling units/acre) are near downtown Avon Park, Sebring, and Lake Placid.

The Transportation Disadvantaged Service Plan (TDSP) projects future demand for critical transportation needs through 2029. To qualify for the TD program, individuals must live in DeSoto, Hardee, Highlands, or Okeechobee counties, be unable to obtain transportation due to disability, age,



or income, and not have access to rides from others for essential trips. They must also complete eligibility with the Community Transportation Coordinator (CTC) and pay a \$2 co-pay per trip.

Through the administrative support of the Central Florida Regional Planning Council, the CTC is also able to utilize FTA 5311 and FTA 5310 to support the mobility needs of individuals in the service area.

Employment and Economic Profile

Population and housing densities for Highlands County were calculated for 2020 and projected for 2030. The population density, expressed as population per acre, shows low-density areas (0-1 persons per acre) mostly in unincorporated regions. The highest densities, 5-6 persons per acre and 5-6 dwelling units per acre, are near downtown Avon Park, Sebring, and Lake Placid.

The top private employers in Highlands County include Advent Health with over 1,639 employees and Walmart with 935 employees. The list of top public employers is led by the Highlands County School Board, employing 1,599 people. Employment trends show an increase in single-occupant trips and a decline in carpooling. Potentially, public transportation can aid in reducing the number of single-occupant trips by providing a mobility alternative and improving traffic by removing trips that would have been otherwise made through a single-occupant vehicle.

Between 2010 and 2019, the Highlands County labor force grew by 1.1% (about 168 people). Most residents live and work within the county, with significant commuting to Polk and Lee counties. Similarly, most workers in Highlands County reside within the county, followed by workers commuting from Polk and Hardee counties.

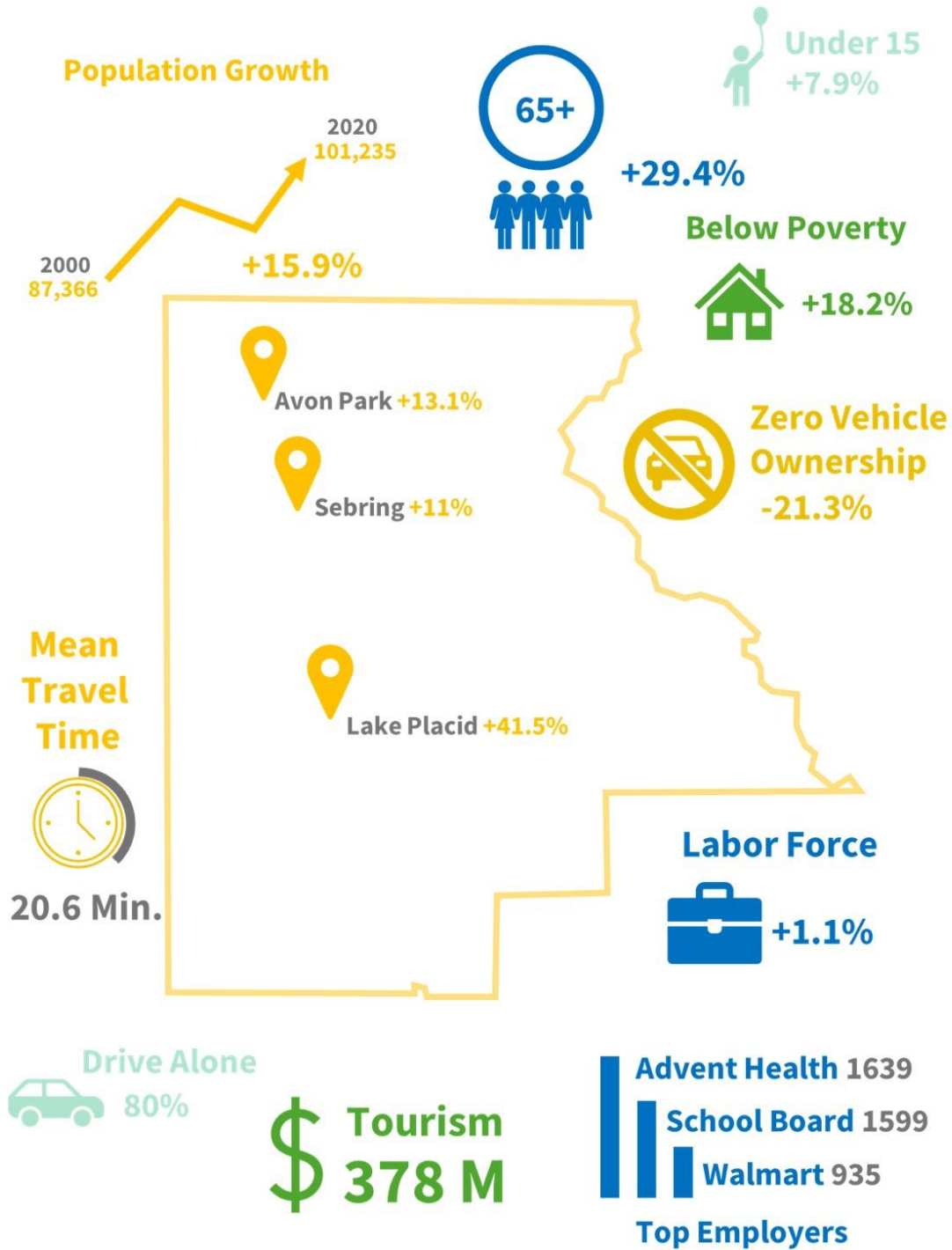
Tourism plays a major role in Florida's economy, including Highlands County, which is known for its lakes, golf courses, and festivals. The Sebring International Raceway hosts the renowned 12 Hours of Sebring race. Local airports, such as the Avon Park Executive Airport, support aviation activities, contributing to business and recreational opportunities. The economic impact of tourism and related activities, including airport events, is significant, generating \$378,046,000 for the county.

Local comprehensive plans identify residential, commercial, and industrial land use densities. Sebring has the highest allowable residential densities and supports high-density mixed-use downtown development, which is conducive to public transportation services. Higher-density areas with diverse land uses can better support public transportation compared to lower-density, single-use areas.

Figure 1 graphically summarizes Highlands County's population and economic profile.



Figure 1: Highlands County Population and Economic Profile





4 Existing Transportation Services

This section provides an overview of the transportation services currently being offered in Highlands County. It is important to note that Highlands County currently does not operate any fixed-route services.

Transportation Providers

Community Transportation Coordinator

A CTC exists in each of Florida's 67 counties. The CTC is responsible for coordinating transportation services for people who are designated as being Transportation Disadvantaged. Highlands have CTC services provided by MTM Transit.

Transportation Disadvantaged Services

MTM Transit is the recipient of the Transportation Disadvantaged Trust Funds to provide transportation to eligible riders.



Rural Public Transit Funding

Central Florida Regional Planning Council (CFRPC) applies for and administers public transit grant programs and contracts with the CTC to support the mobility needs of the service area.

Commuter Assistance

Commute Connector is a program of the FDOT that serves the Heartland Counties. Working with businesses and governments, the program helps facilitate carpooling, vanpooling, transit options, walking and bicycling programs, emergency ride home, and initiates the establishment of park and ride lots. In addition, the program promotes company, employee, and community benefits of mobility services. A free mobile app is available at <http://www.swflroads.com/commute-connector/index.html> to match carpool and vanpool groups.

Inter-County / Inter-Region Services

Throughout the Heartland region, there are limited inter-county and inter-region transportation services. The CTC uses several service providers to provide services in the service area. While not as heavily used as they are in their urban counterparts, traditional taxicab services exist in each county as well as limited transportation network companies (TNCs); however, TNC service is never guaranteed, as it is reliant on independent drivers driving their own personal vehicles. Both taxicabs and TNCs, such as Lyft and Uber have the ability to take the passenger to a destination in any service area. Greyhound Bus service is available in Sebring to regional destinations, and an Amtrak Station that provides service to the North and to the South.

Health, Education, and Other Programs

With the limited availability of para-transit trips that are funded by the Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged, some social services and non-profit agencies have created programs to provide transportation for their participants, while some medical facilities have also developed



partnerships with medical transport companies to support the transportation needs of those accessing their services. These programs are primarily limited to participants for programmatic purposes.

Medicaid Non-Emergency

Medicaid will pay for non-emergency transportation services for a Medicaid eligible recipient who has no other means of transportation to a Medicaid covered service including doctor appointments, dental appointments, mental health appointments, to receive dialysis services, or to receive services at a Prescribed Pediatric Extended Care (PPEC) Center. Reservations must be made through the rider's health plan. Information can be obtained by:

- Calling the Transportation number on the back of the rider's insurance card.
- Calling Medicaid Helpline at 1-877-254-1055 for more information on how to schedule Medicaid Non-Emergency Medical Transportation.



5 Relationship Review to Other Plans

The Highlands Transit Plan is a comprehensive strategy developed to enhance transportation services in Highlands County, aiming to address current deficiencies and meet future needs. This plan is closely aligned with several key planning documents and frameworks to ensure coherence and integration within the broader transportation system.

Florida Transportation Plan (FTP) | FDOT

The Highlands Transit Plan is designed to support the FTP's long-term vision for a balanced, multimodal transportation system across the state. The FTP emphasizes improving accessibility, mobility, and connectivity. The Highlands Transit Plan aligns with these goals by focusing on expanding transit options and improving service reliability in Highlands County, thus contributing to the state's broader objectives of enhancing transportation infrastructure and promoting sustainable mobility solutions. The FTP supports transit by supporting TPO/MPO's that have focused on increasing funds for public transit and to envision transit corridors that can support the current transportation landscape, emphasizing travel efficiency. The FTP is closely linked to the Strategic Intermodal System (SIS) which encourages the modification of policy that would increase flexibility to use SIS funds on facilities not designated as part of the SIS including local transit systems.

Local Government Comprehensive Plans

The local governments with Comprehensive Plans include Avon Park, Sebring, Lake Placid and Highlands County. These provide a framework for land use, infrastructure, and community development within their respective municipalities or area of governance. The Highlands Transit Plan integrates with these local plans by addressing specific transportation needs identified in various communities. This alignment ensures that the transit improvements proposed in the Highlands Transit Plan support and complement local growth strategies, land use patterns, and community development goals.

- The Avon Park Comprehensive Plan does not make explicit mentions of transit or transit supporting developments. However, the plan does support mid-block crossings whenever a transportation facility is nearby, which could include a public transit stop or transfer station.
- The City of Sebring's Comprehensive Plan makes mention of transit at several points, including Objective 6 regarding transit coordination. This section describes the need to provide transit to major trip generators and attractors, supportive land uses, and accommodations for the transportation disadvantaged. The plan encourages the city's participation in the study of mass transit feasibility, including the establishment of land uses and design guidelines in exclusive transit corridors. In other sections of the plan, sidewalk management and bicycle infrastructure are strongly supported to ensure a high level of bicycle and pedestrian access, especially in an anticipated support for transit development, which the city promotes as an alternative to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- Lake Placid's Comprehensive Plan points out that the classification of its downtown mixed use future land use designation is meant to encourage pedestrian friendly and transit-oriented design. The rest of the plan discusses the importance of transportation alternatives to U.S. 27, and the importance of the placement of alternative transportation facilities, as well as a desire for the implementation of multi-modal facilities, although these are more pedestrian and bicycle oriented.



- The Highlands County Comprehensive Plan discusses its support for transit alternatives in Compact Urban Development Areas within a Sustainable Community Overlay. These are places intended to enhance agricultural sustainability and encourage the conservation of key habitats. The Plan also describes elements that would conform a county designated town center or neighborhood zone, such as public transit infrastructure. This is also mentioned where applicable in areas designated as Industrial Parks, Office Parks. Finally, the transportation element supports the implementation of public transit system serving the county’s population centers to reduce vehicle miles traveled. The plan mentions developing land use guidelines that support transit corridors.

Long Range Transportation Plan | HRTPO, 2023



The Highlands Transit Plan builds upon the 2045 LRTP, which outlines transportation priorities and funding strategies for a 20-year horizon. Findings from the LRTP highlighted a significant need for improved public transportation, which is directly addressed in the Highlands Transit Plan. By incorporating feedback from the LRTP and prioritizing public transit enhancements, the Highlands Transit Plan ensures that local transit initiatives align with long-term regional transportation goals and funding strategies.

Unified Planning Work Program | HRTPO, 2024

The UPWP outlines the planning activities and budget for transportation planning efforts. The Highlands Transit Plan is supported by the UPWP through allocated funding and planned activities that address transit needs identified in the Highlands County area. The UPWP provides the framework for executing the Highlands Transit Plan by ensuring that necessary resources and planning activities are in place to implement the proposed transit improvements. The UPWP has identified this transit plan as a key work item within the most recent timeframe. Adoption of the Plan and other completion dates are described in the transit activities segment of the UPWP.



Transportation Improvement Program | HRTPO, Annually



The TIP provides a short-term list of transportation projects funded over a five-year period. The Highlands Transit Plan informs the TIP by identifying specific transit projects and improvements that need to be included in the program. This ensures that transit initiatives outlined in the Highlands Transit Plan are



prioritized and funded in the TIP, facilitating timely implementation and alignment with broader transportation objectives. Currently the only transit related projects included in the TIP are FTA 5311 and FTA 5310 funds that provide additional support to the para-transit program of the Community Transportation Coordinator.

Complete Streets Implementation Plan | FDOT, 2015

This plan emphasizes the development of transportation networks that accommodate all modes of travel—pedestrian, bicycle, transit, and vehicular—while being sensitive to the specific context of each area, particularly land use. The FDOT's Complete Streets Policy, Implementation Plan, and Context Classification Guide support safety, quality of life, and economic development, serving as a framework for Highlands County's Complete Streets projects outlined in the draft 2045 LRTP. The plan suggests that complete streets should focus on residential street network design, emphasizing connectivity for all modes of travel to ensure safe, convenient access to schools, transit stops, and other key destinations. Additional measures to evaluate market access consider the connections between residential areas and employment centers, changes in freight movement, rates of active transportation, and travel time reliability to health facilities.

On-Demand Public Transit Feasibility Study | HRTPO, 2022

The 2022 study was conducted by Via Mobility for the HRTPO and explores on-demand microtransit options to improve service efficiency and accessibility. The study recommends commingling microtransit with paratransit to enhance capacity while minimizing costs, focusing microtransit within the Sebring-Avon Park area where population and job density are highest. Simulations suggest high-quality service can be achieved with 9-10 vehicles, offering a cost-effective solution to meet growing transit demand within Highlands County.

Other TPO Plans and Applicable Regional Plans

The Highlands Transit Plan also considers other HRTPO plans and regional strategies to ensure consistency and coordination. This includes integration with regional transportation goals, such as enhancing connectivity between urban and rural areas, improving transit access, and supporting economic development. One of the most recent plans includes the Heartland 2060, a visioning plan for the Heartland region which supports planning land use and transportation systems to sustain viable natural systems. By aligning with plans, such as the Heartland 2060, the Highlands Transit Plan helps to create a cohesive regional transportation network that addresses both local and regional needs.



Regional Transportation Goals and Objectives

The Highlands Transit Plan aligns with regional transportation goals and objectives by focusing on improving transit service quality, expanding coverage, and increasing accessibility. These goals are reflected in the plan's initiatives, such as enhancing service frequency, developing new routes, and improving infrastructure to support diverse transportation needs across Highlands County. By meeting regional transportation objectives, the Highlands Transit Plan contributes to a more integrated and effective transportation system in the region.



6 Land Use and Corridor Development Assessment

During the transit planning process, a review of emerging land uses was conducted based on Highlands County's 2020 Future Land Use map (Figure 2). Reviewing and understanding future land use designations is important as it illustrates the vision at the county level for growth and development patterns. Fixed route transit is supported by land uses, such as high density/multi-family residential areas, mixed-use areas, designated office areas, and community-oriented spaces. Mobility-on-demand (MOD) services are generally supportive of low density to medium density land uses. After review of the map, the following patterns were noted:

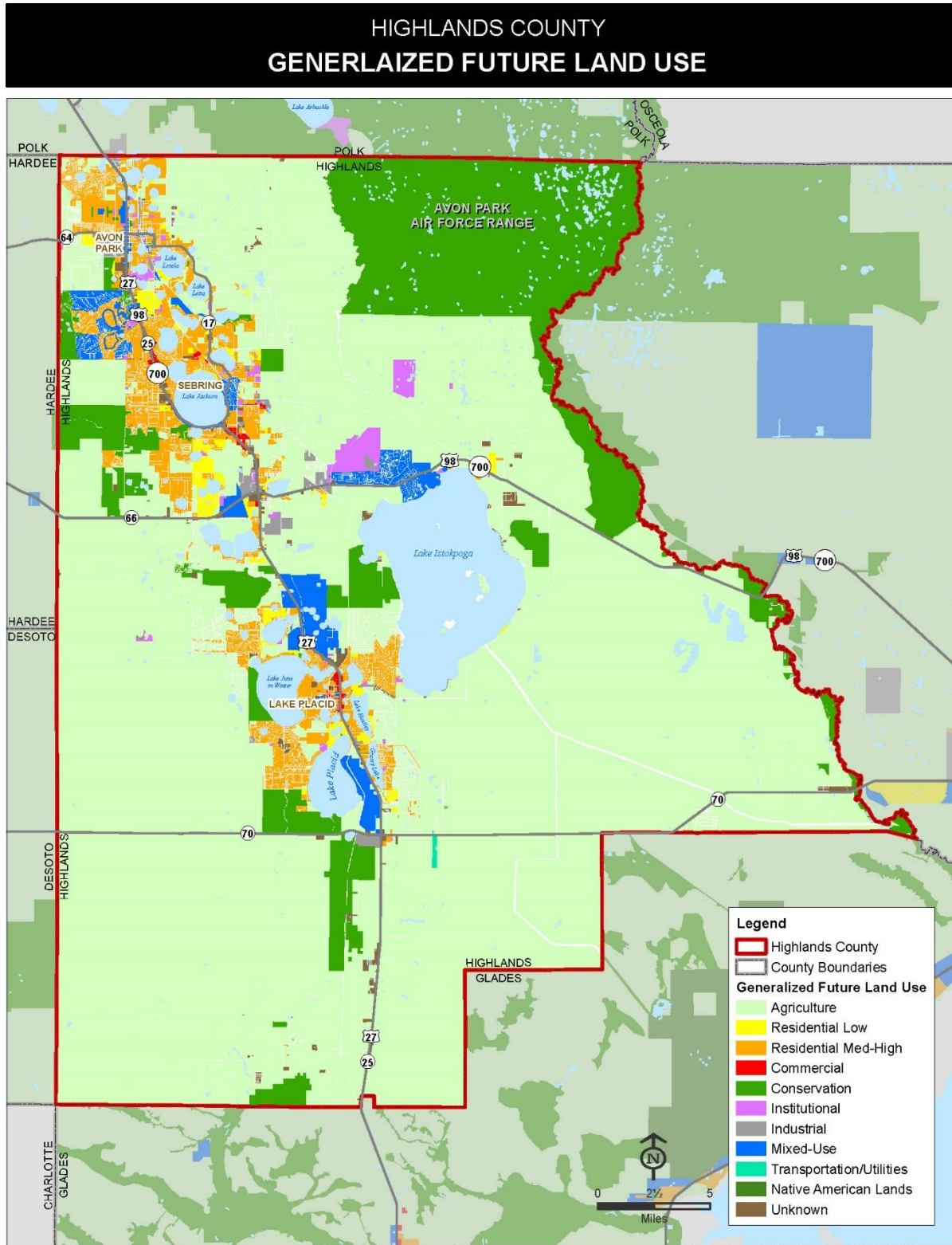
- The county is predominantly rural, characterized by extensive agricultural areas, particularly in the southeast, northeast, and southwest corners. The northeast corner and the eastern boundary are primarily conservation lands.
- A central urban axis follows the U.S. 27 corridor, extending from just south of Lake Placid in the south-central region up through the northwest corner of the county. Lake Placid is largely composed of single-family residential areas, with a central strip of commercial land uses. Mixed-use areas are present along the corridor north towards Sebring, likely due to the presence of several trailer home parks.
- Industrial land uses are situated on the outskirts of Lake Placid's suburban sectors, generally near U.S. 27.
- Further north, the Sebring and Avon Park areas are more urbanized, with commercial zones scattered along U.S. 27, particularly around the southeast shore of Lake Jackson in Sebring.
- Mixed-use developments combining residential and commercial uses are found in the downtown areas of Sebring and Avon Park. However, most urbanized zones are low-density residential, extending outward for about two miles on each side of U.S. 27.
- Industrial land uses follow the rail line closely just northeast of Avon Park's downtown area.

The existing land use configuration does not broadly support fixed-route transit. The U.S. 27 corridor, with strategic stops at high-density residential and commercial locations, is the only viable area for such a service based on land use configuration. In addition, the county's relatively small urban areas are not sufficiently dense to promote a walkable environment. Given the sparse and predominantly single-family residential nature of most urban areas, both walking and fixed-route transit face significant challenges.

An MOD service, designed for low-density urban and suburban environments, could be more successful, especially across the entire urbanized sector since the area exhibits low density patterns with the need to access the U.S. 27 corridor, where higher intensity uses, and much of the commercial uses are concentrated.



Figure 2: Highlands County Future Land Use Map



It would be important to stay in touch with any developments that may result from the Complete Streets Implementation Plan. Future project criteria and funding allocations for complete streets projects will be determined by the HRTPO Board and Committees. The plan expands on the needs and safety of bicyclists and pedestrians, the integration of pedestrian-friendly features, such as sidewalks and crosswalks, and the safe design of transit facilities to ensure efficient passenger loading and connectivity. Any developments resulting from this plan can provide an indication of opportunities regarding local corridors that and complete street projects that could benefit from public transit services.



7 Public Involvement Process

The HRTPO ensures that all people in the region can have full and fair participation in discussions and activities related to the management and improvement of the various modes of mobility in the region. To ensure that the public is actively engaged, the HRTPO published a Public Participation Plan (PPP) in 2023 to provide guidance on public participation in general. This plan has helped to devise several strategic public involvement activities where individuals have been able to discuss transportation at large or in particular for specific projects in the region.

Public Participation Plan

The PPP, which was reviewed and approved by FDOT to serve as the TDP's Public Involvement Plan, serves as a guiding document for engaging the public in the transportation planning processes of the HRTPO. The HRTPO operates with a governing board of 12 voting members from eight local governments and a non-voting advisor from the FDOT. Meetings are held quarterly, with public notices and agendas posted in advance to ensure transparency and encourage public participation.

The HRTPO utilizes a comprehensive, cooperative approach in its transportation planning, involving various advisory committees to guide its work. These include the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC), which represents diverse community interests; the Mobility Advisory Committee (MAC), which focuses on transit, bicycle, and pedestrian mobility; and the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), comprising engineers and planners from local governments and agencies. Each committee operates under its own bylaws, holds public meetings, and provides a platform for informed decision-making through collaboration among stakeholders.

The PPP emphasizes the importance of making public involvement activities accessible to all individuals, regardless of race, age, income, language, or disability. It aligns with federal nondiscrimination regulations, such as Title VI and environmental justice requirements, ensuring that all community members can participate meaningfully in the transportation planning process. To enhance inclusivity, the HRTPO completes a Community Characteristics Inventory to better understand the diverse populations it serves and to tailor its communication methods accordingly.

Efforts are made to engage traditionally underserved populations, including low-income, minority, elderly, disabled, and limited English proficiency groups. The PPP outlines specific strategies, such as extending meeting hours, selecting convenient locations, offering bilingual staff and translators, and providing accommodations like sign language interpreters and translated materials. These initiatives help ensure that all interested parties can contribute to the transportation planning process.

The public participation goals outlined in the PPP focus on four key areas: informing the public, encouraging diverse stakeholder involvement, incorporating public feedback into decision-making, and continuously improving outreach efforts. The HRTPO employs various strategies to meet these





goals, such as providing advance notice of meetings, using accessible communication methods, and hosting engagement opportunities across the region. The organization also leverages online tools and social media to broaden its reach and maintain active engagement with the community.

An annual evaluation of public participation activities is conducted to track demographic representation, outreach efforts, and public feedback. The results are compiled into a report available for review by the HRTPO Board, committees, and the general public. This ongoing assessment aims to ensure that participation reflects the region's diversity and is geographically distributed. The full PPP for the Highlands Transit Plan can be found in Appendix B.

Public Involvement Activities

Recent public involvement activities have given the public an opportunity to participate in the formation of the Highlands Transit Plan, reflecting a commitment to engaging the community and incorporating their feedback into transportation planning. The PPP outlines the importance of involving a broad spectrum of stakeholders to ensure that the transit plan aligns with the needs and priorities of the community. This approach not only adheres to legal requirements but also fosters more inclusive, effective, and responsive transportation solutions.

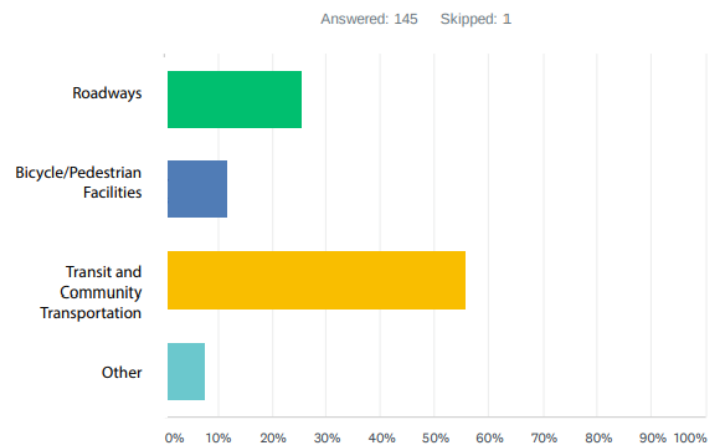
The following provides an overview of the public involvement activities undertaken leading to this plan. These public participation activities have been integral in developing the Highlands Transit Plan, ensuring it reflects the community's needs and priorities.

2045 Long Range Transportation Plan

The 2045 LRTP serves as a comprehensive framework for addressing the future transportation needs of Highlands County. This plan highlights key areas where improvements are necessary and prioritizes funding to enhance public transportation.

- Stakeholder Interviews: Conducted 31 interviews to gather diverse insights and perspectives on transportation needs.
- Consultative Partner Think Tank Meetings: Held 3 meetings with partners to discuss strategic priorities and collaborative approaches.
- Virtual Open Houses: Organized virtual sessions to engage the community in discussions about transportation improvements.
- Surveys: Collected 146 completed surveys to assess public opinions and preferences.

Q1 Which needs the most improvement?



Source: 2045 LRTP Survey Results

Heartland 2060 Plan

The Heartland 2060 Plan outlines long-term regional goals and scenarios for the future of the Heartland region. It aims to guide transportation and land use planning to support sustainable growth and development.



- Summits: Hosted 2 summits, engaging 214 individuals in discussions about regional planning and future scenarios.
- Regional Scenarios Preference Survey: Surveyed 504 people to gather preferences on various future scenarios for the region.

2024 Community Transportation Survey

This survey is designed to assess current transportation service usage, satisfaction levels, and demand for new service options, such as on-demand or fixed-route services.

- Survey Data: Collected comprehensive data on service frequency, user satisfaction, and preferences for different types of transportation services.

United Way United Community Needs Assessment (2022)

The United Way's assessment surveyed 914 Highlands County residents on various topics about transportation and the infrastructure in their community. The assessment identified key community needs, with a focus on transportation's role in accessing essential services. Most notably, 85% of respondents agreed that public transportation is needed in their community and 66% agreed that they would be willing to fund more public transportation options.

The report also highlighted that limited access to affordable and reliable transportation is a significant barrier for residents, impacting employment, food access, education, and healthcare.



Source: United Way of Central Florida

2025-2034 Highlands County Transit Plan

Leading up to the adoption of the TDP, a summary of the Highlands Transit Plan was posted on the HRTPO website to give the public the opportunity to review and provide comments 30 days before it was to be presented to the HRTPO Board. A memo was also sent out to Highlands County stakeholders, including FDOT District 1 representatives. Two letters of support were provided by CareerSource Heartland and the Sebring Multimodal Logistics Center (representing the Sebring Airport Authority), in support of the TDP's proposed alternative. On October 2, 2024, the HRTPO Board adopted the 2025-2034 Highlands County Transit Plan. These outreach materials can be found in Appendix C.



8 Public Transportation Service Options

The HRTPO has evaluated several public transportation options that could potentially serve Highlands County. Proposals generally support service along the U.S. 27 Corridor in the Avon Park and Sebring area, often looking at connecting Lake Placid as well as the rest of Highlands County. While several modes of transportation exist, not all are capable of serving a given location. Two modes of transportation that have been proposed include fixed-route transportation and MOD. Fixed routes are generally effective in high density urban areas where the movement of people is both large and concentrated. MOD is a form of door-to-door transit service that is generally effective in small urban, suburban, or rural areas, where the population is more spread out and where the movement of people is broader.

These options are primarily derived from two studies on the provision of public transportation in Highlands County. These are the 2018-2027 Highlands Transit Plan and the 2022 On-Demand Public Transit Feasibility Study. Maps of the proposed options can be found in Maps 1 through 3 on the following pages.

Option 1 – Fixed-Route Services

Derived from the 2018-2027 Highlands Transit Plan, option 1 looks at the potential implementation of a combination of fixed-route and flex transit services, connecting Lake Placid, Avon Park, and Sebring. An express route would connect the three cities with stops at key points along U.S. 27, while flex routes around Avon Park, Sebring, and Lake Placid would serve as both feeder routes to the express route, and as circulators for riders in these respective locations.

Option 2 – Urban Area Mobility-On-Demand

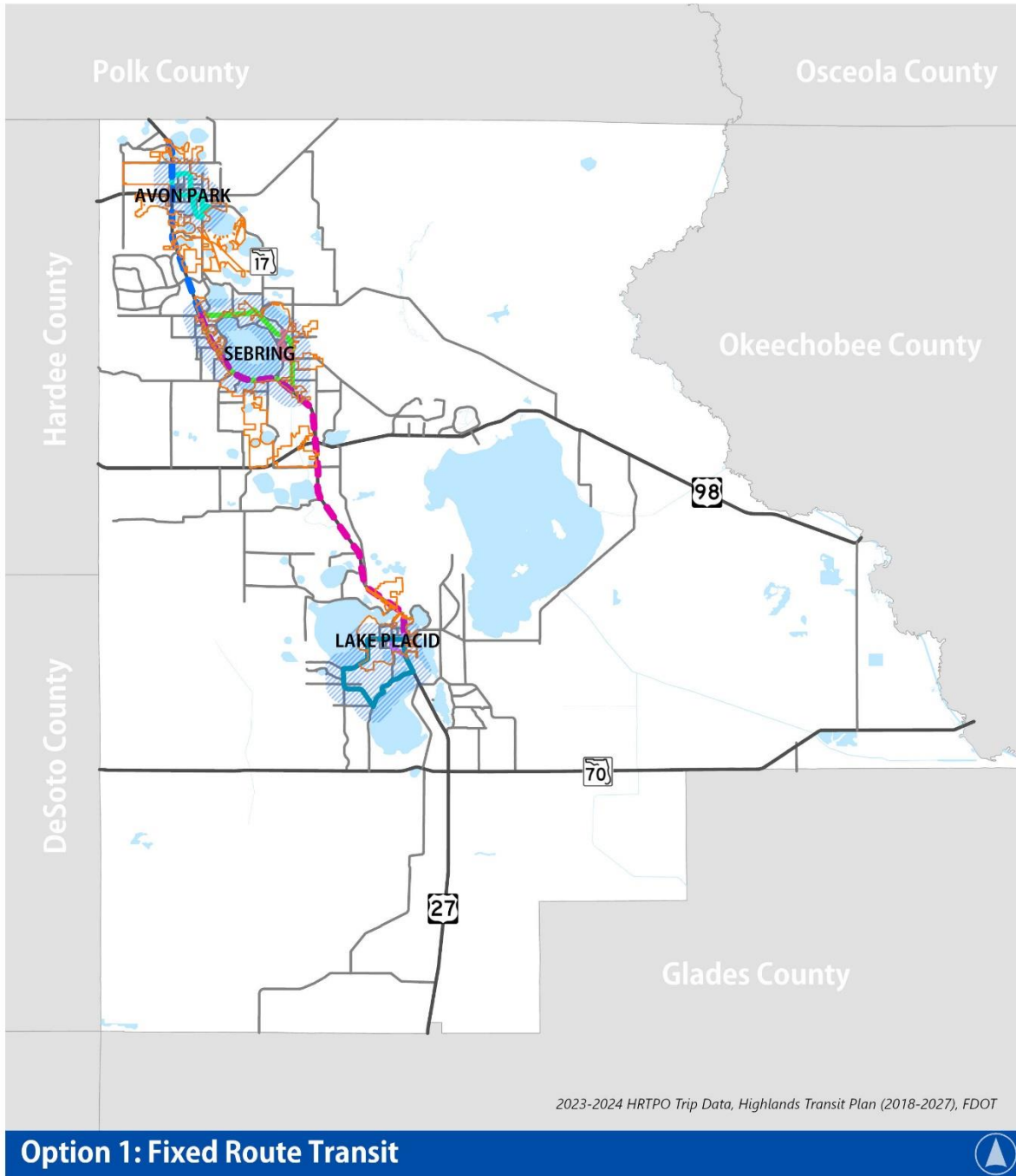
Derived from the 2022 On-Demand Public Transit Feasibility Study, option 2 proposes an MOD service that picks up riders and drops them off door-to-door within a fixed zone. The study proposed that the area that would most benefit from an efficient MOD zone would cover Avon Park and Sebring, and nearby areas, essentially covering the northwestern corner of Highlands County.

Option 3 – Countywide Mobility-On-Demand

Derived from the 2022 On-Demand Public Transit Feasibility Study, option 3 proposes an MOD service that would extend across the entirety of Highlands County. This would also include the County's urban area.



Map 1: Option 1 – Fixed-Route Transit



Option 1: Fixed Route Transit



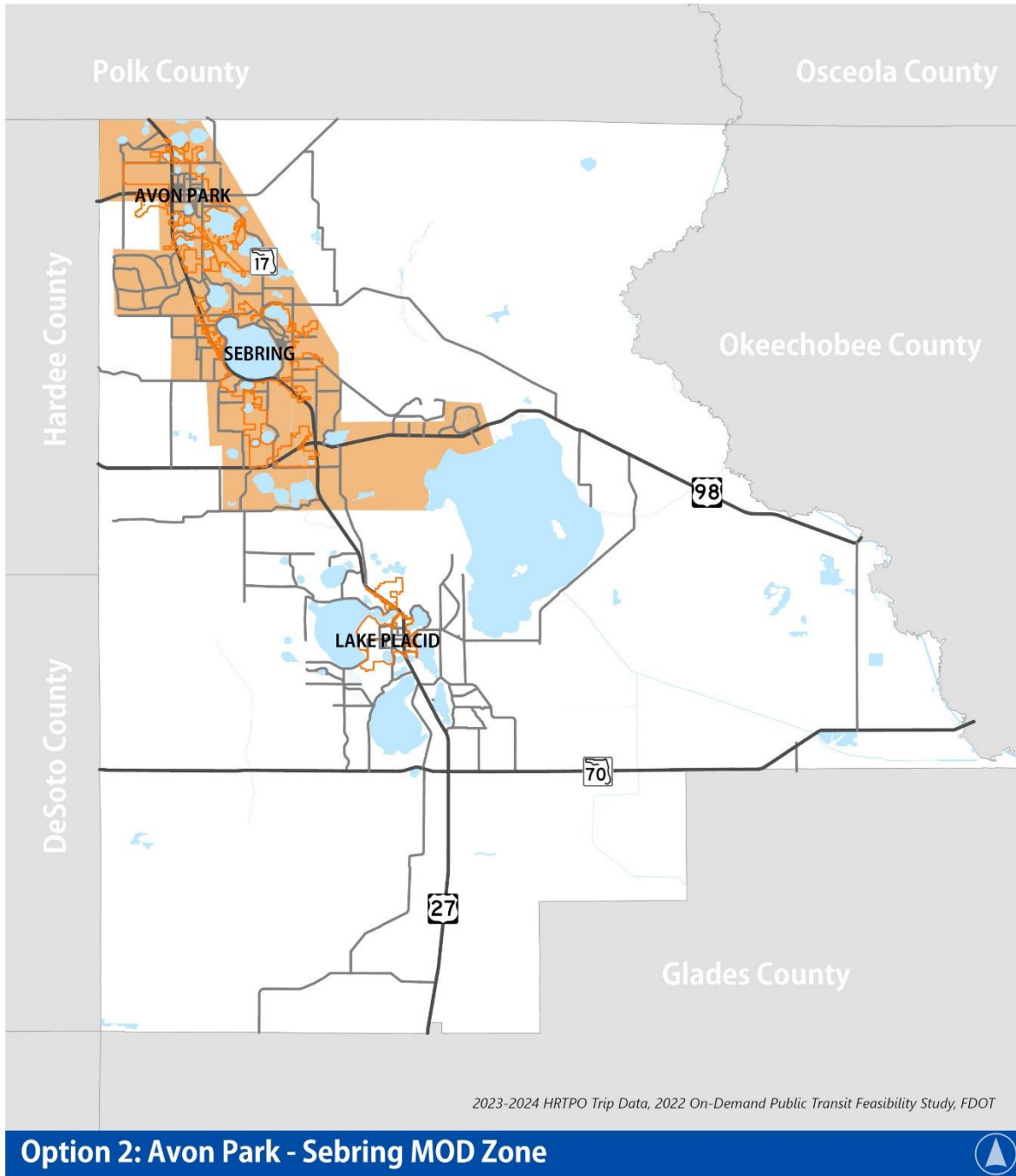
Legend

- Avon Park Flex
- Downtown Sebring Circulator
- Lake Jackson Circulator
- South Lake Placid Flex
- Downtown Lake Placid Circulator
- Sebring-Avon Park Express
- Sebring-Lake Placid Express
- Flex Zones
- City Limits
- Major Roads
- Minor Roads
- Water





Map 2: Option 2 – Urban Area MOD Zone



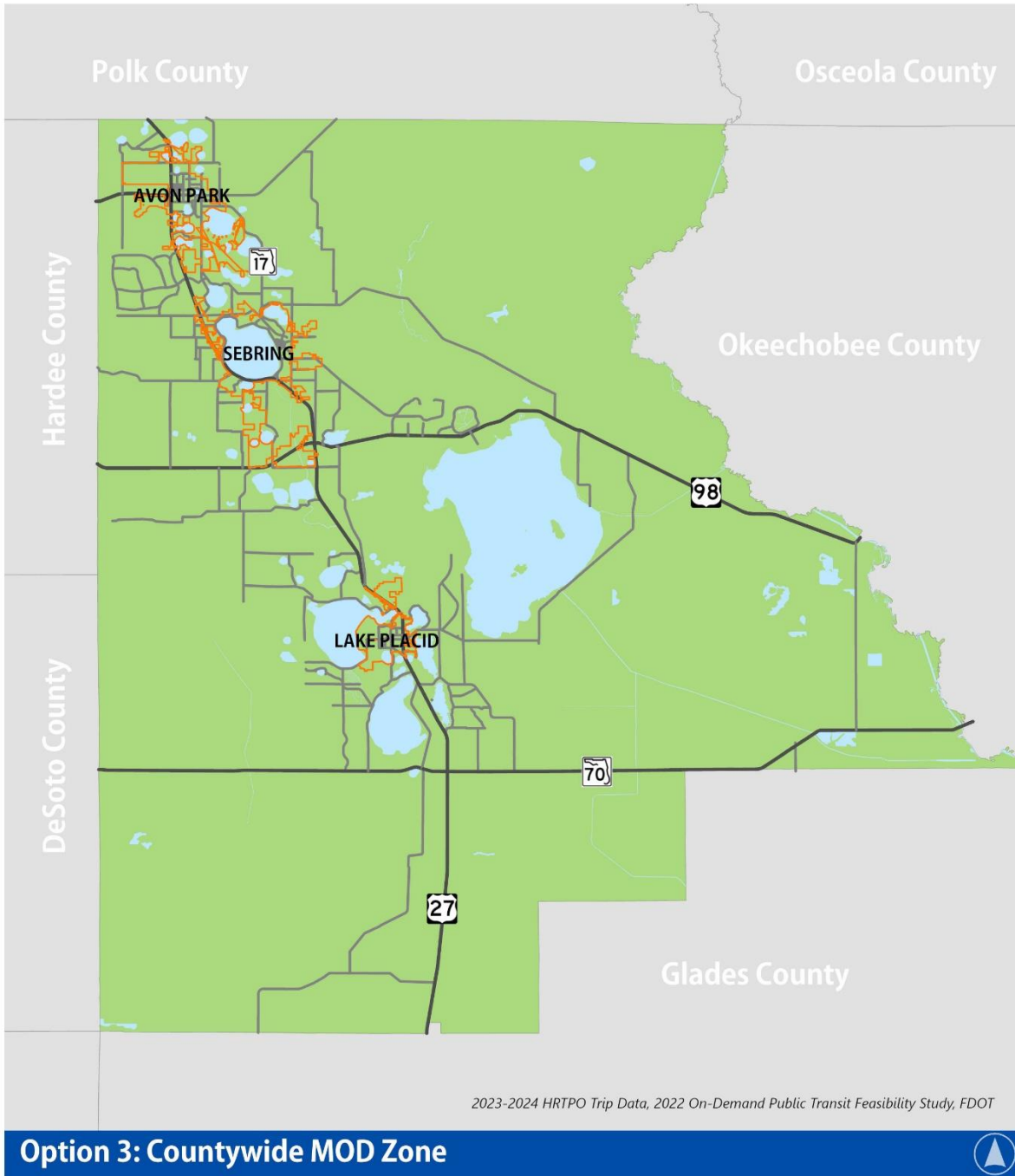
Legend

- Avon Park-Sebring Microtransit Zone
- City Limits
- Major Roads
- Minor Roads
- Water





Map 3: Option 3 - Countywide MOD Zone



Legend

- Highlands Microtransit Zone
- City Limits
- Major Roads
- Minor Roads
- Water





9 Demand Analysis

This section summarizes the public transportation demand analysis conducted as part of the Highlands Transit Plan. Three assessment techniques were used to assess demand for public transportation services in Highlands County:

- Traditional Market Assessment
- TD Origin-Destination Assessment
- Projected Ridership Demand

Traditional Market Assessment

A traditional transit rider market includes groups of people who often need or prefer to use public transportation. These groups typically include older adults, young people, and families with low incomes or no cars. For example, older adults might not drive as much because of age, and younger people might use public transit to get to school or work until they are old enough to drive. Families with lower incomes often spend more on transportation compared to wealthier families, so they rely more on public transit.

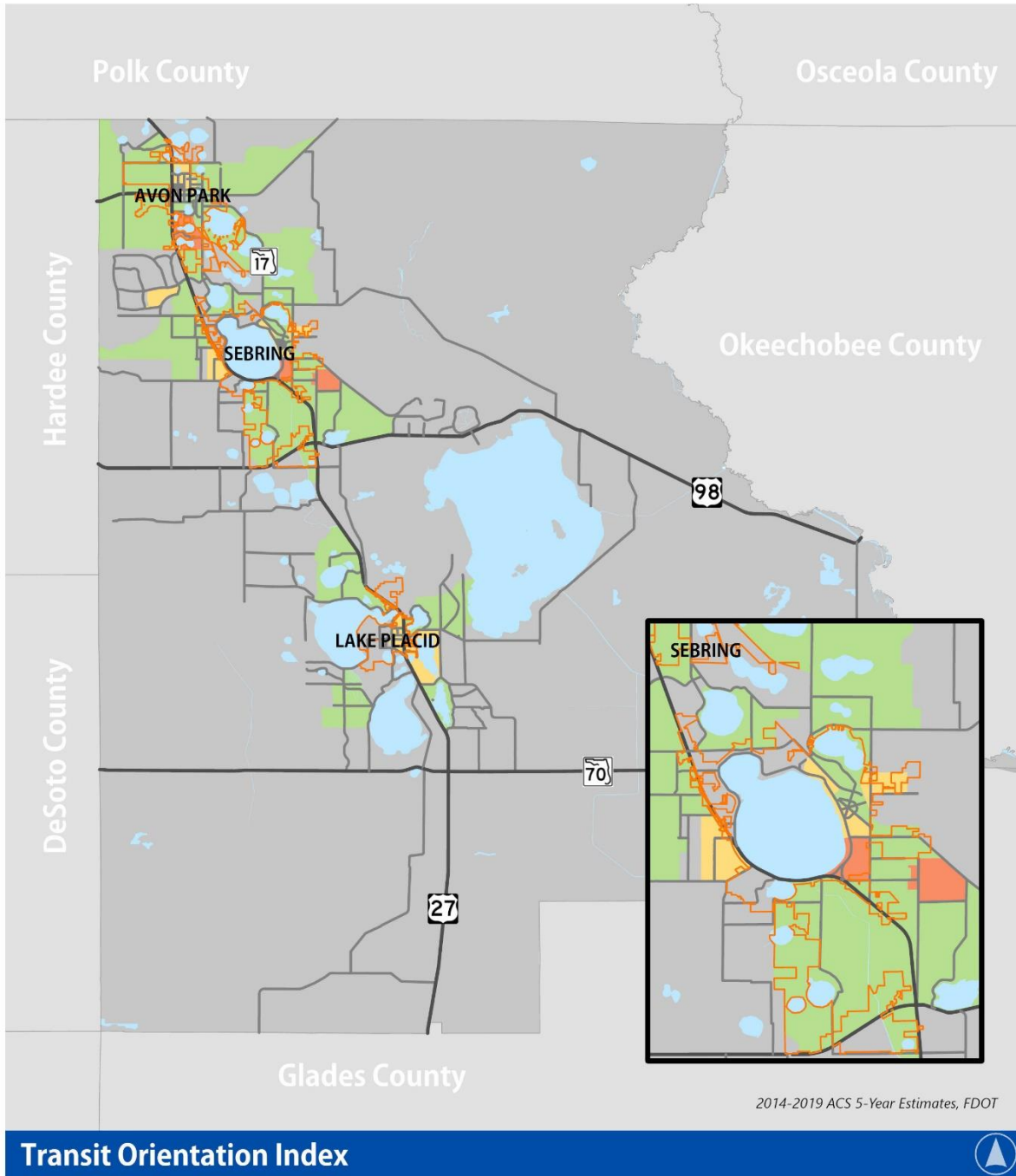
To better understand where these traditional rider markets are located, the transit plan prepared a Transit Orientation Index (TOI). This index helps identify areas with higher numbers of people likely to use public transportation. Using 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) five-year estimates, each part of the county was ranked as "Very High," "High," "Medium," or "Low" based on how likely people in that area are to depend on public transit. Map 4 was created to show these rankings and compare them to the existing bus routes. This helps to see if the current public transportation system is serving the areas where it's most needed. By analyzing this data, the county can improve its transit services to better meet the needs of these communities.

Findings from the TOI assessment include the following:

- Highlands County is largely rural, and the urbanized areas do not demonstrate a density in housing development. Therefore, the study rightly assessed that the county has large areas with low levels of TOI. Most of the transit supportive areas in Highlands County are demonstrated to be in the urbanized sector including Sebring, Avon Park, and Lake Placid.
- Only a handful of areas exhibit "high" or "very high" orientation toward transit.
 - In Avon Park, the neighborhood where the Twin Lakes Apartment, Housing Authority and the South Florida State College demonstrated a very high level of transit propensity. The area north of Main Street and south of Lake Isis, and east of U.S. 27 demonstrates a high level of transit propensity.
 - In Sebring, the southeast shore of Lake Jackson south of Kenilworth Boulevard, including the Fair Havens Village Apartments, the Francis 2 Mobile Home Park, and the Persimmons Commons, demonstrates a very high level of transit propensity. The area that continues north along the Sebring Parkway into the downtown area and up to Dinner Lake demonstrates a high level of transit propensity.
 - The area between DeSoto Road and Mike Kahn Road just south of Kenilworth Boulevard demonstrates a very high level of transit propensity
 - In Lake Placid, the entire downtown sector and the areas surrounding Lake Huntley demonstrate high levels of transit propensity.



Map 4: Transit Orientation Index



Transit Orientation Index

Legend

- | | | |
|-------------|------------------|-----------|
| City Limits | TOI Score | High |
| Major Roads | Low | Very High |
| Minor Roads | Medium | Water |





Origin-Destination Analysis

An Origin-Destination Analysis looks at transit connections between a rider's point of origin and a destination point to understand the patterns of movement that are exclusive to public transit in Highlands County as well as the most frequent patterns of movement. Using the paratransit trip data from the existing CTC, MTM, as observed over the course of a year, the analysis indicated that many trips were occurring along the U.S. 27 corridor.

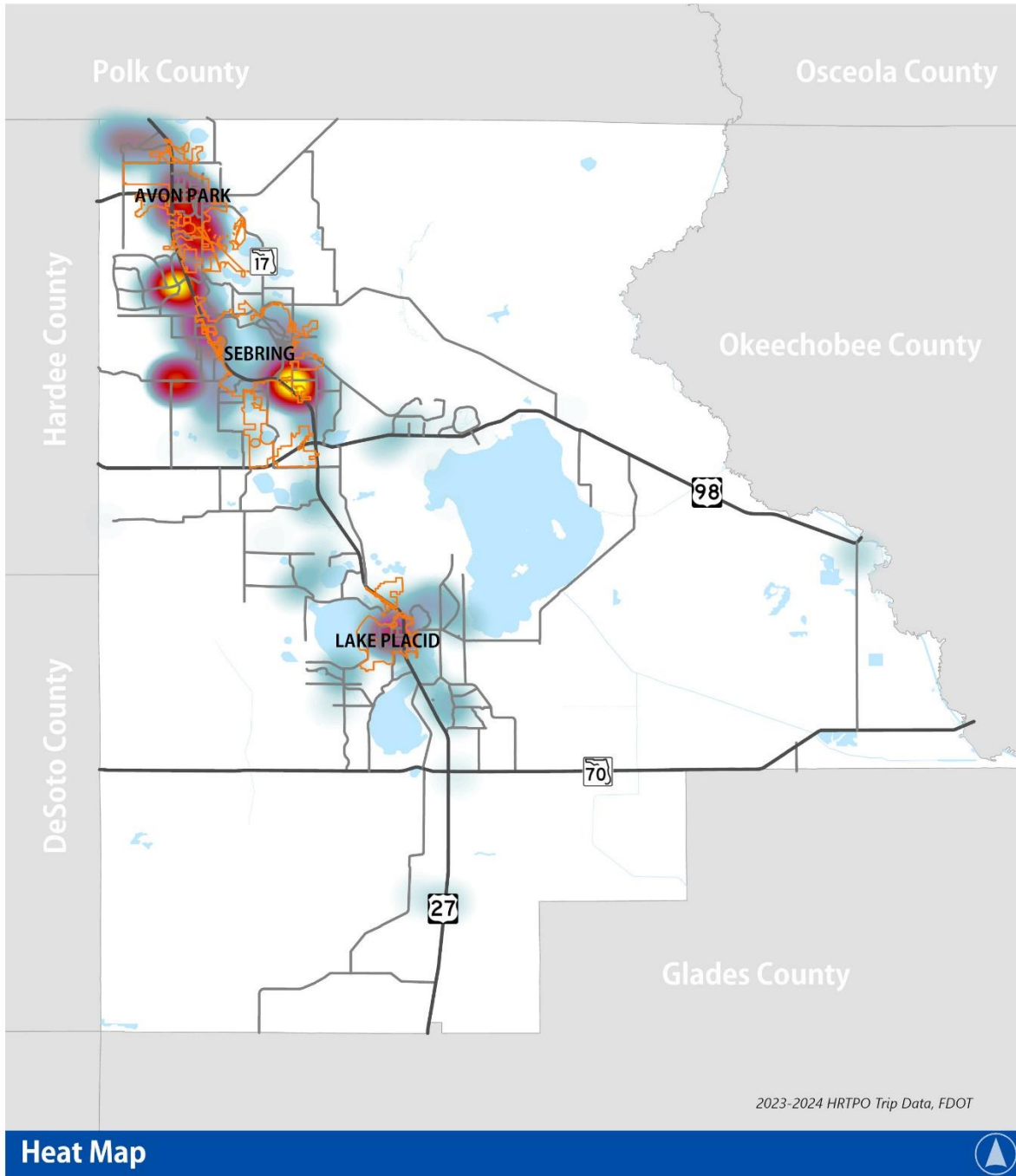
The analysis also suggests that the following points of interest in the county are in high demand for individuals who use or depend on transit:

- In the Avon Park Area: The Ridge Area Arc
- Sun N' Lakes Area: Florida Hospital Health Partners and Advent Health Medical Group
- Sebring Area: Change of Pace, the HCA Florida Highlands Hospital, Highlands County Government Center
- Lake Placid: The Highlands County Health Department

As seen in Maps 5 and 6, the largest volume of trips occurs within the Avon Park and Sebring area. Many long trips occur between Lake Placid and Sebring suggesting demand for service between these two areas. Within Lake Placid, few short trips can be observed connecting the health department and nearby residential areas. Trips in the Sebring and Avon Park area are generally spread across the region with multiple trips originating from the Avon Park Lakes community, Sun N' Lakes area, and other similar suburban sectors. This suggests there is a great level of demand between the major points of interest and the nearby suburban areas. Overall, the places with the highest levels of service demand can be found along the southeast shore of Lake Jackson in Sebring, the Sun N' Lakes area, and the central parts of Avon Park and Lake Placid.



Map 5: Origin-Destination Heat Map



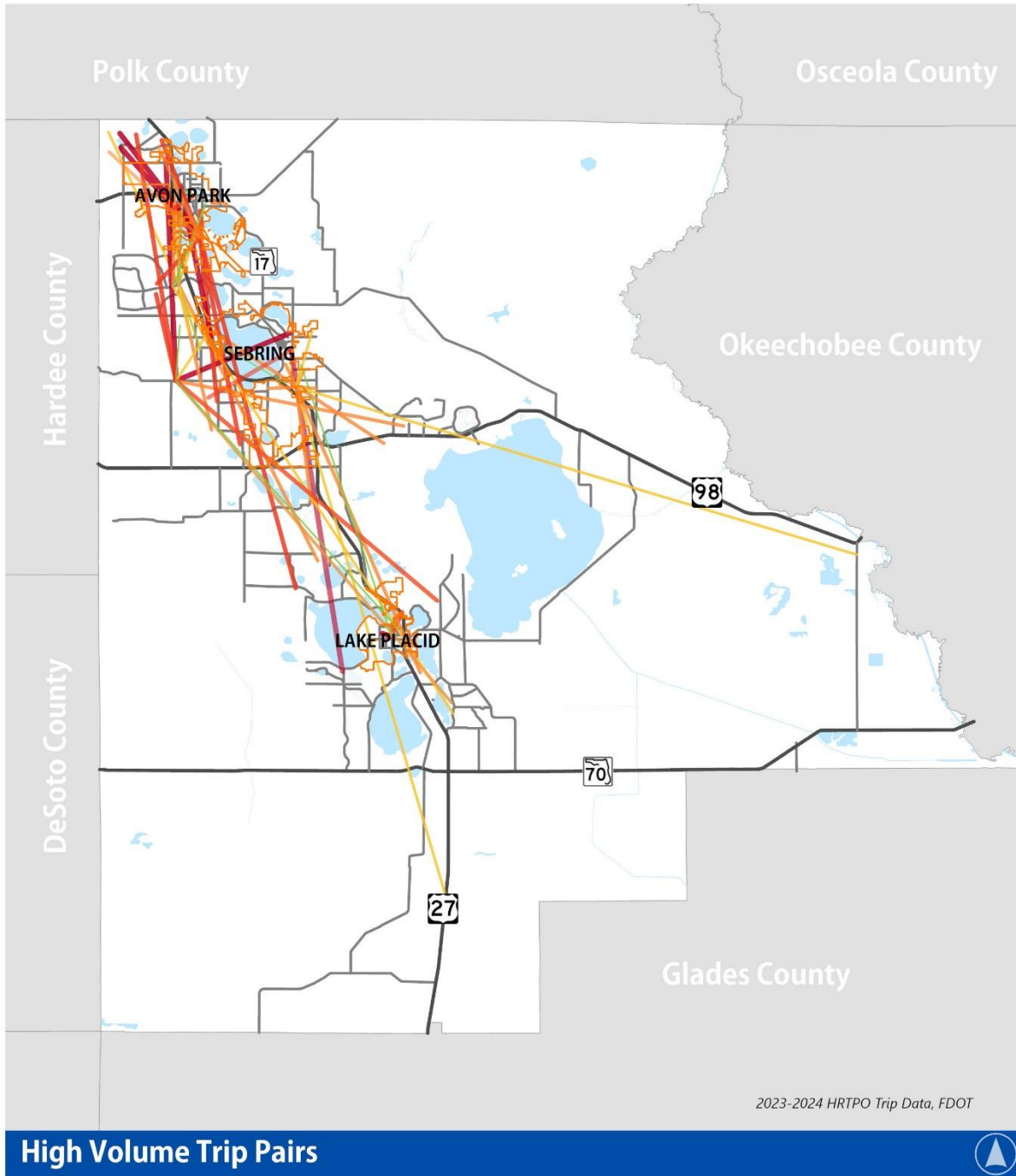
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- City Limits
- Major Roads
- Minor Roads
- Water
- Demand**
- Sparse
- Dense





Map 6: Origin-Destination Trip Pairs





Projected Ridership Demand

In addition to using the GIS-based tools to assess latent demand, demand for ridership for the next ten years was conducted using FDOT's Transit Boardings Estimation and Simulation Tool (T-BEST). This section outlines the ridership forecast methodology and summarizes the resulting ridership estimates.

Ridership forecasts were prepared using the most recent version of T-BEST (Version 4.8), the FDOT-approved transit demand forecasting tool. T-BEST is a comprehensive transit analysis and ridership-forecasting model that can simulate travel demand at the individual route level. The software was designed to provide near- and mid-term forecasts of transit ridership consistent with the needs of transit operational planning and TDP development. In producing model outputs, T-BEST also considers the following:

- Transit network connectivity – The level of connectivity between routes within a bus network; the greater the connectivity between bus routes, the more efficient the bus service becomes.
- Spatial and temporal accessibility – Service frequency and distance between stops; the larger the physical distance between potential bus riders and bus stops, the lower the level of service utilization. Similarly, less frequent service is perceived as less reliable and, in turn, utilization decreases.
- Time-of-day variations – Peak-period travel patterns are accommodated by rewarding peak service periods with greater service utilization forecasts.
- Route competition and route complementarities – Competition between routes is considered. Routes connecting to the same destinations or anchor points or that travel on common corridors experience decreases in service utilization. Conversely, routes that are synchronized and support each other in terms of service to major destinations or transfer locations and schedule benefit from that complementary relationship.

The following section outlines the model input and assumptions, describes the T-BEST scenario performed using the model, and summarizes the ridership forecasts produced by T-BEST.

Model Inputs / Assumptions and Limitations

T-BEST uses various demographic data as model inputs. The inputs and the assumptions made in modeling the transit alternatives in T-BEST are presented below. The model used the recently released T-BEST Land Use Model structure (T-BEST Land Use Model 2023), which is supported by parcel-level data developed from the Florida Department of Revenue (DOR) statewide tax database. The DOR parcel data contain land use designations and supporting attributes that allow the application of Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE)-based trip generation rates at the parcel level as an indicator of travel activity.

It should be noted, however, that the model is not interactive with roadway network conditions. Therefore, ridership forecasts will not show direct sensitivity to changes in roadway traffic conditions, speeds, or roadway connectivity.



Transit Network Alternatives

Based on the inquiries presented by this plan into the various possible alternatives for transit in Highlands County, a few alignments were developed. For the Public Transportation Service Option 1 (Fixed-Route), the following were imported and reconstructed within T-BEST:

- Route alignments
- Route patterns
- Bus stop locations
- Service spans
- Proposed headways during peak and off-peak periods (frequency at which a bus arrives at a stop—e.g., 1 bus every 60 minutes)

For the two proposed MOD options, several assumptions were created to develop the alternatives within T-BEST. One assumption is that MODs operate similar to circulator and flex routes, therefore a few fixed alignments were created with flex and circulator settings, since T-BEST does not offer an MOD setting. This ensured that the model would capture the ability for an MOD to deviate as needed within a defined area. Another assumption includes the addition of stops which could emulate the demand over the area. The lowest setting was to set stops every 0.25 miles.

For the MOD options, Option 2 examines MOD in the Avon Park and Sebring area, while Option 3 examines MOD Countywide. To capture these differences but retain similarities, an alignment was created in Option 2 that covered the entire Avon Park and Sebring Area. This same alignment was included in Option 3, in addition to a separate alignment for the Lake Placid area, and one alignment for the Southeast County area.

Additionally, service frequency assumptions were made that would emulate the wait time for an MOD service, the assumptions included a 15-minute wait time in the Avon Park and Sebring Area, 25 minutes in the Lake Placid area, and 35 minutes in the Southeast County area.

A Base scenario was also developed to make comparisons with the current service provision. This is based on the TD trips that are provided by the current Community Transportation Coordinator.

Special Generators

Special generators were identified and coded into T-BEST to evaluate the opportunity for generating high ridership. Special generators include the following:

- South Florida State College
- Transfer Points – Lake Jackson, Walmart Supercenter in Avon Park, Publix Supermarket at South Highlands.
- Shopping Mall – Lakeshore Mall
- Hospital – HCA Florida Highlands Hospital

T-BEST Model Limitations

It has long been a desire of FDOT to have a standard modeling tool for transit demand that could be standardized across the State, similar to the Florida Standard Urban Transportation Model Structure (FSUTMS) model used by TPO/MPOs in developing LRTPs.

However, whereas T-BEST is an important tool for evaluating improvements to existing and future transit services, model outputs do not account for latent demand for transit that could yield



significantly higher ridership. In addition, T-BEST cannot display sensitivities to external factors, such as an improved marketing and advertising program, changes in fare service for customers, fuel prices, parking supply, walkability and other local conditions and, correspondingly, model outputs may over-estimate demand in isolated cases.

Although T-BEST provides ridership projections at the route and bus stop levels, its strength lies more in its ability to facilitate relative comparisons of ridership productivity. As a result, model outputs are not absolute ridership projections, but, rather, are comparative for evaluation in actual service implementation decisions. T-BEST has generated interest from departments of transportation in other states and continues to be a work in progress that will become more useful as its capabilities are enhanced in future updates to the model. Consequently, it is important for the HRTPO to integrate sound planning judgment and experience when interpreting T-BEST results.

Ridership Forecast

Using these inputs and assumptions, the ridership model forecasts were developed. Using the base model, T-BEST ridership forecasts for this transit plan start with base year (2023) and horizon year (2033) were developed. The Base Scenario generated annual ridership forecasts reflect the estimated level of service utilization if no changes were to be made, and TD service would continue to be provided through the horizon year. All scenarios were run with fares assumed to match the current cost per trip, which is \$2.

Tables 2 and 3 show the projected number of total annual riders by route in 2023 and 2033 derived from T-BEST.

Forecast Ridership Analysis

The T-BEST model suggests the latent ridership based on the geographic and socioeconomic factors assumed with consideration for the supply, however, since the figures are not validated by ridership figures, the model does not alter latent demand to match the supply. Based on the T-BEST model projections, continuing the base scenario will observe an overall service increase of 21% by 2033.

- Furthermore, implementing the Fixed route scenario would indicate a smaller serviceable demand, showing a ridership that is reduced by 8% when compared to the base scenario.
- The Avon Park MOD Zones shows an increase in the ridership of about 28% over the base scenario
- The Countywide MOD Zone shows an increase in ridership of about 35% over the base scenario.
- The Countywide MOD Zone would be capable of serving less of the Avon-Park Sebring Zone as indicated by both 2023 and 2033 figures over the same region.

Based on these projections, implementing the Countywide MOD yields the largest ridership growth, while the Avon Park Sebring MOD would yield a much more efficient and effective service by improving the base scenarios service levels by 28% over a smaller area.

Table 2: Base Scenario and Fixed Route Option

	Base Scenario			TDP 2018-2027 Fixed Route Scenario				
	2023	2033	10-Year Change	2023	2033	10-Year Change	2023 Difference from Base Scenario	2033 Difference from Base Scenario
Sebring-Avon Park	93,554	113,354	21%	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Lake Placid	24,618	29,572	20%	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Southeast County	7,754	9,839	27%	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Totals	125,926	152,765	21%	116,238	140,563	21%	-8%	-8%

Table 3: MOD Zone Options

	Avon-Park Sebring MOD Zone					Countywide MOD Zone				
	2023	2033	10-Year Change	2023 Difference from Base Scenario	2033 Difference from Base Scenario	2023	2033	10-Year Change	2023 Difference from Base Scenario	2033 Difference from Base Scenario
Sebring-Avon Park	160,690	184,833	15%	72%	63%	120,322	146,100	21%	29%	29%
Lake Placid	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	33,238	39,773	20%	35%	34%
Southeast County	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	16,930	20,235	20%	118%	106%
Totals	160,690	184,833	15%	28%	21%	170,490	206,108	21%	35%	35%



As shown in Table 4, the most effective routes in the 2018-2027 Highlands Transit Plan include the Sebring/Lake Jackson Flex Route and the Sebring-Avon Park Sebring-Lake Placid Express, while some of the less effective routes include the Lake Placid Circulator and Flex Route.

Table 4: Route Level Ridership Forecast for Fixed-Route Option

Route	2023	2033	10-Year Change
Avon Park Flex	9,296	11,227	21%
Downtown Lake Placid Circulator	6,461	8,089	25%
Downtown Sebring Circulator	12,645	16,383	30%
Sebring/Lake Jackson Flex	40,800	48,875	20%
Sebring-Avon Park Express	19,510	23,172	19%
Sebring-Lake Placid Express	22,099	26,136	18%
South Lake Placid Flex	5,427	6,681	23%
Totals	116,238	140,563	21%



10 Public Transportation Service Options and Needs Evaluation

This section summarizes the development of potential transit improvements for the transit plan's ten-year horizon. The needs were developed based on information gathered through various data collection, analyses, and outreach efforts conducted for this transit plan and from all other plans that were reviewed during this process.

Evaluation of Transit Options

The HRTPO has evaluated the three public transportation options that could potentially serve Highlands County as part of this plan. The most critical item to evaluate for this transit plan is the selection of a public transportation option in order to refine a list of needs. The following lists the considerations that needed to be made to support the evaluation and option selection process:

- *Public Support and Aspirations* – In line with the PPP's guidance, the public was engaged in defining what the community's public transportation vision aspires to and supports for the next ten years. This included the various surveys, think tank engagements, open houses, and public comment opportunities.
- *Demand Assessments* – Transit demand and needs were also conducted and included the use of various GIS-Based analysis over the transit supportive market, and the use of FDOT-approved demand estimation tools. Combining the information from the demand assessments and the baseline conditions, areas with transit supportive characteristics were identified to support the feasible implementation of the transit needs.
- *Metropolitan Planning Process Considerations* – The development of needs are also considered within the context of the metropolitan planning process, considering that it will be an active part of the larger, multimodal transportation network in Highlands County.
- *Land Use and Corridor Development Assessments* – The Land Use and Corridor Development assessment supports the needs development by providing a clear understanding of the built environment and the various challenges and opportunities that may be present in the implementation of this plan.
- *Relationship Review to Other Plans* – A comprehensive review of the Highlands Transit Plan and its relationship to multiple other plans, helps to reveal the various local processes that have stated the transit needs of the community and to gauge support for these needs. As a result, the developed needs are built upon previously stated needs, they are reinforced and refined.

Option 1 – Fixed-Route Services

The first option included a fixed-route express service combined with a flex service route. While the region is spread along the U.S. 27 corridor, transit services seem to not be efficient in meeting the demand of residents. This is particularly because fixed route or flex route services are most effective in areas where residents are able to walk to their destination. While Avon Park and Sebring are urbanized zones, they still have the characteristics of suburban areas where walkability is often a challenge, such as dispersed buildings, no sidewalks, or large building setbacks. These conditions



strain the effectiveness of fixed route services since walkability barriers impact the transit service's effectiveness.

Option 2 – Urban Area Mobility-On-Demand

The second option includes an MOD service that covers the Avon Park and Sebring areas. An on-demand service would be very effective in this area considering the proximity of various places by car while at the same time having the potential to generate demand in the area. The area is moderate in size, with about a 4-mile width and a 15-mile length from north to south. Covering an area like this may present some strains to efficiency, but the U.S. 27 corridor can prove to support speedy mobility within this area.

Option 3 – Countywide Mobility-On-Demand

The third option includes an MOD service that covers the entire County. The countywide service presents multiple efficiency challenges including increased wait times, and a larger fleet. The concept of MOD will still be more effective at covering the service area than transit since most movements exist between point to point. Most of the MOD service may continue to be in high demand in the Avon Park – Sebring area, while the inclusion of Lake Placid may increase travel times since many trips can be expected to occur between Lake Placid and Sebring.

Prioritization of Projects

After consideration of all elements reviewed in this TDP, the following categories were identified to aid in the prioritization of projects:

- **Low Implementation Cost** – This item assesses the importance of a low-cost implementation of service to guide costs towards a sustainable outcome.
- **Low Local Match Amount** – This item assesses the importance of the cost of the service as a share of local funding, which is generally a large indicator of the ability for a successful service implementation.
- **Land Use Compatibility** – this item assesses the compatibility of the service option and the local land use configuration, indicating the capacity for service support.
- **Corridor Support** – This item assesses the ability of the project to support stated goals in support of relieving congestion at key corridors in the study area.
- **Public Support** – This item examines how supportive the public has been in the various public outreach opportunities to the idea of public transit or of each service option.
- **Identified in Plans** – This item examines the inclusion of the project in the various plans reviewed to understand that the processes leading to the TDP have been supportive of this alternative.
- **Ease of Access** – This item examines the ease of access to the various services in terms of walkability or proximity of access.
- **Service Demand** – Based on the demand estimates previously presented, this item examines the potential service demand that can be expected for each option in support of the option in highest demand.



- **Level of Service** – This item looks at the value of the level of service in terms of operation spans, and hours and days of service as well as frequency of service.
- **Service Coverage** – This item looks at the coverage area that can be served by each option, favoring the option that is capable of feasibly serving the largest area.

Table 5 below ranks each transportation option against the priority categories, with a ‘3’ being the most desirable and a ‘1’ being the least desirable. All categories are equal in weight and are summed, for a minimum value of 10 and a maximum value of 30. The Urban Area MOD and Countywide MOD options tie for the highest total score, meaning they both are equally desirable. The Fixed-Route Transit option follows in third place as the least desirable.

Table 5: Prioritization of Transportation Options

Priority Category	Fixed Route Transit	Urban Area MOD	Countywide MOD
Low Implementation Cost	1	3	2
Low Local Match Amount	1	2	3
Land Use Compatibility	1	3	2
Corridor Support	3	2	2
Public Support	3	3	3
Identified in Plans	3	3	3
Ease of Access	1	3	3
Service Demand	2	3	2
Level of Service	2	3	3
Service Coverage	2	1	3
Total Score (out of 30)	19	26	26

Service Option Selection

Considering the financial challenges of adopting a fixed route service, combined with the desire to offer transit access to as much as the population as possible, it is advisable to offer MOD countywide as presented in Option 3.

Ten-Year Transit Needs

Considering the service option selected, the following needs were identified through this process to support the implementation of a new transit service.

Service Needs

- **Implement App-Based On-Demand Transit**

The discussion on the implementation of a new transit service is at the center of the transit plan’s objective. Having gauged local support and implementation, the Highlands Transit Plan will implement the selected service option. All other needs will be determined by the selection of MOD services.



Capital/Infrastructure/Technology Needs

- **Establish Fleet Replacement and Acquisition Program**
Since a new transit service is to be implemented, it is critical to create a successful fleet replacement and acquisition program since this will determine the burden of capital costs on regular intervals and will guide the operating needs depending on the fleet's size.
- **Establish Performance Monitoring Program**
Part of procuring a fleet to serve transit needs in the area includes an established performance monitoring program. This program would track key performance indicators required by the National Transit Database (NTD) as well as other customized indicators that the HRTPO finds essential to service provision.

Policy and Other Needs

- **Establish marketing/awareness campaign**
To ensure the successful delivery of transit services and that the local community may be aware of this resource, a marketing campaign/awareness campaign is paramount in offering information regarding the transit services to be provided.



11 Ten-Year Service and Financial Plan

This section of the TDP presents the Operating and Capital Program for future Highlands County transit services. The proposed service improvements and capital projects are presented, followed by the financial plan to support funding of the improvements presented. Finally, the Operating and Capital Program is presented in its totality.

Operating and Capital Program

Recommended Service Improvements

Service improvements that are funded but not yet operational are included. A summary of key elements include:

- Implement App-Based On-Demand Transit
 - Countywide MOD Zone – This zone would cover all of Highlands County.
- Maintain an average rider wait time of 15 minutes overall

Recommended Capital/Infrastructure/Technology Improvements

The following recommended capital, infrastructure, and technology improvements will support the service improvements in the Recommended Plan.

- Establish Fleet Replacement and Acquisition Program - Establish vehicle replacements and acquisitions to maintain the MOD network and add new services requiring additional vehicles.
- Establish Performance Monitoring Program – A performance monitoring program tracks the performance and efficiency of the MOD services and provides a convenient tool for ensuring the provision of efficient and effective transit services.

Recommended Policy and Other Needs Improvements

- Establish marketing/awareness campaign – Establish an advertising program through the marketing staff for future services to provide informative collateral at key locations including destinations with high demand, such as a hospital, or a major retail store. Installing displays in the vehicles or space for advertisements can invite interested advertisers to announce their business/location information if they are within the service area.

Table 6: Recommended Plan Service Characteristics

Service Type	Description	Service Span	Days of Service	Service Area Population	Estimated Annual Trips	Anticipated Revenue Hour	Trips per Revenue Hour	Operating Cost Per Trip	Estimated Wait Times	Number of Vehicles
MOD	Countywide MOD Zone	7:00 AM – 7:00 PM	Mon-Fri	101,200	93,444	107,640	0.9	\$92.14	40	6
		8:00 AM – 5:00 PM	Saturday							



Recommended Ten-year schedule of projects

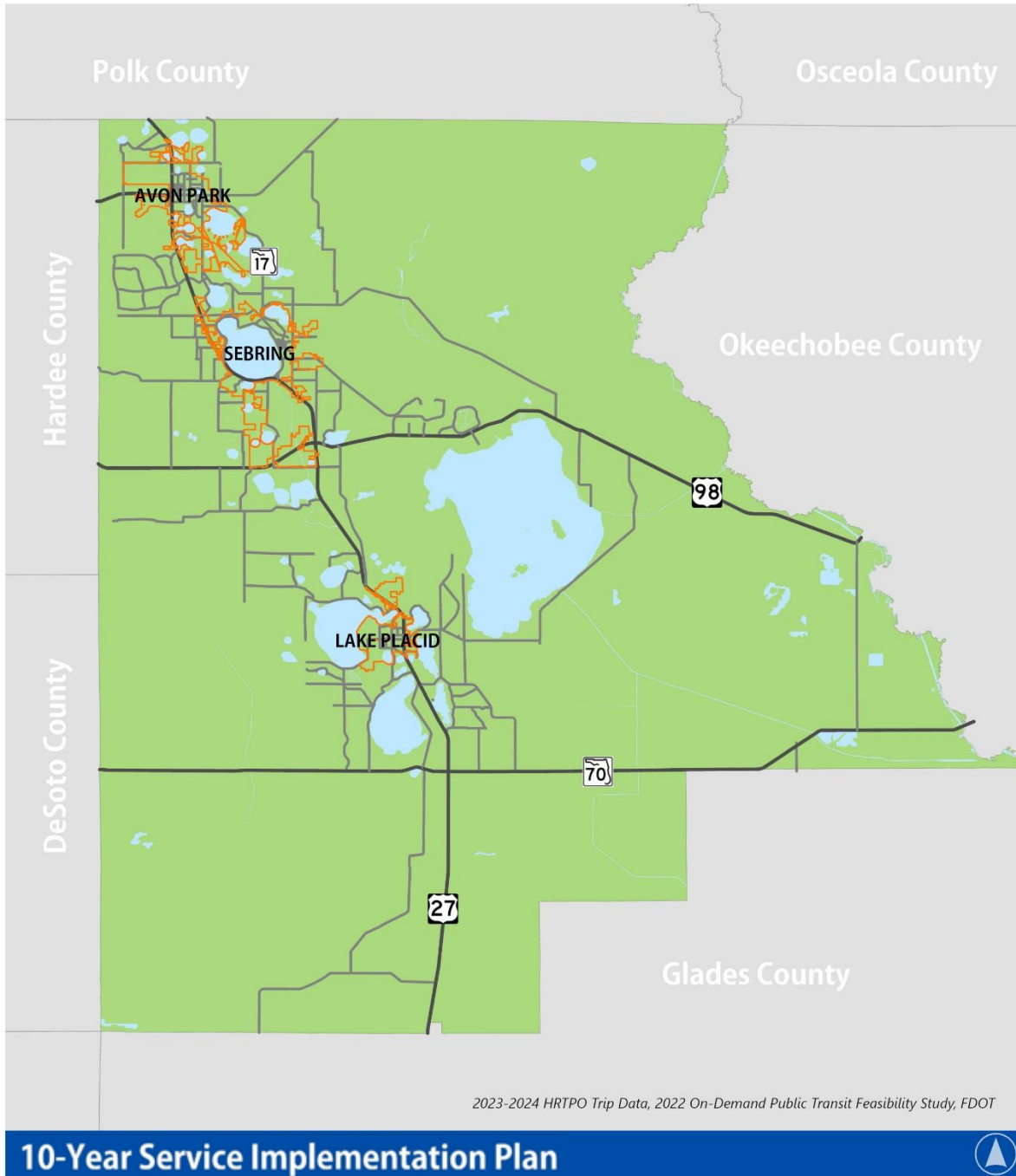
Table 7 below presents the schedule of projects over the ten-year period of the Highlands Transit Plan. Map 7 also shows the recommended projects for implementation over the next ten years.

Table 7: Ten-Year Schedule of Projects

Year	Projects
2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement Countywide MOD Service • Establish Fleet Replacement and Acquisition Program • Establish Performance Monitoring Program • Establish Marketing/Awareness Campaign
2028	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain Countywide MOD service
2029	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain Countywide MOD service
2030	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain Countywide MOD service
2031	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand Marketing/Awareness Campaign
2032	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain Countywide MOD service
2033	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain Countywide MOD service
2034	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain Countywide MOD service



Map 7: Ten-Year Service Implementation Plan



10-Year Service Implementation Plan

Legend

- Highlands Microtransit Zone
- City Limits
- Major Roads
- Minor Roads
- Water



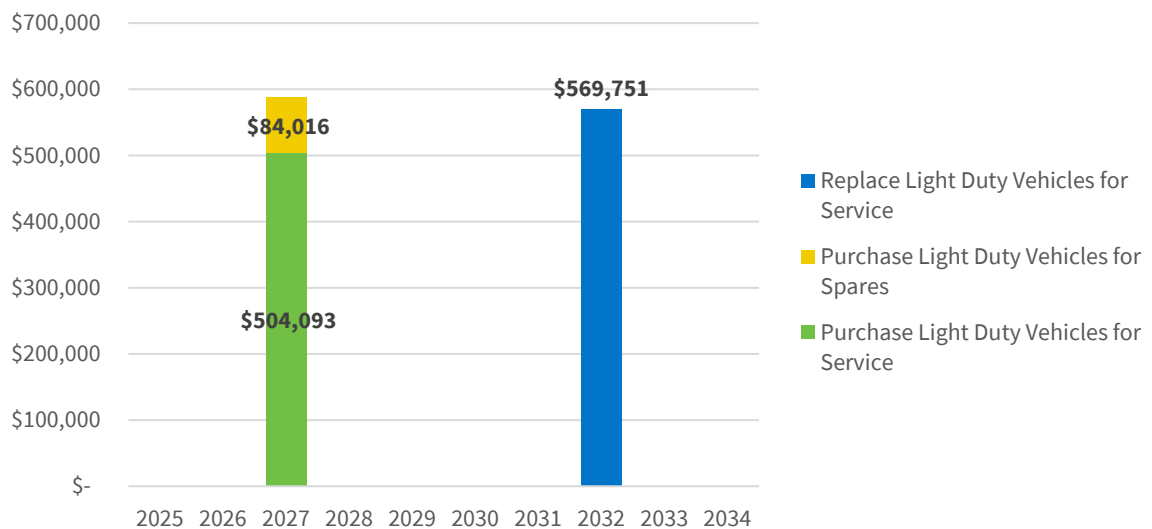
Recommended Ten-year Financial Plan

The recommended plan assumes costs will continue to increase with inflation over the ten-year timeframe. New grant or FDOT revenue sources may be added or increase over time based on new services implemented or planned service levels. The recommended plan budget, including annual inflation rates by cost and revenue category, is based on a variety of factors, such as assumptions regarding service costs, information from other recent Florida transit plans, and discussions with HRTPO staff. The operating and capital components of the recommended plan are presented in more detail below.

Recommended Plan Cost Assumptions

- Based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI)-based inflation data for the last ten years, from 2013-2022, an average annual inflation rate of 2.5% was used for all operating cost projections. The cost per revenue hour was determined using NTD data from a variety of agencies serving similar communities or similar services (2021\$). A cost of \$94.00 per revenue hour and the 2.5% CPI-based inflation rate were used for fixed route transit cost estimations.
- Operating cost projections for the new MOD service were based on service cost data using a Software as a Service (SaaS) model operation. Accessible vehicles provided by the selected operator were assumed for providing MOD services. A cost per revenue hour of \$50.00 (2023\$) was used for projecting MOD costs. These costs are based on industry knowledge.
- Operating costs for the enhancement of services during the ten-year period are based on initial assumptions with an annual inflation rate of 2.5%.
- Fixed route services are modeled using a medium duty vehicle, at a cost assumption of \$100,000. MOD vehicles were assumed at \$80,000 as they are modeled on a light duty vehicle.
- A vehicle replacement schedule is presented in Figure 3. This schedule assumes purchase of a total of six light duty vehicles for revenue service and one for spare, for an estimated total of about \$1.2 million over ten years.

Figure 3: Vehicle Replacement Plan





- The following other capital or operating costs are assumed based on data from a variety of agencies serving similar communities or similar services:
 - The purchase of Radio Equipment for vehicles at \$95,000
 - Initial Advertising and Marketing Needs estimated at \$45,000 and ongoing needs thereafter at \$20,000, with an applied 2.5% annual inflation rate
 - Annual Planning Support, whether through a General Planning Contract, or through a contracted planning service that is estimated at \$20,000 per year, which can include in part the commissioning of the Transit Asset Management (TAM) Plan, to be submitted every four years.
 - A TDP Major Update cost, scheduled for 2030, at an estimated \$158,300

Recommended Plan Revenue Assumptions

Revenues for the recommended plan are based on HRTPO historical data, and discussions with HRTPO staff. The assumptions for the revenue sources for the next ten years include the following

- Annual revenues from Federal, State, and local sources included in the financial plan were projected to continue and were inflated at 2.5% per year.
- Revenues projections from federal sources, including annual FTA formula grant funds, are based on historical data found either in the UPWP or the TIP.
- Revenue from FDOT Block Grant Fund is expected to continue growing from \$250,000 to about \$500,000 by the implementation of the countywide service expansion and may increase as ridership grows.
- Based on the financial projections, it is expected that the local match for Federal and State contributions for FY 2027 will be at \$222,697, a figure that is expected to decrease as ridership increases over the ten-year period.
- A 2.7% in farebox recovery is assumed for both fixed route and MOD services, although this may be higher for MOD services given that they are generally considered a premium service.

Table 8 shows a summary of the financial plan. The full financial plan can be found in Appendix D.

Table 8: TDP Financial Plan Summary

Cost/Revenue Category	10-Year Total	Annual Average
CAPITAL		
Costs		
Operator Contract to Capital	\$10,011,239	\$1,001,124
Vehicles	\$1,157,860	\$115,786
Other Capital	\$383,359	\$38,336
Capital Costs - Subtotal	\$11,552,459	\$1,155,246
Revenue		
Federal Revenue		
Section 5307	\$9,241,967	\$924,197
State Revenue		
Soft Match Toll	\$2,310,492	\$231,049
Capital Revenue - Subtotal	\$11,552,459	\$1,155,246
Capital Costs & Revenues Balance	\$0	\$0
OPERATING		
Costs		
Service Operations	\$15,016,859	\$1,501,686
Planning Support	\$869,054	\$86,905
Operating Costs - Subtotal	\$15,885,913	\$1,588,591
Revenue		
Section 5311	\$7,942,957	\$794,296
Section 5307	\$3,971,478	\$397,148
State Revenue		
Block Grant	\$1,872,502	\$187,250
Local Revenue		
Estimated Farebox	\$664,183	\$66,418
Other Required Local Revenue	\$1,434,793	\$143,479
Operating Revenue - Subtotal	\$15,885,913	\$1,588,591
Operating Costs & Revenues Balance	\$0	\$0
PERCENT LOCAL GOVERNMENT SHARE OF TOTAL REVENUE		
% Local Government Share	6%	



Recommended Implementation Plan

The Implementation Plan in Table 9 outlines recommended improvements from 2025 through 2034. The table also shows the implementation years for improvements based on information available at this time. It is important to emphasize that the implementation schedule shown in the table does not preclude the opportunity to delay or advance any projects. As priorities change, funding assumptions do not materialize, or more funding becomes available, this project implementation can be updated.

Table 9: Ten-Year Implementation Plan

Improvements	Implementation Year	Annual Operating Cost	Total Capital Cost	Potential Revenue Source
Service Improvements				
Countywide MOD	2027	\$2,730,000	\$277,984	5307: Operating 5311: Operating Farebox Revenue State Block Grant Fund Local Match 5307 Share to Capital State Soft Match
Capital/Technology/Policy/Other Improvements				
Radio Equipment	2025	NA	\$95,000	5307 Share to Capital State Soft Match
Advertising / Marketing	2025	NA	\$283,000	5307 Share to Capital State Soft Match
Staff Support	2025	\$60,000	NA	5307: Operating 5311: Operating
Annual Planning Support	2025	\$20,000	NA	5307: Operating 5311: Operating
TDP Major Update	2030	\$159,000	NA	5307: Operating 5311: Operating



Appendix A: Baseline Conditions Tech Memo



HRTPO

Heartland Regional Transportation Planning Organization



Highlands Transit Plan

Technical Support Memo 1 Section 2: Baseline Conditions



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Section 1 Introduction

This study was initiated by the Heartland Regional Transportation Planning Organization (HRTPO) to prepare a Transit Development Plan (TDP) for Highlands County. This TDP, called the Highlands Transit Plan, will help establish a strategic vision to guide the planning, development, and implementation of public transportation service in Highlands County over the next 10 years.

The Highlands Transit Plan includes the following key elements:

- Evaluation of demographics and travel behavior/patterns
- Assessment of existing public transportation options
- Summary of public involvement and community outreach efforts and input received
- Identification and prioritization of public transportation service and capital needs
- Ten-year service, financial, and implementation plan

1.1 State Requirements

The Highlands Transit Plan is required for Highlands County to be eligible for state public transportation funding. According to Rule 14-73.001, Public Transit, of the Florida Administrative Code (FAC), the TDP (or annual updated thereof) must be the applicant's planning, development, and operational guidance document to be used in developing the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and FDOT's Five-Year Work Program.

The current TDP requirements were adopted by FDOT on February 20, 2007, and include the following:

- Major updates must be completed at least once every 5 years, covering a 10-year planning horizon with an annual progress report or assessment conducted each year between major updates.
- A public involvement plan must be developed and approved by FDOT or be consistent with the approved Metropolitan/Transportation Planning Organization's (MPO) public involvement plan. The Heartland Regional TPO is the TPO serving the Sebring-Avon Park Urbanized Area within Highlands County.
- FDOT, the Regional Workforce Development Board, and the TPO must be advised of all public meetings at which the TDP is presented and discussed, and these entities must be given the opportunity to review and comment on the TDP during the development of the mission, goals, objectives, alternatives, and 10-year implementation program.

Estimation of the community's demand for transit service (10-year annual projections) using the planning tools provided by FDOT or a demand estimation technique approved by FDOT must be included. An additional requirement for the TDP was added by the Florida Legislature in 2007 when it adopted House Bill 985. This legislation amended s. 341.071, Florida Statutes (F.S.), requiring transit agencies to "... specifically address potential enhancements to productivity and performance which would have the effect of increasing farebox recovery ratio." FDOT subsequently issued guidance requiring the TDP and each annual update to include a 1–2-page summary report on the farebox recovery ratio and strategies implemented and planned to improve it as an appendix item.



1.2 Organization of Memorandum

This Technical Memorandum is the first of four memoranda being prepared for the Highlands Transit Plan. This initial memorandum is organized into four major sections (including this introduction).

Section 2 summarizes the **Baseline Conditions** with respect to the study area and demographics for Highlands County. This includes a physical description of the study area, a population profile, and key demographics indicative of the traditional public transportation customer, including employment and journey-to-work characteristics. It also includes a review of tourism information, land use trends, major transit trip generators and attractors, commute patterns, and major employers. The information compiled and presented in this section provides the basis for more detailed analysis in subsequent tasks of the Highlands Transit Plan.

Section 3 presents the **Public Transportation Performance Evaluation**, which includes an inventory of transportation service providers, trend analyses of existing transit service, and peer review analyses of peer communities and future peers.

Section 4 includes the **Situation Appraisal**, which documents a review of relevant plans, policies, and trends and summarizes the situation appraisal prepared for the Highlands Transit Plan.



Section 2 Baseline Conditions

The update to this report utilizes data sources that are the most readily available at the time of publishing. The Covid-19 Pandemic has altered historical ridership data for the past several years. For this reason, and the fact that 2020 census data is incomplete, the data in this report will reflect the best available sources.

This section establishes the baseline conditions of the study area and provides context for the Highlands Transit Plan through the components within Figure 2-1 and the following subsections:

- Study Area Description
- Population and Housing Profile
- Employment and Economic Profile

Discussion of the above is supported by maps and graphics. Primary data sources include the US Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS) and socioeconomic data from the regional travel demand model. These data sources are supplemented by other local and regional sources, as needed.

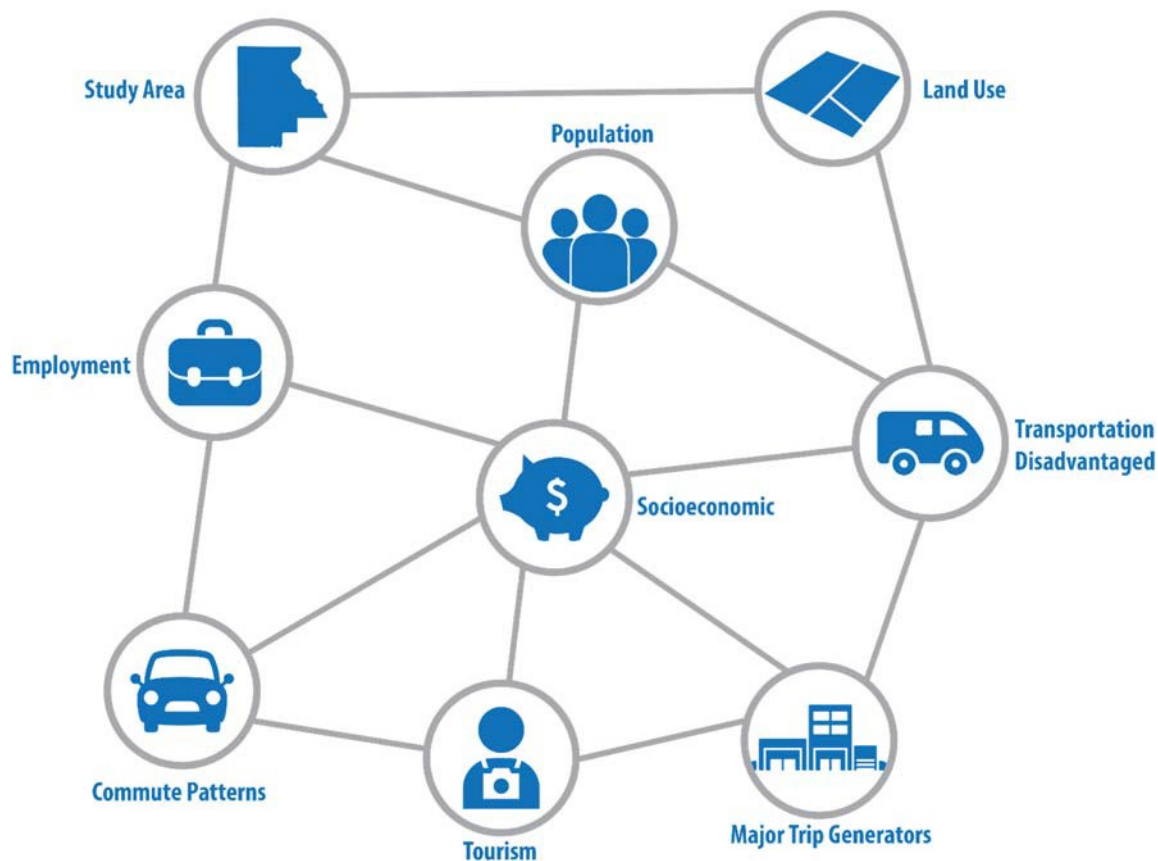


Figure 2-1: Baseline Conditions Components



2.1 Study Area Description



The study area for the Highlands Transit Plan includes all of Highlands County, with focus on the Sebring-Avon Park Urbanized Area, designated by the 2010 Census. Incorporated areas within Highlands County include Sebring, Avon Park, and Lake Placid.

Map 2-1 illustrates the Highlands Transit Plan study area. Highlands County is known for its many lakes, providing opportunities for water sports and leisure activities, the Sebring International Raceway, home of the "Twelve Hours of Sebring" event, arts and culture events, and much more.

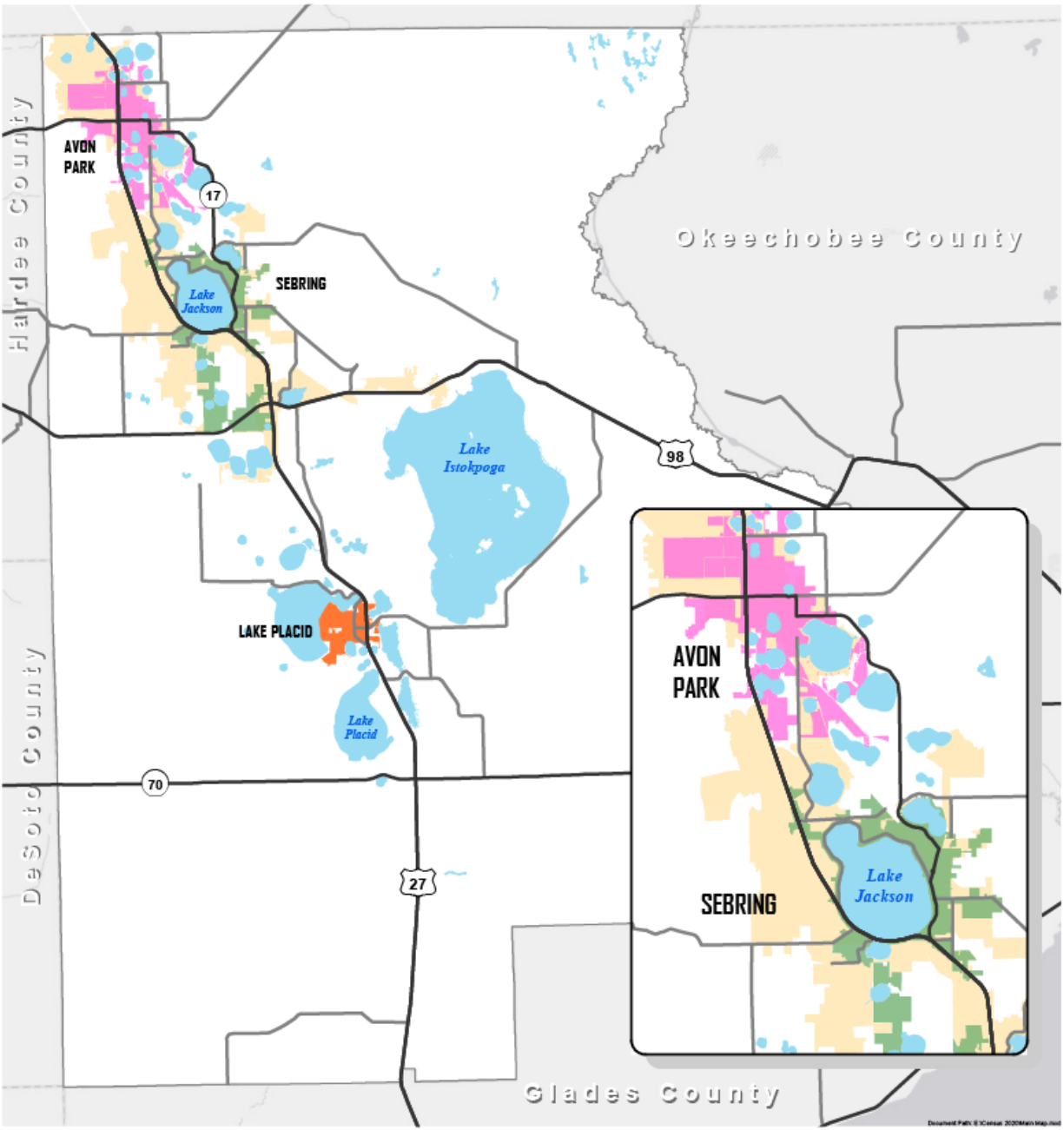
Highlands County is the 14th largest county in Florida in terms of area. As shown in Table 2-1, the total area of Highlands County is just over 1,100 square miles, 92% of which is land area. The water area remains the same from 2010 to 2020.

Table 2-1: Study Area Physical Description

Physical Description	2010	2020
Total Area	1,106	1,106
Water Area	89	89
Land Area	1,017	1,017






Note: Area shown in square miles.

Source: US Census Bureau, 2010 and 2020 Census QuickFacts



Study Area

Legend

-  Water
-  Urbanized Area
-  Avon Park
-  Lake Placid
-  Sebring
-  Major Roads
-  Minor Roads





2.2 Population and Housing Profile



This subsection presents a population and housing characteristics profile for Highlands County. Table 2-2 summarizes the population change for Highlands County as a whole, its cities, and the unincorporated areas from 2000 to 2020. Overall, the total population of Highlands County has grown approximately 15.87% between 2000 and 2020, and the unincorporated areas have grown at nearly the same rate as the overall county during this period. Although Lake Placid experienced the highest growth rate during this period at 41.5%, it has the smallest population base from which to start, therefore growing by 692 people during this period. Collectively, the cities experienced a (14.44%) growth rate during the 20-year period. The total number of residents in the unincorporated county areas grew by over twice as many people than in the cities during this 20-year period.

Table 2-2: Population Characteristics and Trends

Population	2020		2010		2000	Percent Change (2000 to 2020)	Absolute Growth (2000 to 2020)
Highlands County	101,235	↖	98,786	↖	87,366	15.87%	13,869
Avon Park	9,658	↖	8,836	↖	8,542	13.06%	1,116
Lake Placid	2,360	↖	2,223	↖	1,668	41.5%	692
Sebring	10,729	↖	10,491	↖	9,667	10.99%	1,062
Incorporated Only	22,747	↖	21,550	↖	19,877	14.44%	2,870
Unincorporated	78,488	↖	77,236	↖	67,489	16.3%	10,999

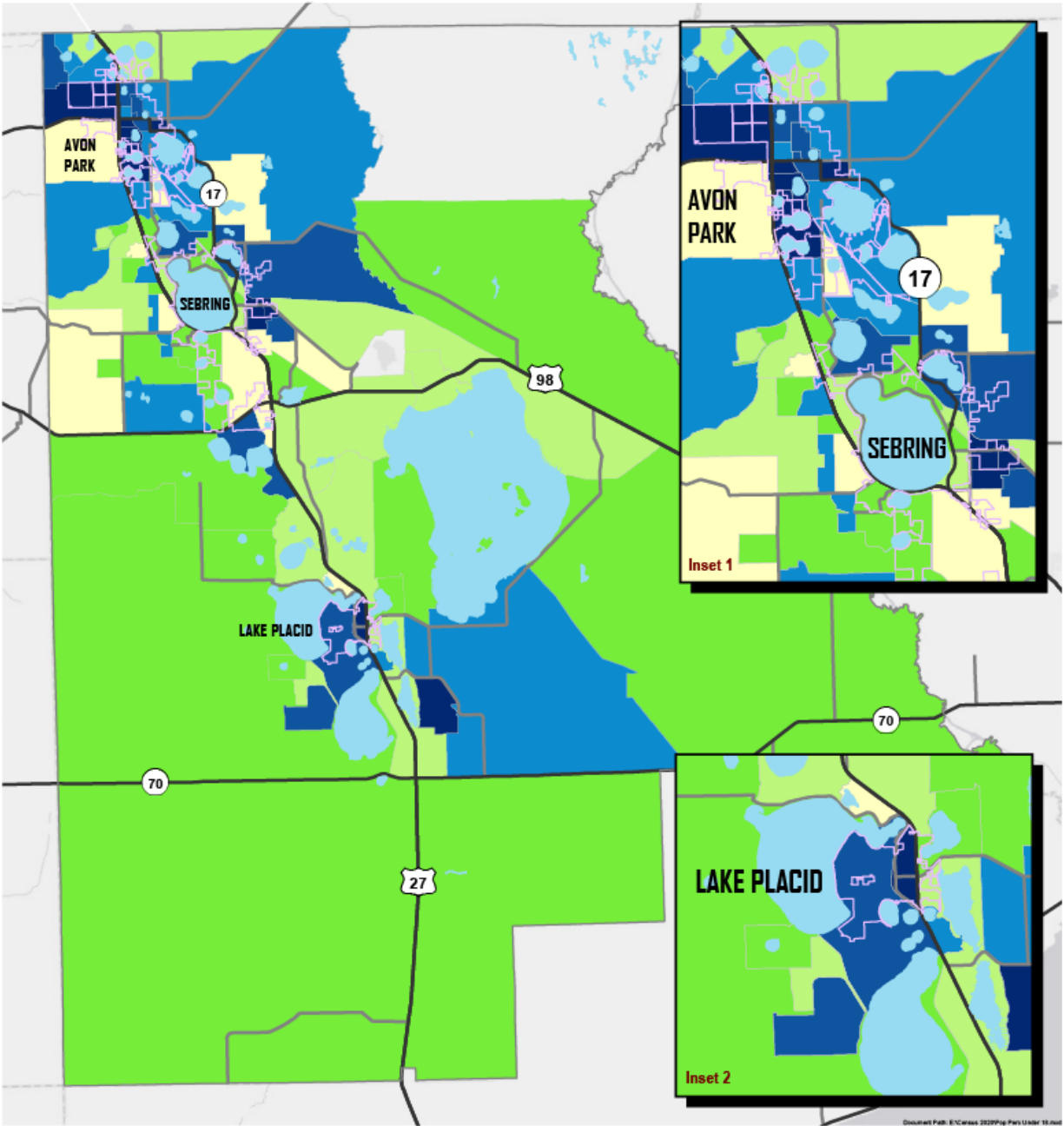
Source: US Census Bureau 2000, 2010, 2020 P1

Table 2-3 summarizes the trend of different socio-demographic variables for Highlands County during the same period from 2000 to 2020. The percentage of younger residents (age 15 and younger) has increased by 7.87% and the percentage of households with zero vehicles has decreased by 21.32%. Whereas percentages of older residents (age 65 and older) and the percentages of households below poverty have increased (29.44% and 18.2%, respectively). Black/African American, and Hispanic populations have increased since 2000. Additionally, since the percentage of households under the poverty level and the average number of available vehicles per household are increasing, this indicates that a higher percentage of the average household income is likely being spent on transportation. Maps 2-2 through 2-4 illustrate the 2020 population characteristics identified in Table 2-3. In general, the urbanized areas around Sebring and Avon Park as well as the Town of Lake Placid, have the highest concentrations of population in the county, have the greatest percentages of younger and older residents, minorities, lower-income households, and households with zero available vehicles.

Table 2-3: Age and Household Vehicle Availability Trends

Population	2020		2010		2000		Percent Change (2000 to 2020)	Absolute Change (2000 to 2020)
Age								
Under 15 Years	14,707	14.5%	14,803	15.0%	13,634	15.6%	7.87%	1,073
65 Years and Over	37,320	36.8%	31,822	32.3%	28,833	33.0%	29.44%	8,487
Ethnic Origin								
White	65,511	64.7%	79,972	81.0%	72,926	83.5%	-10.17%	-7,415
Black/African American	9,484	9.3%	9,263	9.4%	8,155	9.3%	16.3%	1,329
Other	5,297	5.2%	9,551	9.6%	6,285	7.2%	-15.72%	-998
Hispanic/Latino Origin	20,943	20.6%	17,157	17.4%	10,542	12.1%	98.7%	10,401
Low-Income Households								
Households Below Poverty	5,956	13.9%	6,105	15.1%	5,038	13.4%	18.2%	918
Vehicles Available in Household								
No Vehicle Available	2,166	5%	2,135	5.3%	2,753	7.3%	-21.32%	-587
1 Vehicle Available	20,588	48.1%	20,106	49.8%	18,856	50.3%	9.19%	1,732
2 Vehicles Available	15,424	36.1%	13,806	34.2%	12,019	32.1%	28.33%	3,405
3+ Vehicles Available	4,543	10.6%	3,885	9.6%	3,843	10.3%	18.2%	700

Source: US Census Bureau, 2000, 2010, 2020 Census P2, /ACS DP04, DP05, B17017



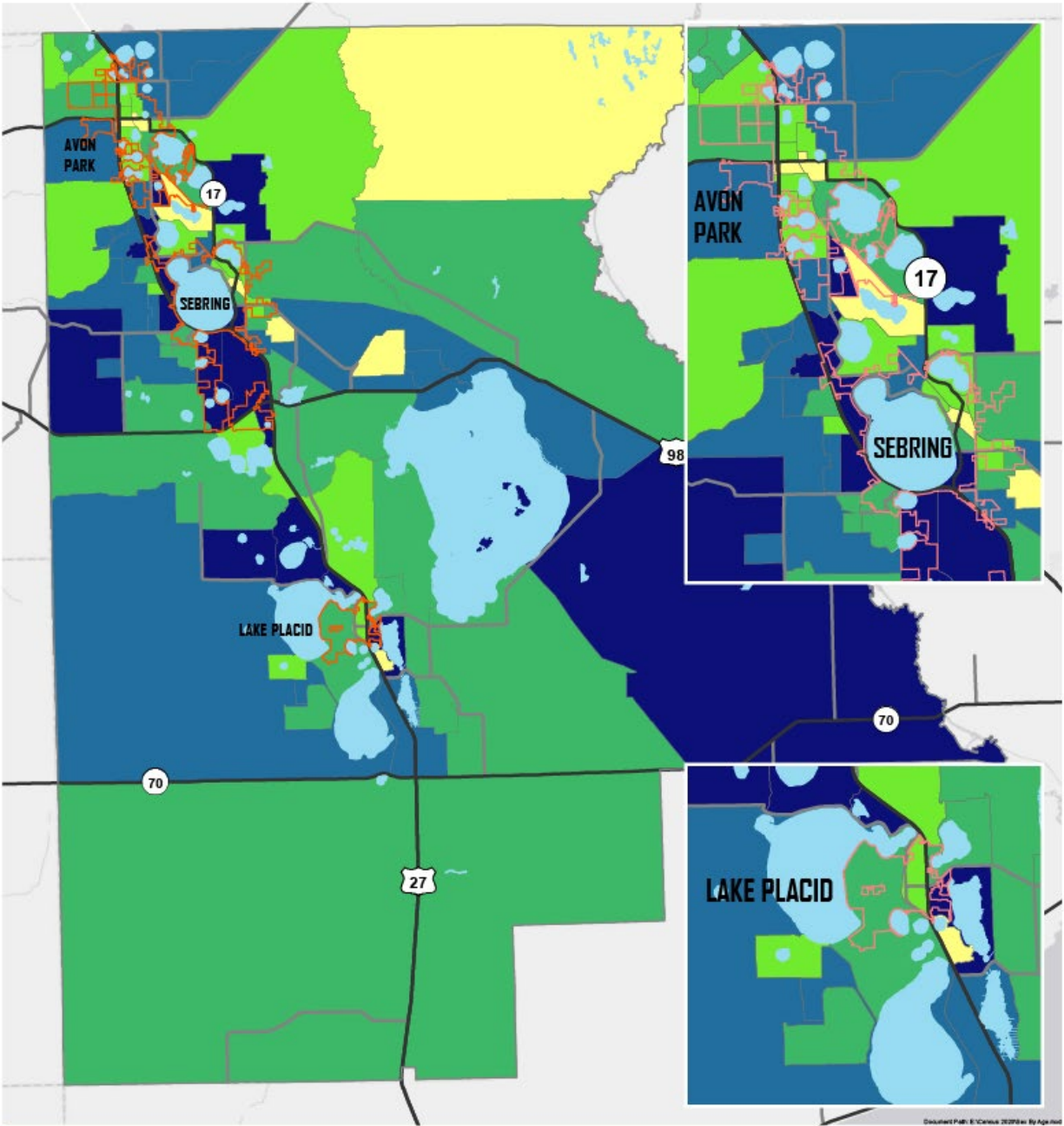
Percent of Population Under 18 Years of Age



Legend

- 3 - 9
- 10 - 14
- 15 - 19
- 20 - 22
- 23 - 25
- 26 - 32
- City
- Water
- Major Roads
- Minor Roads



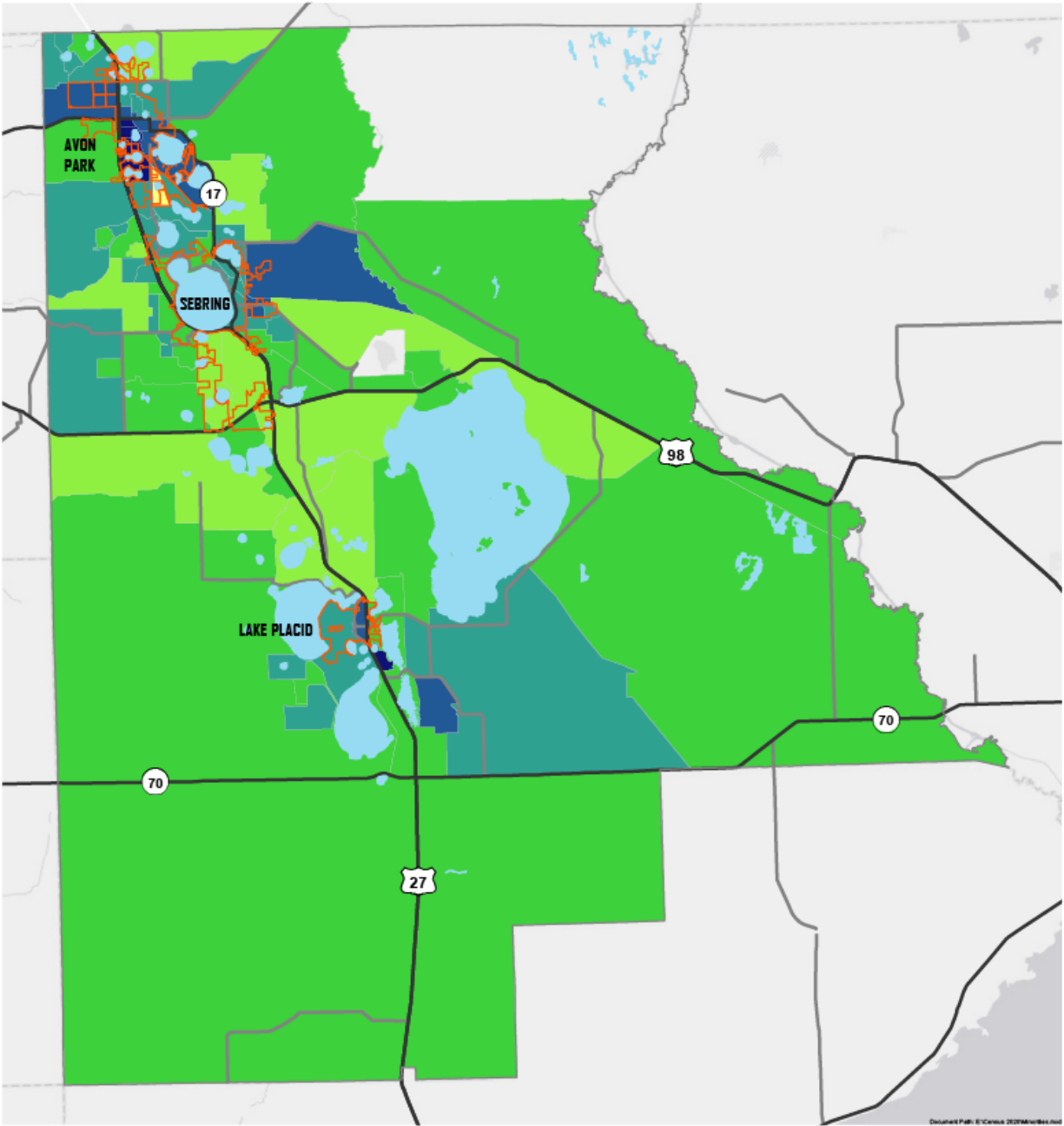


Percent of Population Age 65 and Older

Legend











- 0% - 11%
 25% - 38%
 56% - 98%
 City
 Major Roads
- 12% - 24%
 39% - 55%
 Minor Roads
 Water





Minority Population (%) 

Legend

- | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---------|---|----------|---|-----------|---|-----------|---|-----------|---|-------------|---|------|---|-------------|
|  | 0% - 6% |  | 7% - 18% |  | 19% - 32% |  | 33% - 55% |  | 56% - 70% |  | 71% - 83% |  | City |  | Major Roads |
| | | | | | | | |  | Water |  | Minor Roads | | | | |



Age and Income Distribution

Age Distribution

The current and future age distribution of Highlands County's population are major factors when considering demand for public transportation. Persons aged 15 or younger are not legally allowed to operate a motor vehicle by themselves, and persons age 65 and older are traditionally considered more likely to use public transportation, as the aging process may place limitations on their ability to drive. Teenagers who are unable to afford or have access to their own vehicle may be more likely to use public transportation or find a ride (carpool). In addition, the Millennial ("Gen Y") generation is a relatively new market of choice public transportation riders. However, this generation is greatly influential since Millennials now represent approximately one-third of the total U.S. population, according to the U.S. Executive Office Council of Economic Advisors. Shaped by technology and the Internet, the preferences of Millennials are very different than preceding generations, particularly related to housing and transportation.

In Highlands County, the population distribution within each age category has changed incrementally since 2000, with a decreasing percentage in those aged 17 or younger and an increase in persons aged 65 and older, as seen in Table 2-4. Highlands County has lower percentages of residents ages 18–44 and higher percentages of residents aged 65 and older compared to the state.

As seen in Table 2-5, the percentage of population in Highlands County from birth to age 17 is projected to increase by 32% overall by 2035, and the population age 80 and older is projected to increase by 53% by 2035.

Income Distribution

Income is a leading influence in travel decisions. Due to less available disposable income, low-income households are less likely to own one vehicle per licensed driver and, therefore, may be more dependent on public transportation to make essential or recreational trips. Table 2-6 depicts the income distribution of Highlands County. The largest income bracket includes households with annual incomes between \$50,000 and \$74,999, representing 21.6% of the population. In 2020, 28% of all households in Highlands County had an annual household income of less than \$25,000, closely aligning with the 2022 Federal Poverty Level of \$27,750 for a family of four.

Table 2-4: Highlands County Age Distribution Trends Compared with Florida

Age Group	2015		2010		2000	
	Highlands	Florida	Highlands	Florida	Highlands	Florida
0-17	17,571 (17.9%)	4,041,123 (20.5%)	17,972 (18.2%)	4,002,091 (21.3%)	16,744 (19.2%)	3,646,340 (22.3%)
18-44	23,958 (24.4%)	6,676,684 (33.8%)	23,961 (24.3%)	6,460,456 (34.4%)	22,373 (25.6%)	5,899,949 (39.8%)
45-64	24,006 (24.4%)	5,276,974 (26.8%)	25,031 (25.3%)	5,079,161 (27%)	19,416 (22.2%)	3,628,492 (19.7%)
65+	32,793 (33.4%)	3,650,991 (18.8%)	31,822 (32.2%)	3,259,602 (17.3%)	28,833 (33%)	2,807,597 (18.2%)

Source: US Census Bureau, 2000 and 2010 Census, 2015 ACS

Table 2-5: Projected Age Distribution

Projected Age	2020	2025	2030	2035	Percent Change (2020 to 2035)	Absolute Change (2020 to 2035)
0-4	4,765	5281	5424	5574	17%	809
5-17	12,809	13,854	14,256	14,792	15%	1,983
18-24	6,150	6,830	7,245	7,162	16%	1,012
25-54	27,663	29,848	31,005	32,377	17%	4,713
55-64	15,554	15,826	14,554	14,604	-6%	-950
65-79	24,833	28,669	31,693	32,933	33%	8,099
80+	10,290	12,543	14,073	15,759	53%	5,469
Total	102,065	112,850	118,250	123,200	21%	21,135

Source: University of Florida's Bureau of Economic and Business Research (BEBR) population projections. (Medium High)



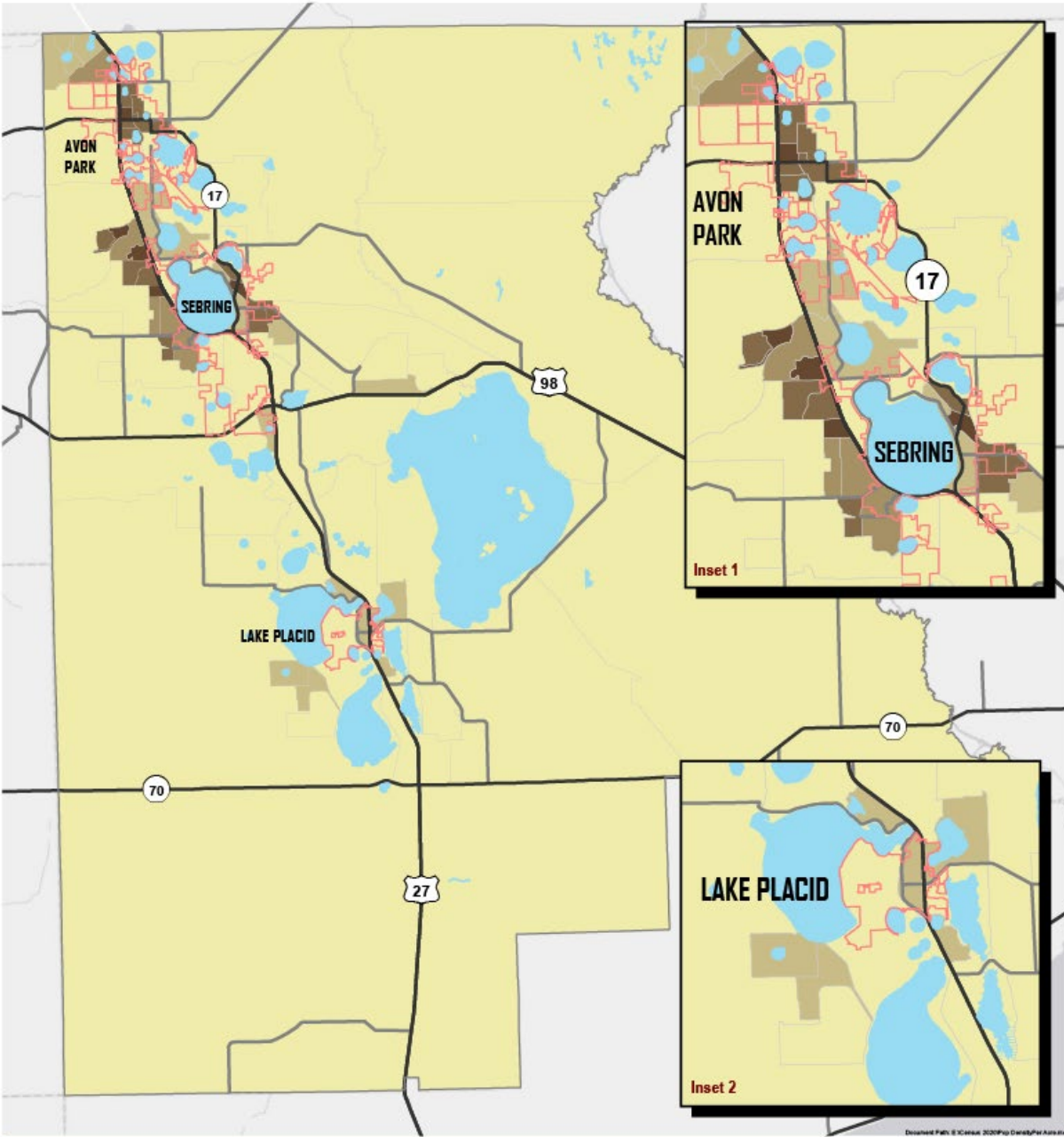
Table 2-6: Income Distribution

Annual Household Income	2020		2010		2000	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Less than \$10,000	2778	6.5%	3,351	8.3%	4,347	11.6%
\$10,000 to \$14,999	2509	5.9%	3,028	7.5%	3,597	9.6%
\$15,000 to \$24,999	6734	15.8%	6,662	16.5%	7,344	19.6%
\$25,000 to \$34,999	5487	12.8%	7,187	17.8%	6,482	17.3%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	6314	14.8%	7,752	19.2%	6,782	18.1%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	9208	21.6%	6,419	15.9%	5,171	13.8%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	3794	8.9%	3,109	7.7%	1,948	5.2%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	3409	8.0%	2,140	5.3%	1,162	3.1%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	1318	3.1%	444	1.1%	262	0.7%
\$200,000 or more	1170	2.7%	283	0.7%	375	1.0%

Source: US Census Bureau, 2000 and 2010 Census, 2020 ACS DP03

Population and Housing Densities

Population and housing densities were calculated for 2020 and 2030. Population density is expressed by population per acre and is illustrated below. Housing density is expressed as dwelling unit (du) per acre and is illustrated in Map 2-9 for 2020 and Map 2-10 for 2030. Low-population (0-1 persons per acre) and housing density (0-1 du/acre) areas in Highlands County occur in mostly unincorporated areas. The highest densities are found closer towards the downtown centers of Avon Park, Sebring, and Lake Placid and peak at 5-6 persons/acre and 5-6 du/acre today.

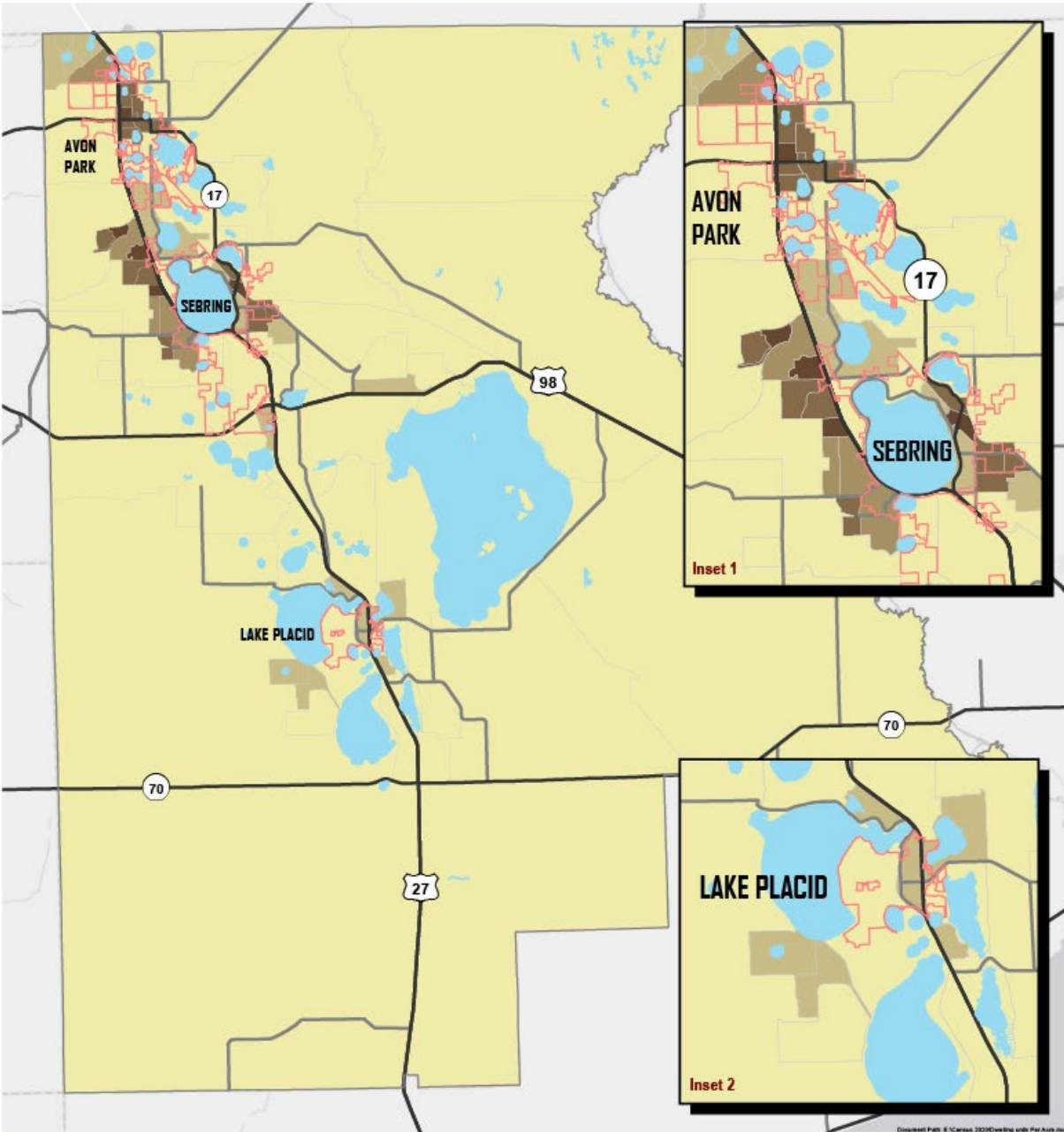


2020 Population Density

Legend

0 - 1	2 - 3	5 - 6	City	Major Roads
1 - 2	3 - 4	Water	Minor Roads	

0 2 4 8 Miles



2020 Housing Density Per Acre (Including Housing Units & Group Quarters)

- Legend**
- 0 - 1
 - 1 - 2
 - 2 - 3
 - 3 - 4
 - 5 - 6
 - City
 - Water
 - Major Roads
 - Minor Roads





Transportation Disadvantaged Populations

The Transportation Disadvantaged Service Plan (TDSP) for the service area provides an analysis of population forecasts prepared by the Bureau of Economic and Business Research and applying the changes to the TD population and trip rate estimate previously described, the tables below display the future potential demand for critical need transportation in Highlands County through 2029.

To qualify for the TD program, a person must:

- Live in DeSoto, Hardee, Highlands, or Okeechobee counties.
- Not be able to obtain their own transportation due to a disability, age, or income.
- Not be able to get a ride from household members or others for life-sustaining trips (medical, grocery, work, job-related training/education, and other vital services).
- Complete the eligibility process with MTM Transit.
- Pay a co-pay for each trip. The co-pay is currently \$2 per trip.

Total Critical TD Population	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
<i>Disabled</i>	5,898	5,938	5,979	6,021	6,062	6,104	6,146	6,189	6,232	6,275	6,318
<i>Low-Income; Not Disabled; No Auto/Transit</i>	3,221	3,243	3,266	3,288	3,311	3,334	3,357	3,380	3,403	3,427	3,451

Annual Trips Needed to Serve Critical Need TD Population										
2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
1,934,523	1,967,216	2,000,462	2,034,270	2,068,649	2,105,265	2,142,528	2,180,450	2,219,044	2,258,321	2,293,777

The capacity of the CTC to provide transportation for individuals who are transportation disadvantaged is contingent on the program funding availability and cost per trip as identified by the Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged Rate Calculation model.

	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
<i>TD Trust Fund Allocation</i>	\$467,885	\$467,885	\$427,654
<i>10% Local Match</i>	\$51,987	\$51,987	\$42,765
<i>Trip Provided</i>	22,458	19,117	14,735
<i>Est. Trip Demand Annually for Critical Need TD Population</i>	1,967,216	2,000,462	2,034,270
<i>Projected Trip Shortfall</i>	1,944,758	1,981,345	2,019,535

Another role of HRTPO is to provide public transportation in those rural areas with a population of less than 50,000, where many residents must rely on rural public transit to reach their activities and destinations. As a recipient of federal operating funds under the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) Section 5311 Formula Grants for Rural Areas program, HRTPO coordinates with MTM Transit as the CTC to provide rural transit service in DeSoto, Hardee, Highlands and Okeechobee counties.



2.3 *Employment and Economic Profile*

The Highlands County employment and economic profile includes the following subsections:

- Employment Characteristics
- Employment Densities
- Journey-to-Work Commute Patterns
- Commuter Travel Flow
- Major Trip Generators
- Tourism and Visitors Level
- Land Use and Densities

Employment Characteristics

Table 2-10 identifies the labor force trends in Highlands County. In general, labor force indicators are trending up in Highlands County in terms of total business, and total employment. However, the percentage of population in the work force is declining from 2010. The percentage of population age 65 and older is projected to increase by 86% from 2020 to 2035 and the “working age population” of persons ages 18–64 is projected to increase by 27% during this same period (see Table 2-5). The increasing growth in retired-age persons could be a major reason employment levels are trending down in Highlands County. These trends are likely to continue in the future unless new major employers or industry attract employees to Highlands County.



In terms of the impact to public transportation, the trend in increasing employment levels will support existing work commute trips. As the percent of population in the labor force shrinks, there will likely be a greater need for life sustaining or essential trips, such as for medical appointments, grocery shopping, banking, etc. among the aging population as driving becomes more difficult.

Table 2-10: Labor Force Trends

Labor Force	2020		2010		2000
Total Businesses	1,994	↩	1,980		N/A
Total Employment	34,339	↩	34,083	↩	30,051
Percent of Population in Civilian Labor	42.3%	↩	46%	↩	43.50%

Source: US Census Bureau, 2000 and 2010 Census, 2020 ACS DP03, CB2000CBP

The top 10 private employers in Highlands County are listed in Table 2-11 and employ over 5,051 (14.7%) of Highlands County’s workforce. The top private employer in Highlands County is Advent Health with over 1,639 employees and the second largest private employer is Walmart with 935 employees.

Table 2-11: Top Private Employers

Employer	Employees
Advent Health	1,639
Walmart	935
Publix	522
The Results Company	351
Highlands Regional Medical Center (HCA)	339
Alan Jay Automotive Network	400
Costa Farms	388
Orchid Cove at Lake Placid	164
The Palms of Sebring	188
Royal Care of Avon Park	125
Total Top 10 Private Employers	5,051

Source: Highlands County Economic Development (2020)

Table 2-12 shows the top five public employers in the county. These entities employ nearly 3,100 employees (9% of Highlands County’s workforce), with Highlands County School Board employing the greatest number at 1,599 people.

Table 2-12: Top Public Employers

Employer	Employees
Highlands County School Board	1,599
South Florida State College	421
Highlands County BoCC	381
Highlands County Sheriff's Office	371
Avon Park Correction Institution	391
Total Top 5 Public Employers	3,098

Source: Highlands County Economic Development (2020)



Journey-to-Work Commute Patterns

Journey-to-work characteristics for Highlands County were compiled from the American Community Survey (ACS) and are shown in Table 2-13. Single-occupant trips are trending up, and carpool trips are trending down. If public transportation or micro mobility were an option in Highlands County, this could help reduce single-occupant trips, provide another alternative to get to work, and potentially lower the mean travel time to work (though many factors, including congestion, affect this).

Commuting to Work	2020		2010		2000	
Car, Truck, or Van (Drove alone)	26,709	80.1%	25,316	76.1%	21,731	74.1%
Car, Truck, or Van (Carpooled)	3,423	10.2%	4,594	13.8%	5,652	19.3%
Public Transportation (excluding taxicab)	195	.58%	653	2.0%	326	1.1%
Taxicab	0	0.0%	6	0.0%	19	0.0%
Walked	576	1.7%	665	2.0%	499	1.7%
Other	738	2.2%	813	2.5%	353	1.2%
Worked at Home	1,664	4.9%	1,207	3.6%	762	2.6%
Mean Travel Time	20.6 Min		22 Min		23 Min	

Table 2-13: Journey-to-Work Commute Patterns

Source: US Census Bureau, 2000 and 2010 Census, 2020 ACS B08137, S0801.



Commuter Travel Flow

An analysis of commuting patterns for Highlands County residents and employees was completed using the U.S. Census Bureau’s Center for Economic Studies “On the Map” tool. As shown in Table 2-14, the Highlands County labor force increased by 1.1%, or approximately 168 people, between 2010 and 2019. The majority of Highlands County residents continue to live and work in Highlands County, followed by inter-county commutes to Polk and Lee counties for employment.

Table 2-14: Where Highlands County Residents Work, 2010 and 2019

County of Employment	2019		2010		Percent	Absolute
	# of Workers	% Distribution	# of Workers	% Distribution	Change (2000-2019)	Change (2000-2019)
Highlands County	14,594	45.2%	14,426	50.8%	1.1%	168
Polk County	2,731	8.5%	1,960	6.9%	39.3%	771
Lee County	1,760	5.4%	1,301	4.6%	35.3%	459
Miami-Dade County	1,186	3.7%	890	3.1%	33.2%	296
Hillsborough County	1,158	3.6%	932	3.3%	24.2%	226
Palm Beach County	1,039	3.2%	840	3.0%	23.7%	199
Broward County	944	2.9%	825	2.9%	14.4%	119
Sarasota County	811	2.5%	594	2.1%	36.5%	217
Orange County	714	2.2%	-	-	-	713
Hardee County	699	2.0%	660	2.3%	1.3%	9
Collier County	-	-	486	1.7%	-	-
Other Locations	6,681	20.7%	5,474	19.3%	22%	1,207
Total	32,317	100%	28,388	100.0%	13.8%	3,929

Source: US Census Bureau “On the Map” online application, primary jobs. (2019)

An analysis was also completed to understand where Highlands County’s labor force (workers) reside. As shown in Table 2-15, the majority of Highland County workers are Highlands County residents, consistent with Table 2-14. Outside of Highlands County, the highest distribution of Highlands County workers commute from Polk and Hardee counties.



Table 2-15: Where Highlands County Workers Live, 2010 and 2019

County of Residence	2019		2010		Percent	Absolute
	# of Workers	% Distribution	# of Workers	% Distribution	Change (2000-2019)	Change (2000-2019)
Highlands County	14,594	58.1%	14,426	61.6%	1.1%	168
Polk County	1,969	8%	1,561	6.7%	26.1%	408
Hardee County	594	2.4%	535	2.3%	11%	59
Hillsborough County	577	2.3%	507	2.2%	13.8%	70
Lee County	552	2.2%	398	1.7%	38.7%	154
Orange County	479	1.9%	380	1.6%	26%	99
Pinellas County	387	1.6%	353	1.5%	9.6%	34
Palm Beach County	352	1.4%	352	1.5%	0%	0
Brevard County	314	1.3%	339	1.4%	-7.3%	-25
Indian River County	307	1.2%	343	1.5%	-10.5%	-36
Other Locations	4,596	18.6%	4,232	18.1%	8.6%	364
Total	24,721	100.0%	23,426	100.0%	5.5%	1,295

Source: US Census “On the Map” online application, primary jobs. (2019)

Major Activity Centers

Major activity centers are places that attract a high number of visitors and provide necessary services for residents, such as medical services, educational facilities, retail, and government services. Major activity centers in Highlands County are listed in Table 2-16 and illustrated on Map 2-13. With few exceptions, most of the major trip attractors are located within the Sebring-Avon Park Urbanized Area.

Table 2-16: Major Trip Generators and Attractors

Activity Center	Type	Activity Center	Type
City of Avon Park		City of Sebring	
Avon Park City Hall	Civic	Bed Bath & Beyond	Shopping
Avon Park Community Center	Community Center	Florida Hospital Heartland Medical	Medical
Avon Park High School	Education	Harder Hall Country Club	Entertainment
Avon Park Public Library	Library	Highlands County Health Department	Human Services
Donaldson Park	Park	Highlands County Veterans Services	Human Services
Highlands County Health Department	Human Services	Highlands Hammock State Park	Park
Highlands Plaza	Shopping	Highlands Regional Medical Center	Medical
South Florida State College	Education	Lakeshore Mall	Shopping
Tri County Human Services	Human Services	North Gate Peddler's Mall	Shopping
Walmart Supercenter	Shopping	Sebring City Hall	Civic
Town of Lake Placid		Sebring High School	Education
Florida Hospital Lake Placid	Medical	Sebring International Raceway	Entertainment
Highlands County Health Department	Human Services	Sebring Public Library	Library
Lake Placid High School	Education	Sebring Regional Airport	Transportation
Lake Placid Memorial Library	Library	Sebring Station	Transportation
Lake Placid Town Office	Civic	Sebring YMCA	Community Center
Lake Placid Publix	Shopping	Southgate Shopping Center	Shopping
		Multi-sports Complex	Community Center
		Sun 'n Lake of Sebring	Community Center
		Village Fountain Plaza	Shopping
		Vocational Rehabilitation	Human Services
		Walmart Supercenter	Shopping

Tourism and Visitor Levels

Table 2-17 demonstrates the economic impacts of Florida’s tourism industry over the last several years. This information indicates that Florida as a whole is still a major tourist destination for out of state visitors generating increased local tax revenue and employment opportunities throughout the state, including in Highlands County. Tourism is a major economic driver in Florida. Highlands County, especially, is known for its natural amenities such as lakes for fishing, boating, skiing and sailing; golf courses; and festivals with a statewide draw. The Sebring International Raceway, located within the Sebring Regional Airport hosts one of the most famous races in the world – the 12 Hours of Sebring International Grand Prix of Endurance. The Avon Park Executive Airport supports flight training, recreational/sport aviation activities and accommodates smaller general aviation aircraft as well as business jet aircraft stimulating business attraction, recreation, and commercial activities. Taken together, the on-airport impacts and visitor spending impacts related to the major events and activities hosted by both airports generate a local economic impact of \$378,046,000-contributing significantly to the economic base of the County.

Local Economic Impact: \$ 378,046,000

Source: March 2019 Florida Statewide Aviation Economic Impact Study, Florida Department of Transportation

Table 2-17: Economic Impact of Tourism

Tourism	2019		2013	Percent Change (2013 to 2019)
Out-of-State Visitor Spending	\$98.8 Billion	↖	71.8 billion	37.6%
Total Business Sales from Tourism	\$57.2 Billion		N/A	N/A
Travel Generated Employment	1.62 million	↖	1.1 million	47.3%
Travel Generated Tax Receipts (All)	\$27.6 Billion		N/A	N/A
Travel Generated Local Tax	\$12.7 Billion		N/A	N/A

Visit Florida Annual Report, visitflorida.org



Land Use and Densities

The Highlands County and municipal comprehensive plans identify residential densities and commercial and industrial land use densities and/or intensities within their respective jurisdictions. Table 2-18 summarizes the allowable residential land use designations for Highlands County, Sebring, Avon Park, and Lake Placid, and Table 2-19 summarizes this information for commercial and industrial land use designations. Sebring has the highest allowable residential densities and also provides for a high-density downtown mixed-use development designation. Land use designations and densities are important, as higher-density areas with a mix of land uses can generally better support public transportation service than lower-density, single-use land use patterns.



Table 2-18: Residential Land Uses

Area	Density and/or Intensity
Highlands County	
Low Density Residential	1-3 units per acre
Medium Density Residential	4-8 units per acre
High Density Residential	9-12 units per acre
Assisted Living Facilities	Exception, maximum 30 units per acre
City of Sebring	
Low Density Residential	1-5 units per acre
Medium Density Residential	5-12 units per acre
High Density Residential	10-40 units per acre
Mixed Use	12-20 units per acre
Downtown Mixed Use Redevelopment (DMUR)	Maximum 40 units per acre
City of Avon Park	
Low Density Residential	1-6 units per acre
Medium Density Residential	Maximum 16 units per acre
Mixed Use	16 units per acre
Mobile home parks	Maximum 8 units per acre
Town of Lake Placid	
Rural Landscape	1 unit per 5 acres - 1 unit per acre
Low Estate Residential	1 unit per acre
Low Suburban Residential	2 units per acre
Low Density Residential	1-3 units per acre
Medium Density Residential	Maximum 6 units per acre
County Medium Density Residential	Maximum 8 units per acre
High Density Residential	Maximum 12 units per acre, 0.35 FAR
County High Density Residential	Maximum 12 units per acre
Residential Mixed Use	Maximum 3 units per acre, 0.35 FAR
Downtown Mixed Use	Maximum 12 units per acre, 1.00 FAR
Residential/Office	Maximum 2 units per acre, 0.50 FAR
Public-Semi Public / Conservation	1 unit per acre / 1 unit per 10 acres, .001 FAR

Note: FAR = Floor Area Ratio



Table 2-19: Commercial and Industrial Land Uses

Area	Density and/or Intensity
Highlands County	
Public/Quasi-Public Facility and Institutional Lands	Up to 1.00 FAR
Commercial	Up to 0.70 FAR for office Up to 0.80 for other commercial uses
Commercial/Industrial Mixed Use	Up to 0.80 FAR
Business Park Center	Up to .50 FAR for non-commercial uses
Industrial	Up to 1.00 FAR
Mixed Use	Consistent with approved Development Order or Development Agreement
Multi Use Center	Floor Area Ratio: 1.0 FAR Retail/Office/Light Industrial: Up to 80% of acreage
City of Sebring	
Mixed Use	Up to .70 FAR
<i>Commercial Mixed Use</i>	Up to 100% office, retail, industrial, or other commercial
<i>Single Family Mixed Use</i>	Up to 30% commercial
<i>Industrial-mixed use</i>	Up to 90%, minimum of 80% industrial, up to 20% commercial
Commercial	Maximum impervious surface ratio of 0.70, exception Downtown Sebring CRA max impervious surface ratio 1.0 Max 50 feet building height, exception maximum 100 feet upon City Council approval for PUD Multi-Family up to 12 du/ac and 20% of area
Neighborhood Commercial	Offices and small-scale commercial uses maximum impervious surface ratio of 70% maximum 50 feet building height.
Industrial	Industrial and warehousing activities, More intensive commercial uses, wholesale, and retail with a maximum impervious surface ratio of 70%, max building height 50 feet, exception up to 100 feet upon City Council approval for PUD
Downtown Mixed-Use Redevelopment	Up to 40 units per acre; maximum impervious surface ratio is 0.70; Downtown Sebring CRA impervious ratio up to 1.0; building height max 50 feet; exception up to 100 feet upon City Council approval for PUD



Area	Density and/or Intensity
City of Avon Park	
Downtown Commercial	Offices up to 0.70 FAR, Commercial FAR 0.80.
Highway Commercial	Offices up to 0.70 FAR, Commercial FAR 0.80.
Mixed Use	Retail/Office/Light Industrial FAR 1.00.
Neighborhood Commercial	Offices up to 0.70 FAR, Commercial FAR 0.80.
Industrial	Up to 1.00 FAR.
Public Buildings and Grounds	Up to 1.00 FAR.
Town of Lake Placid	
Residential Mixed / High Density Residential	Maximum 0.35 FAR. / Maximum .35 FAR
County Mixed Use	Established through site specific policies in the FLUE (Future Land Use Element).
Downtown Mixed Use	Maximum 1.00 FAR.
Residential/Office	Maximum 0.50 FAR.
Commercial-General	Maximum 1.00 FAR.
Commercial-Intensive / Light Industrial	Maximum 1.00 FAR.
Industrial	Maximum 1.00 FAR.
Public/Semi-Public	Maximum 1.00 FAR.

Sources: Highlands County, Sebring, Avon Park, and Lake Placid Comprehensive Plans, Future Land Use Element



Appendix B: Public Involvement Plan

Hi!

Public Participation Plan

HOLA

HRTPO
Heartland Regional
Transportation Planning Organization



heartlandregionaltpo.org

(863) 534-7130

Approved: March 15, 2023

How to get involved



CALL US @ (863) 534-7130

8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
Monday through Friday
Se habla español
Dial 711 for the Florida Relay Service (TTY)



WRITE TO US

Heartland Regional Transportation
Planning Organization (HRTPO)
555 E. Church Street
Bartow, FL 33830



EMAIL US

General Inquiries:
info@heartlandregionaltpo.org
Public Involvement, Media, Title IV:
msoderstrom@cfrpc.org



VISIT OUR WEBSITE

www.HeartlandRegionalTPO.org



COME TO AN EVENT

The HRTPO participates in events throughout the region and hosts workshops for citizens to learn about projects where they work and live. Visit the HRTPO website at heartlandregionaltpo.org to learn more.



PARTICIPATE IN PERSON

Make a public comment at a HRTPO board or committee meeting. Find our calendar of events at heartlandregionaltpo.org



VOLUNTEER

To serve as a representative on a HRTPO committee contact info@heartlandregionaltpo.org or call (863) 534-7130 for more information



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Appendix C: HRTPO Response to Agency and Public Comments

The preparation of this report has been financed in part through grant(s) from the Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration, US Department of Transportation, under the State Planning and Research Program, Section 505 [or Metropolitan Planning Program, Section 104(f)] of Title 23, US Code in cooperation with the Florida Department of Transportation, the urbanized area of Highlands County including the cities of Sebring and Avon Park; and the counties of DeSoto, Glades, Hardee, Hendry, Highlands and Okeechobee. The contents of this report do not necessarily reflect the official views or policies of the US Department of Transportation.

This plan may be revised without formal TPO action or public comment period to update information such as contact information, addresses or locations, and scribal errors.

Introduction

The Heartland Regional Transportation Planning Organization is the primary agency responsible for transportation planning in DeSoto, Glades, Hardee, Hendry, Highlands and Okeechobee counties.

Transportation planning organizations were created by law to review and administer all policies and procedures applicable for state and federal transportation funding. The Heartland Regional Transportation Planning Organization (HRTPO) was established to provide transportation planning services for the six counties of the Heartland region including the urbanized area of Sebring-Avon Park.

The responsibility of the HRTPO is to manage a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive planning process that results in the development of transportation plans and programs. The HRTPO provides a forum for cooperative decision making by officials of the affected governmental entities with input from citizens and constituency groups.

Public participation is a key component of transportation planning and one of the core functions of the HRTPO. Meaningful and effective public involvement brings a diverse set of views into the discussion and improves decision making by generating ideas for how the transportation system may be improved.

The Public Participation Plan (PPP) provides guidelines used by the HRTPO to inform and gather input from residents, communities, and interest groups throughout the six counties in order to expand the information available for planning.



HRTPO Full and Fair Participation

Public participation is solicited without regard to race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, religion or family status. Persons requiring accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) or language translation, free of charge should contact Marybeth Soderstrom, HRTPO Title VI Liaison, 863-534-7130 (voice), or via Florida Relay Service 711, or by emailing msoderstrom@cfrpc.org at least three days prior to the event. The HRTPO strives to ensure full and fair participation by all potentially affected individuals, groups and communities in the transportation decision-making process.

Our Commitment to You

- Early and continuous public involvement
- Inclusionary practices in activities and notification
- Consideration of the needs of the traditionally under-served
- Collaboration with other agencies, local governments, private sector transportation entities, and non-TPO officials
- Convenient meeting times and locations
- Reasonable access to information
- Timely notice of public involvement activities, including appropriate review and comment periods
- Acknowledgment and consideration of public comments



Background and Purpose

What is a Transportation Planning Organization?

A Transportation Planning Organization, or TPO, is the organization designated by law with the responsibility for developing transportation plans and programs for urbanized areas of 50,000 or more in population. TPOs are established by agreement of the Governor and units of local government which together represent 75 percent of the affected population of an urbanized area.

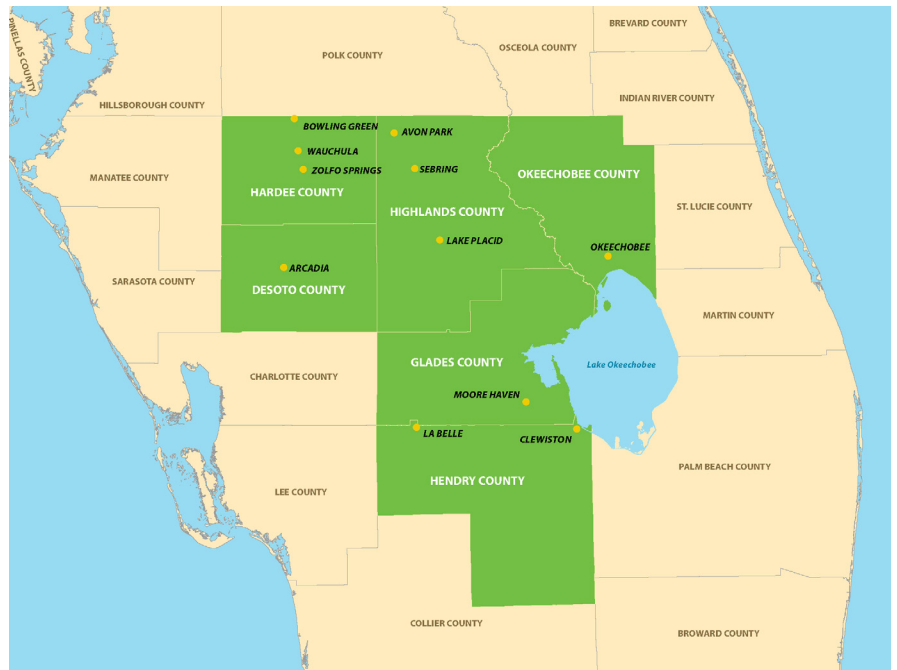
The HRTPO coordinates transportation plans for the Heartland region including:



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Six counties and 11 cities and towns • The Sebring Airport Authority • Federally managed lands including the Avon Park Air Force Range • Native American Tribal Governments partially located within the Heartland region: Big Cypress Indian Reservation, Brighton Seminole Indian Reservation 	<table border="1"> <tbody> <tr> <td>DeSoto</td> <td>City of Arcadia</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Glades</td> <td>City of Moore Haven</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Hardee</td> <td>Town of Bowling Green, City of Wauchula, Town of Zolfo Springs</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Hendry</td> <td>City of Clewiston, City of LaBelle</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Highlands</td> <td>City of Avon Park, City of Sebring, Town of Lake Placid</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Okeechobee</td> <td>City of Okeechobee</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	DeSoto	City of Arcadia	Glades	City of Moore Haven	Hardee	Town of Bowling Green, City of Wauchula, Town of Zolfo Springs	Hendry	City of Clewiston, City of LaBelle	Highlands	City of Avon Park, City of Sebring, Town of Lake Placid	Okeechobee	City of Okeechobee
DeSoto	City of Arcadia												
Glades	City of Moore Haven												
Hardee	Town of Bowling Green, City of Wauchula, Town of Zolfo Springs												
Hendry	City of Clewiston, City of LaBelle												
Highlands	City of Avon Park, City of Sebring, Town of Lake Placid												
Okeechobee	City of Okeechobee												

What if I want to participate?

Public participation is an important part of the transportation planning process. Turn to the chart on page three to see all the ways you can get involved. The rest of this document provides details about the plan for public participation to be followed by the Heartland Regional Transportation Planning Organization (HRTPO). If you have questions or comments about the HRTPO Public Participation Plan, please visit our website at www.heartlandregionaltpo.org or contact Marybeth Soderstrom at (863) 534-7130 or msoderstrom@cfrpc.org.



Requirements for Public Participation

Regional transportation planning is guided by laws, rules, and policies set forth at the federal and state level. Both federal and state laws require public participation in the planning process. Transportation planning activities must also consider other laws and regulations including, but not limited to, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, Civil Rights Act, and Americans with Disabilities (ADA) Act .

Federal Requirements

The emphasis on public involvement/public participation has grown in importance as federal transportation laws and rules have changed. Transportation Planning Organizations develop Public Participation Plans in consultation with a variety of interested parties. Public meetings must be held at convenient times and accessible locations and use electronic methods and visualization techniques to provide information to the public. See Appendix A.

- These regulations are found in 23 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 450.212 and 450.316 to guide the development of statewide, local and metropolitan transportation plans and programs. These regulations also include the following:
 - Early and continuous public involvement opportunities throughout the planning and programming process;
 - Timely information to citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of transportation agencies, private sector transportation entities and other interested parties, including segments of the community affected by transportation plans, programs, and projects;
 - Reasonable access to information;
 - Adequate public notice of public involvement activities and ample time for public review and comment at key decision points;
 - Explicit consideration and response to public comment;
 - Consideration of the needs of the traditionally underserved, including low-income and minority citizens;
 - Periodic review of public involvement efforts by the Transportation Planning Organization (TPO) to ensure full and open access to all;
 - Review of public involvement procedures by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) when necessary; and
 - Coordination of TPO public involvement processes with statewide efforts whenever possible.
- The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) established a national policy for the protection of the environment. NEPA requires the consideration of potential impacts on social and natural resources during transportation decision-making.
- In addition, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires reasonable efforts be made to accommodate citizens with disabilities who wish to attend public meetings.

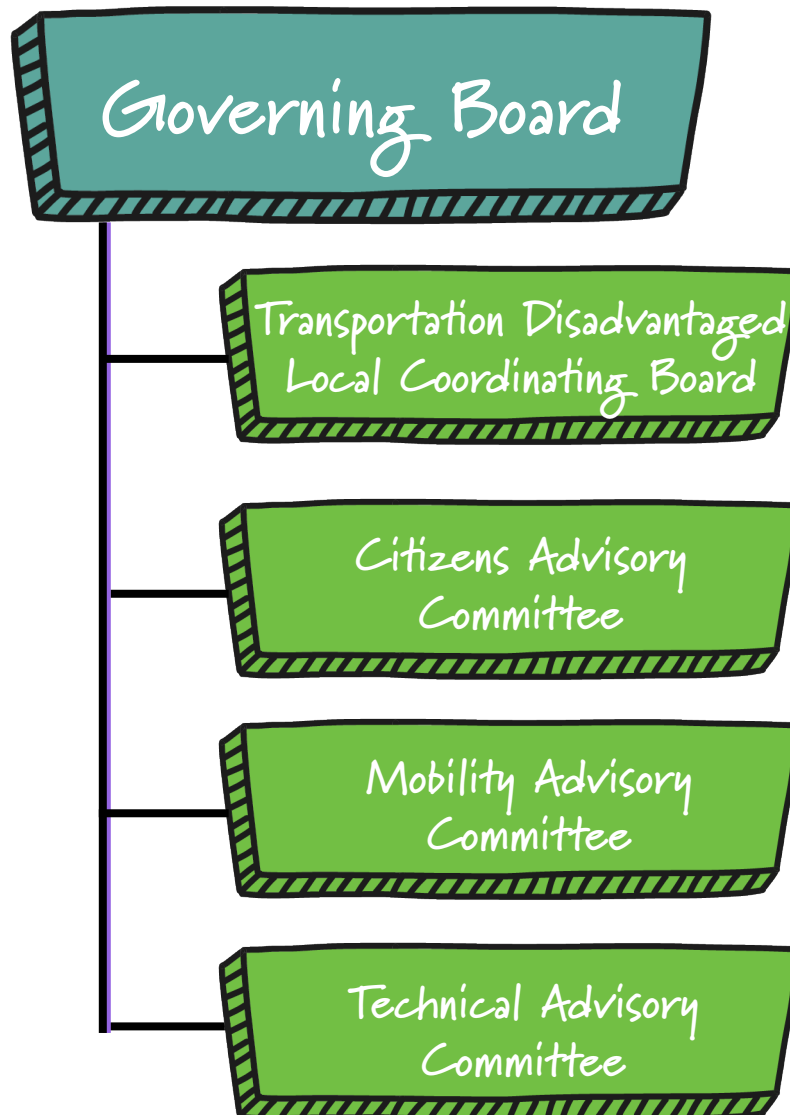
State Requirements

- Chapter 339.155, Florida Statutes (F.S.) addresses public involvement in transportation planning. It requires that citizens, public agencies and other known interested parties be given the opportunity to comment on the long-range component of the Florida Transportation Plan (FTP) and before substantive revisions to the Plan. It also requires hearings during the development of major transportation improvements.
- Chapter 339.175, F.S. requires public involvement in the development of the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) and the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).
- Chapter 286, F.S., commonly known as “The Sunshine Law”, addresses public access to governmental proceedings at the state and local level. The Sunshine Law requires that meetings of boards or commissions be open to the public, reasonable notice of such meetings be given, and minutes taken and made available to the public in a timely manner.

Our Organization

The TPO is a legislative body with the power to develop and adopt plans, manage priorities for improvements to the transportation system, and program and administer federal and state planning grants

The HRTPO is managed by a governing board of elected officials representing local jurisdictions. The board is supported by three advisory committees and the two transportation disadvantaged boards in the region. Each fulfills an important role in the transportation planning process within Heartland region. Public notifications are made for all regular and special business meetings of the board and committees. All meetings are conducted in an open public forum with an opportunity for public comment. To engage the broadest input of all citizens, at least one public meeting or workshop will be held in each county each year.



Governing Board

The HRTPO is the primary agency responsible for transportation planning in DeSoto, Glades, Hardee, Hendry, Highlands and Okeechobee Counties. The HRTPO Board consists of 12 voting members representing eight local governments and one non-voting adviser from the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT).

County	County Population 2010	% of Total Regional Population	Number of Members	Weight Per Voting Member
DeSoto	34,862	13.76%	1.0	13.76%
Glades	12,884	5.08%	1.0	5.08%
Hardee	27,731	10.94%	1.0	10.94%
Hendry	39,140	15.45%	1.0	15.45%
Okeechobee	39,996	15.78%	1.0	15.78%
Highlands (Unincorporated) + Lake Placid	79,459	31.36%	5.0	6.27%
Avon Park	8,836	3.49%	1.0	3.49%
Sebring	10,491	4.14%	1.0	4.14%
FDOT	N/A	N/A	1.0	Non-voting
Sub Total:	253,399	100.00%	12.00	100.0%

Source: US Census Population 2010



The HRTPO Board is ultimately responsible for implementing transportation plans in the six-county area

Meetings

The HRTPO Board meets at least quarterly to discuss issues and make informed decisions about future transportation projects, initiatives and improvements – providing leadership for a continuous, cooperative and comprehensive transportation planning process.

Meetings are at a date, time and place acceptable to a majority of the voting members, typically on the third Wednesday of March, June, September, and the first Wednesday in December. At the last scheduled meeting in a calendar year, a regular meeting schedule for the next calendar year will be adopted by the HRTPO Board. Other meetings may be scheduled by the Chair at the request of HRTPO staff. Notice of such meetings will be given to members at least seven (7) days in advance. Special meetings may be called by the Chair with a minimum of three (3) calendar days' notice indicating the reason for the meeting and notifying all members of the HRTPO Board. In the event of an emergency meeting reasonable public notice will be given for amendments and will not be bound by the timeframes outlined on page 3.2.

For the most up-to-date meeting information, visit the website calendar on www.heartlandregionaltpo.org. Meeting agenda for the TPO Board and its committee meetings will be posted on the HRTPO's website at least seven (7) days in advance of a meeting.

Transportation Disadvantaged Local Coordinating Boards

As the designated planning agency for the region, the HRTPO provides staff support to the transportation disadvantaged Local Coordinating Boards (LCBs) in the region. These board coordinate transportation needs of the disadvantaged in our community, including individuals with physical and economic challenges and senior citizens facing mobility issues. The transportation disadvantaged local coordinating boards assists the HRTPO in identifying local service needs and provides information, advice, and direction to the Community Transportation Coordinator (CTC) (Chapter 427 F.S) on the coordination of transportation services to be provided to the transportation disadvantaged.

Meetings

The LCBs will meet at least quarterly at a date, time and place acceptable to a majority of the voting member. Public Notice will be given seven days in advance of all meetings, posted on the HRTPO website at www.heartlandregionaltpo.org and distributed to local media outlets. These meetings are open to the public and provide an opportunity for interested parties to hear and discuss transportation issues.



Multi-County LCB

DeSoto, Hardee, Highlands, & Okeechobee
Typically meets the third Wednesday of January, April, July, and October

Community Transportation Coordinator: MTM Transit

Glades/Hendry LCB

Typically meets the fourth Wednesday of January, April, July, and October

Community Transportation Coordinator: Hendry County

Local Coordinating Board Membership

An elected official who will serve as chair (in areas where there is a multi-county system an elected official from each county will serve)

A representative from each of the following: Florida Department of Transportation, Florida Department of Children and Family Services, Public Education community, Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation or Division of Blind Services, Local Veterans Service Office, Florida Association for Community Action, local Mass Transit or Public Transit System, Florida Department of Elderly Affairs, Florida Agency for Health Care Administration, local Workforce Board

A person over sixty years of age representing the elderly

A person with a disability representing the disabled in the service area

Two citizen advocates representatives in the service area; one who must be a person who uses the transportation service(s) as their primary means of transportation

A local representative for children at risk

A representative of the local medical community

Each LCB operates under its own adopted Bylaws and elects its own officers. All other members are chosen from a cross-section of the community and can either request to serve on the board through an application process or can be recommended by community civic and social organizations. Contact the HRTPO for an application.

Committees

Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC)

The Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) consists of representatives from professional associations, neighborhood associations, civic and community organizations, and the private sector knowledgeable with the transportation needs of individuals with disabilities, minority groups, the business community, and geographic areas of the region. The CAC provides an avenue for obtaining public input for deliberations and recommendations on transportation issues. The CAC assists in identifying the needs of the public and ways to extent outreach opportunities. Comments received from the CAC members and non-members are treated equally.

A broad cross section of the six-county region, the Citizens Advisory Committee is a collective of volunteers that provide input on HRTPO work products and plans.

Every two years, the HRTPO will recruit membership for the CAC. Once members are appointed by the HRTPO, the committee will meet quarterly to learn from local subject matter experts on how transportation decisions are made, how projects are funded, how equity considerations affect decision-making, and become familiar with the multi-modal transportation infrastructure within the Heartland region.

Membership of the CAC includes two citizens from each member county, and one member each from the cities of Avon Park and Sebring totaling 14 members. The CAC operates under its own adopted Bylaws and elects its own officers.

CAC members are selected based upon an application submitted to the HRTPO. Application forms are available at www.heartlandregionaltpo.org or by contacting the HRTPO at info@heartlandregionaltpo.org. Applications must be reviewed and approved by the county or city TPO member government which the applicant will represent. Completed applications will be placed on the HRTPO agenda for consideration to fill vacancies.

CAC Meetings

The CAC will meet at least quarterly at a date, time and place acceptable to a majority of the voting members, typically in February, May, August, and November. Public Notice will be given seven days in advance of all meetings, posted on the HRTPO website at www.heartlandregionaltpo.org and distributed to local media outlets. These meetings are open to the public and provide an opportunity for interested parties to hear and discuss transportation issues.

Mobility Advisory Committee (MAC)

The HRTPO established the Mobility Advisory Committee (MAC) on April 19, 2017 to serve initially as the steering committee to help guide and direct the Transit Development Plan (TDP) for Highlands County. The MAC member was then expanded to assist in the development of the Heartland Rural Mobility Plan. In the future, the MAC membership will assist in developing and guiding multimodal input including bicycle, pedestrian, trails, transit and other mobility modes.

The Mobility Advisory Committee assisted in the development of the Highlands Transit Plan and the Heartland Rural Mobility Plan

Meetings

The committee will meet as needed, at a time and place acceptable to a majority of the voting members. Public Notice will be given seven days in advance of all meetings and notice will be posted on the HRTPO website at www.heartlandregionaltpo.org.

Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)

The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) is made up of engineers, planners or other staff of local governments and agencies which review HRTPO work products and plans before they are presented to the Board. The TAC operates under its own adopted Bylaws and elects its own officers. The TAC includes up to 26 members.

The HRTPO Board's Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) is composed of technically qualified representatives of agencies responsible for maintaining, controlling, developing and improving the transportation system within the Heartland region, including the Cities of Sebring and Avon Park, the six counties, the Sebring Airport Authority, the Central Florida Regional Planning Council and the Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council. Other municipalities within the six counties will be invited to participate, including those operating municipal airports and local school board officials. Committee duties include coordination of transportation plans and programs arising from the review of all transportation technical studies and reports.

The TAC will be represented with the following membership through staff assignment by the local government or agency:

Two staff members of each HRTPO County	DeSoto, Glades, Hardee, Hendry, Highlands, Okeechobee	12 Members
One staff member each from the cities	Avon Park, Sebring	Two (2) Members
One staff member from the following municipalities	Arcadia, Clewiston, Lake Placid, LaBelle, Moore Haven, Okeechobee City, Wauchula	Seven (7) Members
One staff member from the following agencies or authorities	Sebring Airport Authority Central Florida Regional Planning Council Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council	Three (3) Members
One staff member representing public schools in the Heartland Region		One (1) Member
One staff ex-officio member from Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT)		One (1) Non-voting Member

TAC Meetings

The committee will meet at least quarterly at a date, time and place acceptable to a majority of the voting members, typically on the third Wednesday of February, May, August, and November. Public Notice will be given seven days in advance of all meetings and notice will be posted on the HRTPO website at heartlandregionaltpo.org.



The Technical Advisory Committee presented a certificate of appreciation to Arcadia City Administrator Terry Stewart, who served as chair of the TAC from its formational meeting in 2015 through 2017.



The HRTPO is responsible for four core documents in order to be certified by the federal government as eligible to program and receive federal transportation funds. Public participation requirements prescribed by the federal government vary by document, but all of these plans and programs are completed through an open process that allows for public review and feedback throughout various stages of plan development. Final products and reports are adopted after careful consideration of community comment. HRTPO plans may be revised without formal TPO action or public comment period to update information such as contact information, addresses or locations, and scribal errors. Other administrative changes may be made by HRTPO staff as authorized by the Board.

As these documents are developed, they are made available on the HRTPO website and copies are provided to each HRTPO member government

<p>Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Details comprehensive plan for transportation modes ➤ Includes long and short range goals and strategies ➤ Identifies funding sources and estimates costs ➤ Provides framework for choosing transportation projects ➤ Includes local government projects 	<p>Adopted: Every five years Amended: As needed Public Comment: 30 days prior to adoption, seven (7) days prior to amendment, and continuous during the plan development of the LRTP.</p>
<p>Required by: 23 USC 134, 49 USC 5303, 23 CFR 450.322, and Section 339.175, FS</p>		
<p>Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Identifies HRTPO priority projects ➤ Provides 5-year implementation schedule ➤ Allocates state and federal funds for capital projects ➤ Becomes part of the Statewide TIP (STIP) 	<p>Adopted: Every year Amended: As needed Public Comment: 30 days prior to adoption, seven (7) days prior to amendment, and continuous during the development of the TIP.</p>
<p>Required by: 23 CFR 450.324, Section 339.175, FS, Section 163.3161et seq., FS, 23 CFR 450.324, Section 339.175, FS</p>		
<p>Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Summarizes planning tasks to be completed by the HRTPO ➤ Defines work products and timeline for major activities ➤ Proposes budget using federal and other funds for planning ➤ Estimates cost for each task 	<p>Adopted: Every two years Amended: As needed Public Comment: 30 days prior to adoption, seven (7) days prior to amendment, and continuous during the development of the UPWP.</p>
<p>Required by: 23 CFR 450.308, 23 USC 134 & 135, Chapter 339.175 (9) FS</p>		
<p>Public Participation Plan (PPP)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Outlines organizational structure and work products ➤ Describes HRTPO public communication tools ➤ Prescribes public comment periods ➤ Offers opportunities for public involvement 	<p>Adopted: Every three years Amended: As needed Public Comment: 45 days prior to adoption with seven day notice for public meeting and seven (7) days prior to amendment, continuous during the development of the PPP.</p>
<p>Required by: 23 USC134(i)(5)(B), 23 CFR 450.316(a), 23 CFR 450.316(a)(1) and (2)</p>		

Summary of Public Participation Procedures

The HRTPO follows agency organization and operation policies that provide specific guidelines for public records and public access.

Public Opportunities For Participation		Schedule	Public Comment Period	Public Notice	Public Access
Open Meetings					
Governing Board	HRTPO	Meets at least 4x/yr	At every meeting	7 days public notice	Summary of advance public comments provided in writing, opportunity for additional public comment at all meetings and prior to adoption of plans
Local Coordinating Boards		Meets at least 4x/yr	At every meeting	7 days public notice	
Committees	Citizen Advisory Technical Advisory	Meets at least 4x/yr	At every meeting	7 days public notice	
	Mobility Advisory	Meets as necessary	At every meeting	7 days public notice	
Plan and Program Adoption					
Long Range Transportation Plan	L RTP	Every five years	30 days	37 days public notice	Posted on HRTPO website with public notice, hard copies available, advance comments documented for review, opportunity for comment at all meetings prior to adoption
Transportation Improvement Program	TIP	Every year	30 days	37 days public notice	
Unified Planning Work Program	UPWP	Every two years	30 days	37 days public notice	
Public Participation Plan	PPP	Every three years	45 days	52 days public notice	
Amendments to Adopted Plans and Programs					
Long Range Transportation Plan	L RTP	As needed	7 days	7 days public notice	Posted on HRTPO website with public notice, hard copies available, opportunity for comment at all meetings prior to adoption
Transportation Improvement Program	TIP	As needed	7 days	7 days public notice	
	<i>The HRTPO has approved staff to make administrative amendments to the TIP in order to maintain consistency between the adopted Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and the FDOT Tentative Work Program. If an administrative amendment is made, the amendment would be presented to the HRTPO Board as an informational item at the next regularly scheduled HRTPO Board meeting.</i>				
Unified Planning Work Program	UPWP	As needed	7 days	7 days public notice	
Public Participation Plan	PPP	As needed	7 days	7 days public notice	

In the event of an emergency meeting, reasonable public notice will be given for amendments and will not be bound by the timeframes outlined above.

Stakeholders in the Transportation Planning Process

Public involvement activities must be accessible to anyone who has an interest in transportation, regardless of race, age, income level, language or disability.

As different involvement techniques may be required to ensure inclusion, it is important for the HRTPO to gain an understanding of all the populations that work, live, and play in the area, so that communications methods can be tailored to their needs and preferences. Making sure that all interested members of the public are provided the opportunity to have input into our projects also helps the HRTPO comply with federal nondiscrimination regulations, including Title VI and environmental justice.

In addition to legal requirements, the more that is known about the study area population, the more effective the public involvement will be. The HRTPO will complete a Community Characteristics Inventory to further identify opportunities to provide meaningful public involvement opportunities to all populations in the Heartland.

Traditionally Underserved Populations

HRTPO staff will make specific efforts to engage communities that traditionally have not been participants in the governmental planning processes. Traditional non-participants tend to include persons who are low-income, minority, elderly or youth, individuals with disabilities, have no vehicles, and/or have low levels of literacy or have limited English proficiency. Staff will identify opportunities and strategies that will provide these communities greater access to the transportation planning process. Communities will be identified that require more extensive public participation outreach efforts through the census and local data available, and relationships with key leaders and organizations within the communities.

Accommodations will be made to ensure all populations are given the opportunity to participate in the transportation planning process when available.

Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Plan

The HRTPO adopted a Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Plan on February 22, 2018 that identifies the Limited English Proficient populations in our service area and provides guidelines for TPO staff to help ensure that information and services are accessible to LEP persons. View the plan on our website at www.heartlandregionaltpo.org. Translation services will be made available for all HRTPO meetings and documents as requested.



Native American Tribal Governments

The HRTPO will offer the Native American Tribal Governments located in the region the opportunity to participate in all HRTPO public participation activities and will formally notice the tribes of any products or significant processes of the TPO via registered US mail.

The HRTPO area includes:

- Big Cypress Indian Reservation
- Brighton Seminole Indian Reservation

Accommodations may include:

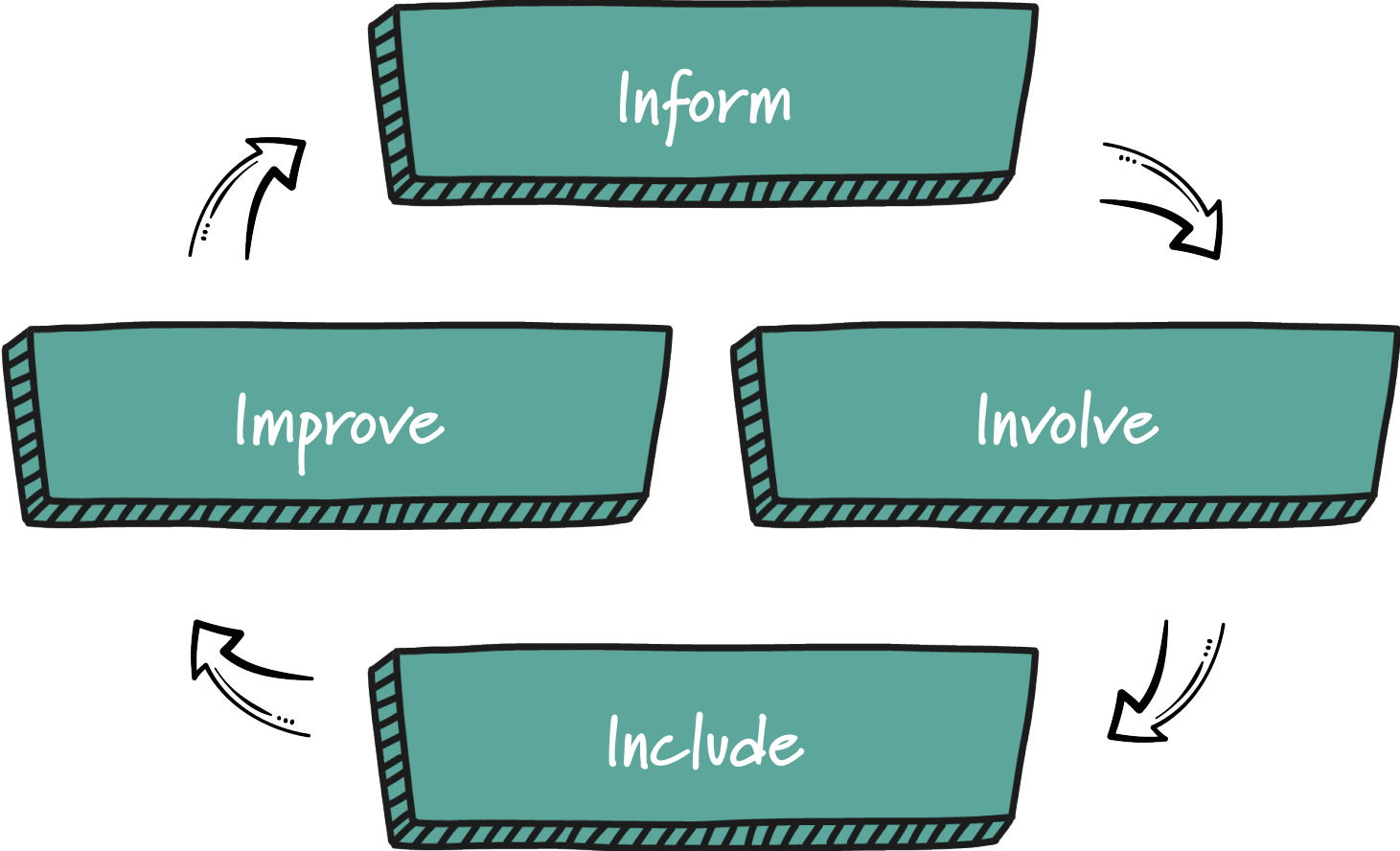
Accommodations may be made to ensure all populations are given the opportunity to participate in the transportation planning process when available. Below is a chart that is used by HRTPO staff to help determine examples of accommodations that may be helpful to ensure full and fair participation.

	Seniors	Youth	Hearing Impaired	Sight Impaired	Physically Challenged	No High School	Low Income	Non-English Speakers	Transit Disadvantaged	Shift Worker
Provide extended or special meeting hours	X	X							X	X
Plan a special meeting in a convenient location	X	X		X	X		X		X	X
Incorporate games or similar activities		X				X				
Provide written materials			X							
Provide American Sign Language interpreters			X							
Use plain language guidance	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Post meeting notices and project information in convenient locations						X	X		X	
Contact via telephone				X	X					
Ensure meeting location meets ADA requirements	X		X	X	X				X	
Place display materials at an accessible level during meetings	X				X					
Provide verbal assistance to convey the written information displayed at meetings				X		X				
Provide translated materials in languages other than English								X		
Ensure bilingual staff is available at public meetings as requested								X		

Goals

Public Participation Goals, Strategies, Measurements, and Success

Public participation is an on-going activity. The HRTPO has a variety of approaches for communicating and consulting with the public and is continually working to improve its outreach. These are the primary tools used to interact with stakeholders and the community. On an annual basis, public participation activities will be evaluated and compiled into a report and will be made available for review by the HRTPO Board, committees, and general public.



Goal 1: Informing the Public

Encourage the participation of all stakeholders regardless of race, ethnicity, age, disability, income, or primary language by employing a mix of tools to reach the broadest audience possible.

Strategies

Provide adequate notice of all meetings to HRTPO members, committee members, and interested parties by mail or email at least 7 days in advance including provisions for interested persons to respond in writing, by phone or by e-mail.

Disseminate announcements of meetings and activities, opportunities for public participation, and the availability of documents for public review.

Post meeting agendas on web page at least 7 days in advance.

Distribute summary of HRTPO Board meetings including presentations, actions taken, and documents developed to the agency's mailing list.

Include in public notices posted by the HRTPO that upon request and adequate notice, assistance will be provided to the hearing and visually impaired, those with limited English proficiency, the transportation disadvantaged, and others requiring special assistance.

Maintain an agency's mailing list of all interested parties.

Host at least one meeting or opportunity in each county annually.

Provide translators at public meetings in areas where a high proportion of the affected population comprises non-English speakers or when requested.

Ensure 100% of board and committee meetings are accessible to persons with disabilities.

Goal 2: Involving the Public

Provide early and ongoing opportunities for stakeholders to ask questions, raise issues, or share concerns.

Strategies

Maintain active, standing committees such as the TAC, CAC, and LCBs so residents have an opportunity to participate in the continuous transportation planning process.

Design community engagement strategies that incorporates a complementary mix of smaller, community-based forums, large-scale public forums and online opportunities for engagement.

Allocate time for public input on each committee's agenda.

Make comment forms available to solicit input in writing at public meetings or online.

Goal 3: Including the Public

Ensure that public feedback is considered in the decision-making process

Strategies

Document comments received and agency response as part of each major document developed.

Maintain a website that provides current information about the HRTPO activities, members, meetings, and contacts. The website will allow visitors to get to know the regional projects with visual tools and a Frequently Asked Questions section and provide links to other websites of interest.

Engage in online social platforms as a communication tool to inform and include the general public, partner governments, community organizations, and traditionally underserved communities and drive traffic to the HRTPO website.

Participate in community outreach events, providing additional opportunities to include traditionally underserved communities.

As HRTPO plans and programs are developed, distribute copies to public libraries and public facilities in the region.

Speak at local civic group meetings, schools, leadership courses, and conferences about transportation planning as requested.

Goal 4: Improving Public Participation Process

Continually identify and implement ways to improve the public participation processes.

Strategies

Look for opportunities to add and create strategies that will reach greater numbers and more diverse populations.

Continue expansion of regional inter-TPO coordination of public participation activities, particularly when projects may directly impact residents from adjacent counties.

A Public Involvement Report will be developed annually that tracks progress of public participation including meetings, direct participant outreach efforts, comments received, efforts to include Traditionally Underserved and Limited English populations, and feedback from participants in the transportation planning process.

Information on the demographic characteristics of persons who attend transportation-related meetings, are members of established committees, or otherwise participate in the transportation decision making process will be tracked annually including race, ethnicity or national origin, age, gender, income, education, and occupation. A crucial piece of information is the participant's address or ZIP code.

Public Participation Targets

Targets
Participant demographics mirror regional demographics
Participants location is geographically distributed
Responses to online or in-person engagement events or public comment periods
Clarity of informational resources, including visualization/interactivity/printed documents/videos
Partnerships and coordination with partner agencies, nonprofit organizations and other outreach organizations



Appendix A: Relevant State Statutes and Federal Regulations

Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act (SAFETEA-LU) in 2005

- Previously the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) of 1991 required states and TPOs to involve the public to a much greater extent in transportation decision-making than under previous law. When ISTEA expired in 1998, it was replaced by the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) which continued to put a strong emphasis on public participation.

Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP21)

- MAP-21 was enacted in 2012, and carries forward all of the advancements in public participation from the Safe, Accountable, Flexible and Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) legislation.
- MAP-21 continues to support previous federal public participation guidelines and adds new requirements, including the development of a Public Participation Plan by TPOs in consultation with interested parties; the addition of bicycle and pedestrian facilities users and the disabled as interested parties; public meetings to be held at convenient times and accessible locations; and the use of electronic methods and visualization techniques to provide information to the public. With MAP-21, public participation remains a hallmark of the transportation planning process.

Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA)

- Title II of this Act, 42 United States Code (USC) Sections 12131-12134, prohibits the exclusion of persons with disabilities from participation in services, programs, or activities of a public entity. This is the basis for the Department of Transportation's standard language (see Part 1, Chapter 11, Section 11-2.4 of the Project Development and Environment [PD&E] Manual) regarding accommodating persons with disabilities for such issues as hearing or visual impairment.
- Title III of this Act, 42 USC Sections 12181-12189, requires public accommodations to provide equivalent access to individuals with disabilities. This is important for public involvement activities, as the locations of public meetings, workshops, and hearings should be accessible.

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Other Nondiscrimination Laws

- Title VI, 42 USC Sections 2000d-2000d-1, prohibits federally assisted programs from discrimination based on race, color, or national origin. Since public funds are comprised of contributions from taxpayers of all races, colors, and national origins, fairness requires that federal activities receiving such funds be conducted in a manner that discourages racial discrimination.
- Age Discrimination Act of 1975, 42 USC Sections 6101-6107, prohibits federally assisted programs from discrimination based on age.

Executive Order 12898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations

- Directs federal agencies to identify and address any disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of their actions on minority and low-income populations.
- Requires each agency to develop a strategy for evaluating environmental justice.
- Promotes access by minority and low-income communities to public information and public participation.

Executive Order 13166, Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency

- Requires agencies to develop plans so that people for whom English is not their native language or who have a limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English can have meaningful access to the services provided.
- Requires recipients of federal funding to also provide meaningful access.
- Factors for determining when meaningful access is necessary include:
 - Number or proportion of limited English proficiency (LEP) persons in the affected area,
 - Frequency of contact with LEP persons,
 - Importance of the service provided to LEP persons, and resources available.
 - What methods of communication constitute meaningful access?
 - Translation of vital documents into languages other than English
 - Oral interpretation through translators or other interpretive services
- These services must be provided free of cost to the recipient

Florida Statute 286.011 Public Meetings and Records

- The Florida Sunshine Law mandates that meetings of the HRTPO and its committees, workshops, and programs are open to the public.
- All public records of the HRTPO are open for inspection and examination at the office of the Heartland Regional Transportation Planning Organization, 555 East Church Street, Bartow, FL 33830 on regular business days between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.

Executive Order 07-01, Section 2 - Plain Language Initiative

- The purpose of this initiative is to ensure that announcements, publications, and other documents provided by state agencies contain “clear and concise” information. Specific requirements include: Use of common language instead of technical jargon, Providing only the pertinent information in an organized manner, Use of short sentences and active voice, and Layout and design that are user friendly.

Section 120.525, FS, Administrative Procedures Act

- Requires notice of public meetings, hearings, and workshops by publication in the Florida Administrative Register (FAR) and on the agency’s website, no less than seven (7) days prior to the event. Includes the general subject matter to be considered.
- Requires an agenda (containing the items to be considered in order of presentation) to be prepared and published on the agency’s website.

Section 286.011, FS, Public Business (Government in the Sunshine)

- Declares all meetings of any board or commission of any state, county, municipal, or political subdivision, agency, or authority to be public meetings that are open to the public at all times.
- Requires reasonable notice of all such meetings.
- Requires minutes of any such meeting to be available for public inspection.
- Prohibits public meetings from being held at a facility or location that discriminates on the basis of sex, age, race, creed, color, origin, or economic status or that otherwise restricts public access.
- Establishes penalties for violation of these provisions and exceptions for specific situations.

Section 286.29, FS, Public Business (Green Lodging)

- Requires state agencies to contract for meeting and conference space only with hotels or conference facilities that have been designated as Green Lodging facilities by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP).

Section 335.199, FS, State Highway System (Access Modification)

- Requires notification of all affected property owners, municipalities, and counties at least 180 days prior to design finalization of any project on the State Highway System that modifies or otherwise affects access to the facility. Requires at least one public hearing in the jurisdiction where the project is located.

Jessica Lunsford Act

- Codified in Title XLVIII K-20 Education Code, Chapter 1012 Personnel, §1012.465-1012.468, this law requires background checks of any person entering school grounds when children are present. As a result of this, FDOT adopted a policy that K-12 educational facilities should not be used for public meetings and hearings. There is a provision for exceptions.

Appendix B: Acronyms and Abbreviations

For your information, these are some of the acronyms the TPO works with on a daily basis.

AARP	American Association of Retired Persons
AASHTO	American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials
ACES	Autonomous, Connected, Electric, & Shared Vehicles
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
AER	Annual Expenditure Report
AHCA	Agency for Health Care Administration
AMPO	Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations
APR	Annual Performance Report
ARRA	American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009
ATMS	Automatic Traffic Management System
BCC	Board of County Commissioners
BEBR	Bureau of Economic and Business Research
BPAC	Bicycle/Pedestrian Advisory Committee
BMS	Bridge Management System
BUILD	Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development
CAC	Citizens Advisory Committee
CAMP	Corridor Access Management Plan
CAP	Commuter Assistance Program
CDMS	Crash Data Management System
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
CFASPP	Continuing Florida Aviation System Planning Process
CFRPC	Central Florida Regional Planning Council
CIA	Community Impact Assessment
CIP	Capital Improvements Program
CMP	Congestion Management Process
CMS	Congestion Management System
COOP	Continuity of Operations Plan
CRA	Community Redevelopment Agency
CST	Construction
CTC	Community Transportation Coordinator
CTD	Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged
CTPP	Census Transportation Planning Package
CTST	Community Traffic Safety Team
CUTR	University of South Florida Center for Urban Transportation Research
CUTS	Coordinated Urban Transportation Studies
DBE	Disadvantaged Business Enterprise
DOEA	Department of Elder Affairs
DOPA	Designated Official Planning Agency
DRI	Development of Regional Impact
E+C	Existing plus committed network (used in modeling)
EAR	Comprehensive Plan Evaluation and Appraisal Report
EJ	Environmental Justice
EOP	Emergency Operations Plan
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
ETAT	Environmental Technical Advisory Team
ETDM	Efficient Transportation Decision Making
FAA	Federal Aviation Administration
FAC	Florida Administrative Code

FACTS	Florida Association of Coordinated Transportation Systems
FDOT	Florida Department of Transportation
FAP	Federal Aid Program
FAST Act	Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act
FHWA	Federal Highway Administration
FM	Financial Management
FREDI	Florida Rural Economic Development Initiative
FHREDI	Florida's Heartland Regional Economic Development Initiative
FSUTMS	Florida Standard Urban Transportation Model Structure
FS	Florida Statutes
FTA	Federal Transit Administration
FTP	Florida Transportation Plan
FY	Fiscal Year
GIS	Geographic Information Systems
GPC	General Planning Consultant
HOA	Home Owners Association
HP&R/D	Highway Planning and Research/Department, also known as state "D" funds
ICAR	Intergovernmental Coordination and Review
ICE	Intersection Control Evaluation
IMS	Intermodal Management System
ISTEA	Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act
IT	Information Technology
ITS	Intelligent Transportation System
JPA	Joint Participation Agreement
LCB	Local Coordinating Board
LEP	Limited English Proficiency
LOS	Level of Service
L RTP	Long Range Transportation Plan
MAC	Mobility Advisory Committee
MAP-21	Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century
MOA	Memorandum of Agreement
MPO	Metropolitan Planning Organization
MPOAC	Metropolitan Planning Organization Advisory Council
NARC	National Association of Regional Councils
NADO	National Association of Development Organizations
NHS	National Highway System
MSTU	Municipal Service Tax Unit
NPS	National Park Service
PD&E	Project Development and Environment Study
PE	Preliminary Engineering (Design)
PEA	Planning Emphasis Area
PM2	Performance Measures 2: Bridge and Pavement
PM3	Performance Measures 3: System Performance
PPP	Public Participation Plan
PIP	Public Involvement Plan
PL	FHWA Transportation Planning Funds
PMS	Pavement Management System
RAO	Rural Area of Opportunity
RFLI	Request for Letters of Interest
RPC	Regional Planning Council

RSF	Regionally Significant Facility
RTCA	Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program
R/W or ROW	Right of Way
SAFETEA-LU	Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for users.
SIS	Strategic Intermodal System
RPO America	Rural Planning Organizations of American
SMS	Safety Management System
SPR	State Planning and Research
STIP	State Transportation Improvement Program
SWFRPC	Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council
SWFTI	Southwest Florida Transportation Initiative
TAC	Technical Advisory Committee
TAM	Transit Asset Management
TAP	Transportation Alternatives Program
TAZ	Traffic Analysis Zone
TD	Transportation Disadvantaged
TDM	Travel Demand Management
TDP	Transit Development Plan
TDSP	Transportation Disadvantaged Service Plan
T/E	Trip and Equipment
TEA-21	Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century
TIGER	Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery
TIM	Traffic Incident Management
TIP	Transportation Improvement Program
TMA	Transportation Management Area
TOP	Transportation Outreach Program
TPO	Transportation Planning Organization
TRB	Transportation Research Board
TRIP	Transportation Regional Incentive Program
TSM	Transportation System Management
TTF	Transit Task Force
UPWP	Unified Planning Work Program
USC	United States Code
USDOT	United States Department of Transportation
UA	Urbanized Area
YOE	Year of Expenditure

Appendix C: HRTPO Response to Agency and Public Comments

The comment period for the Draft Public Participation Plan began on September 4, 2018, and comments were accepted through October 19, 2018. The PPP was reviewed and recommended for adoption by the Technical Advisory Committee at their meeting on October 17, 2018, and by the Citizens Advisory Committee at their meeting on October 25, 2018.

After the comment period closed and all input had been considered, the draft plan was presented for final adoption to the HRTPO Board at their meeting on November 28, 2018, with at least seven (7) days public notice.

Agency/ Public	Comment	TPO Response	PPP Page
Highlands County Citizen	I am an interested citizen in the effort and have reviewed the current document and it is my view that it is very effective in presenting the current status of its efforts. Thanks for keeping me on the public comment list.	Thank you for your review and comment.	
Federal Highway Administration <i>(These comments were received verbally during a review of the HRTPO's Title VI program)</i>	Suggestion to add the typical days and months that the HRTPO Board and Committees meet	The typical meeting day and month were added for each of the committees as well as the HRTPO Board.	2.2 2.3 2.4 2.5
	Suggestion to add clarifying language to chart on page 4.2.	Clarifying language was added on page 4.2 to describe that accommodations listed are examples of general guidelines for staff.	4.2



www.heartlandregionaltpo.org

555 East Church Street, Bartow, FL 33830-3939

P: (863) 534-7130 • F: (863) 534-7138

facebook.com/heartlandregionaltpo



Appendix C: Public Involvement Materials



HRTPO Website TDP Public Comment Page

TDP Information Page on HRTPO Website



The Highlands Transit Plan will help establish a strategic vision to guide the planning, development, and potential implementation of public transportation service in Highlands County over the next 10 years

[View the Plan](#)

This Transit Development Plan (TDP) brings together technical analysis and community voices to create a 10-year Operating and Capital Plan to expand mobility and transportation options in Highlands County and was shaped by:

- Input from residents, community partners, and stakeholders
- Other planning documents like the Florida Transportation Plan and the region's Long Range Transportation Plan
- An estimate of what the demand for transit might be based on demographic, land use, transportation, and transit data
- An assessment of the land use and design patterns and how that might support or hinder the efficient provision of existing and future transit services

🗨️ Leave a Comment

I want to be contacted to learn more
 I don't have any comments or questions, but I reviewed the information

[Send](#)



Landing Page on LRTP Website for TDP

VISION, MISSION, AND GOALS

SERVICE OPTIONS

HOW TO COMMENT



Vision | Highlands County will have mobility choices allowing residents and visitors to travel easily and efficiently using accessible public transportation.

Mission | To provide Highlands County with safe, dependable, and cost efficient public transportation options.

Setting goals and objectives is a critical foundation for any successful planning effort and should stem from values inherent in the community's vision for the future. A goal is a statement of what needs to be accomplished to implement the vision, and objectives and policies outline more specific actions needed to achieve the goal.

Goals, objectives, and policies to support the planning, implementation, and operation of Highlands County's public transportation system over the next 10 years were formed in the various plans and efforts that have led into the Highlands Transit Plan development process.

128 Authority Lane
Sebring, FL 33870
info@sebring-airport.com
Tel: 863.655.6444
Fax: 863.655.6447
www.Sebring-Airport.com

October 3, 2024

Heartland Regional Transportation Planning Organization
555 East Church Street
Bartow, Florida 33830

Re: Transit Development Plan for Highlands County

Dear Heartland Regional Transportation Planning Organization,

I am writing to express our support for the proposed Highlands Transit Plan, which outlines the development of a new on-demand transit service to serve Highlands County. Representing Sebring Airport Authority, we understand the vital importance of accessible and reliable transportation options for both our workforce and the general public.

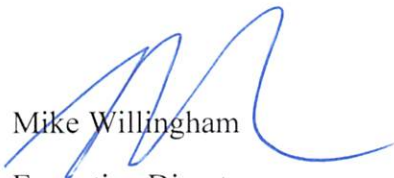
The proposed on-demand transit service would significantly enhance the convenience for visitors and employees, providing a seamless connection between key locations within the county and our facility. This improved accessibility will foster greater community involvement, boost attendance at public event, and support the local economy by ensuring that individuals from diverse areas can easily reach our airport and neighboring businesses.

This service would align with broader sustainability and growth initiatives. By offering an efficient, on-demand transportation option, Highlands County can reduce traffic congestion, lower environmental impact, and ensure equitable transit access to all residents, particularly those who may not have reliable personal transportation.

We commend the County's vision and commitment to innovation in public transportation and look forward to this project's positive outcomes. Please count on our full support for the Highlands Transit Plan, and we are eager to collaborate in any way necessary to bring this vision to reality.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,


Mike Willingham
Executive Director

MW/jto

SEBRING
MULTIMODAL LOGISTICS CENTER





October 4, 2024

Heartland Regional Transportation Planning Organization
555 E. Church Street
Bartow, FL 33830

Dear HRTPO Board,

As the designated Local Workforce Development Board serving DeSoto, Hardee, Highlands, and Okeechobee Counties, and a key partner in the effort to improve the quality of life for residents, Career Source Heartland strongly supports transit and mobility options in Highlands County. We recognize the critical role that public transportation plays in economic and workforce development by increasing access to jobs and services.

A countywide on-demand mobility service will provide vital support to individuals facing barriers to accessing reliable transportation. This is especially important for residents in rural areas, low-income families, seniors, and individuals with disabilities who rely on public transit to access employment opportunities, healthcare services, educational programs, and other essential resources. This will open a wide range of employment opportunities to Highlands County residents whose employment choices are currently limited by lack of or unreliable transportation. This will also help businesses attract, hire, and retain qualified employees.

In addition, increased mobility will contribute to the sustainability and economic resilience of our community by reducing isolation, supporting local businesses, and encouraging economic participation across all demographics, thus ultimately improving the health of the local workforce.

As an organization dedicated to local workforce development, we see this as an essential step toward building a strong workforce in Highlands County. We are committed to supporting this initiative and are eager to collaborate in any way to help ensure the success of these mobility improvements.

Thank you for your leadership and for considering the needs of all community members. We strongly urge you to approve and move forward with this important plan.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Donna Doubleday".

Donna Doubleday

President/Chief Executive Officer

An equal opportunity employer/program

Highlands

Transit Plan

- Foundational Plans
- Reports & Studies
- Transit Demand Analysis
- Options
- Recommendations
- Plan Implementation & Next Steps





The TDP will:

- ✓ Meet Long Range Plan requirements
- ✓ Allow Highlands County to access State and Federal funds for urban transit

And is not:

- X A final budget
- X A Capital Improvement Program
- X A binding agreement
- X An operations plan



Key Takeaways

Broad recognition of the need for additional mobility services, especially for our seniors and individuals with disabilities

Only a handful of areas exhibit “high” or “very high” orientation toward fixed-route transit

Current services through the CTC are not able to support the demand, and funding is declining



What Services Are Available Now

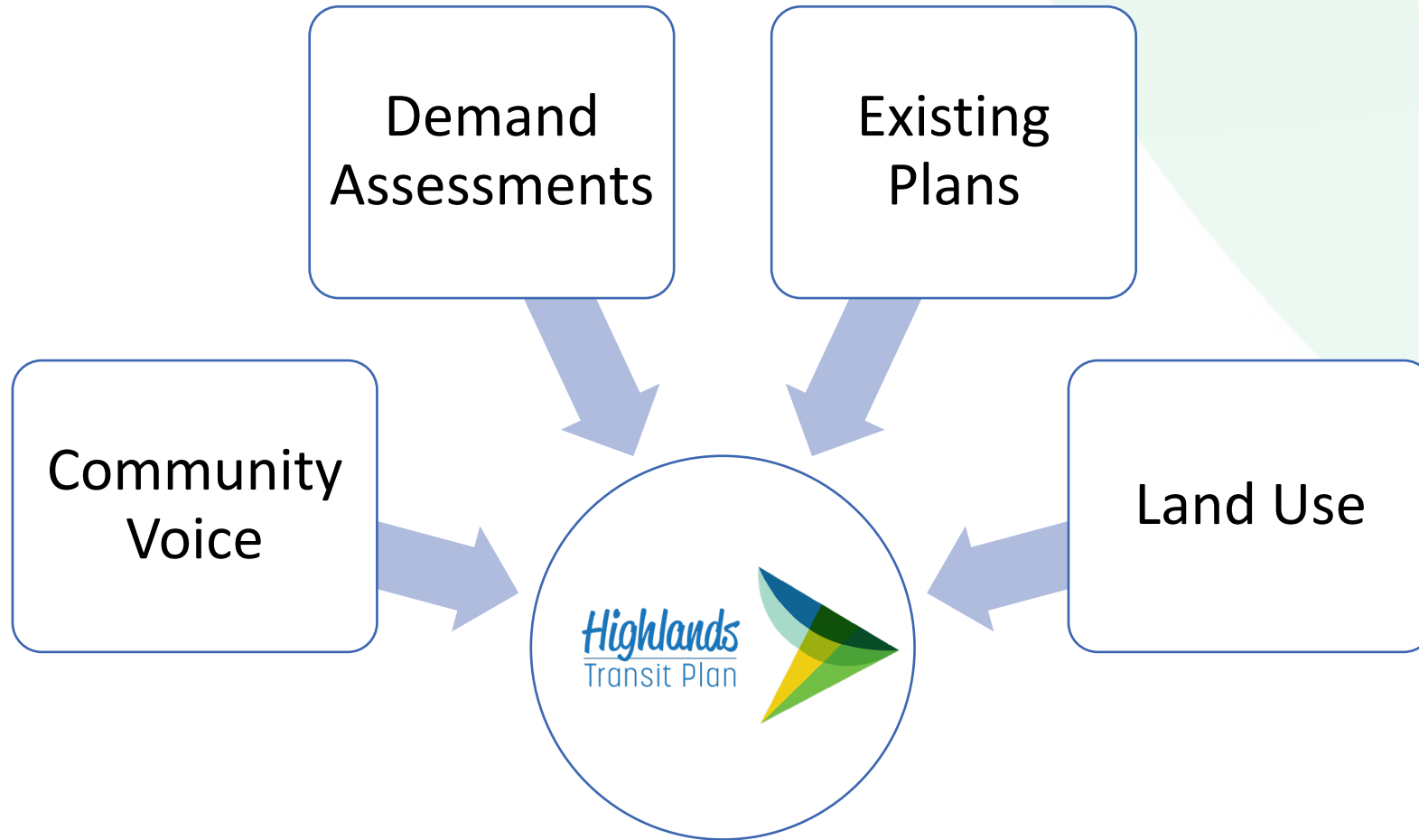
45,000 Door-to-Door Trips

Funded by the CTD, FTA Rural Transit, and FTA for Seniors and Ind. With Disabilities





Planning Process





Foundational Plans

- 2017 TDP Findings
- HRTPO LRTP 2045 Plan
- Transportation Disadvantaged Service Plan
- Heartland 2020 Refresh
- On-Demand Feasibility Study
- City and County Comprehensive Plans



Vision



Highlands County will have mobility choices allowing residents and visitors to travel easily and efficiently using accessible public transportation.

Mission

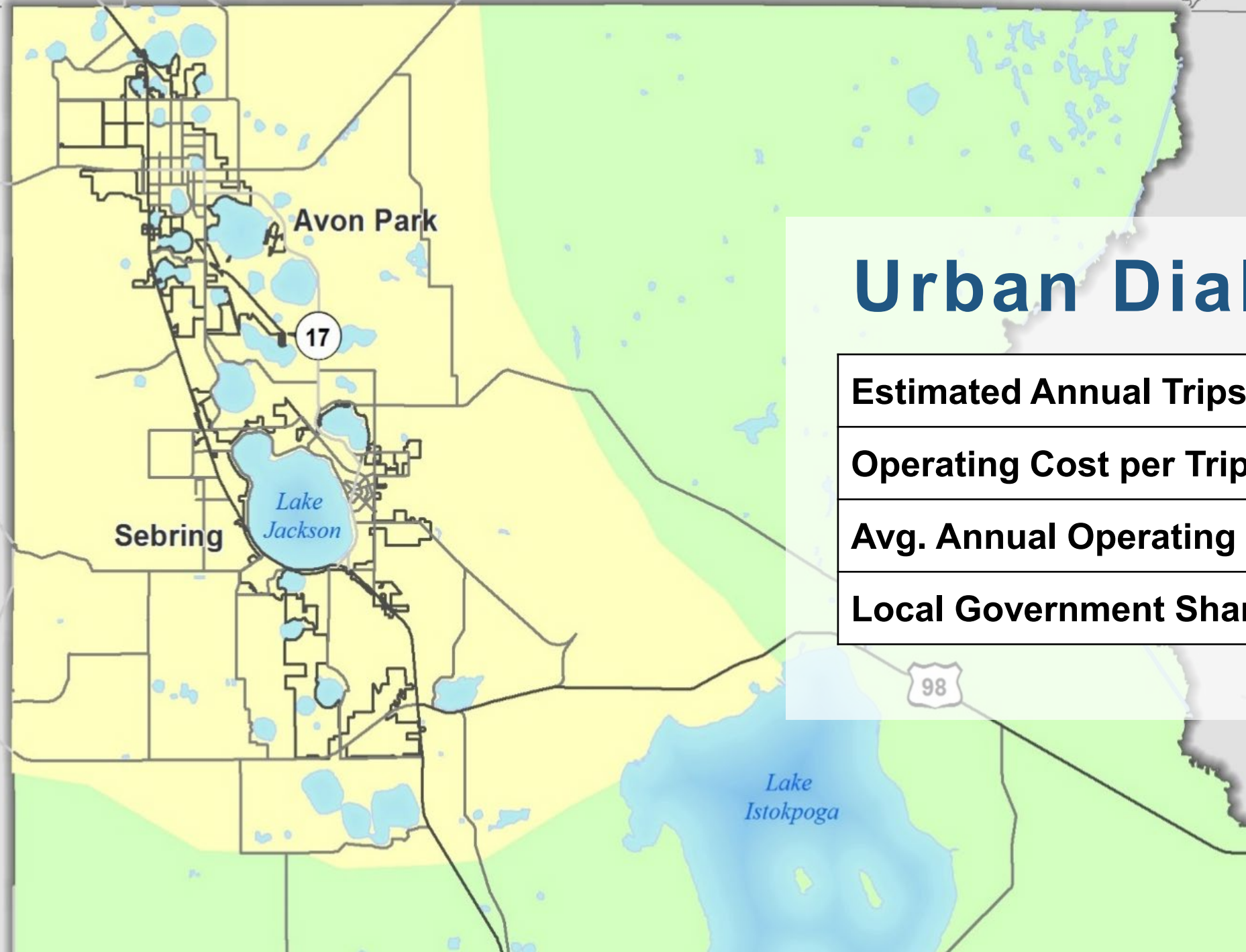


To provide Highlands County with safe, dependable, and cost efficient public transportation options.

Goals



- > Goal 1: Expand mobility choices for residents and visitors.
- > Goal 2: Create and maintain a reliable and efficient public transportation system.
- > Goal 3: Support tourism and economic development.
- > Goal 4: Maximize safety and security for all transportation services and facilities.

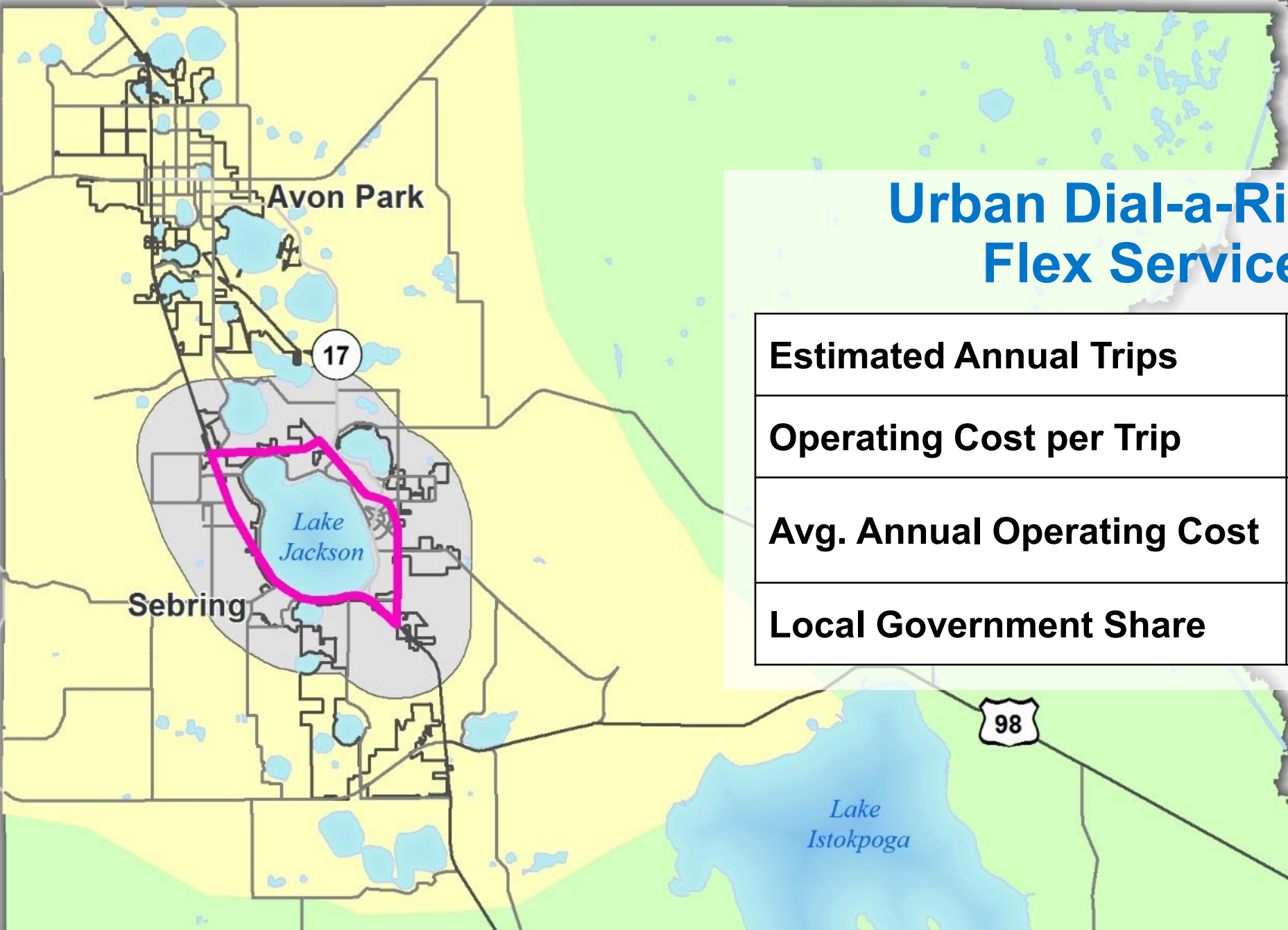


Urban Dial-a-Ride

Estimated Annual Trips	21,600
Operating Cost per Trip	\$39.29
Avg. Annual Operating Cost	\$545,036
Local Government Share	12%

Polk County

Hardee County



Urban Dial-a-Ride + Flex Service

Estimated Annual Trips	31,300
Operating Cost per Trip	\$30.06
Avg. Annual Operating Cost	\$637,134
Local Government Share	13%

Polk County

Avon Park

17

Sebring

Lake Jackson

98

Lake Istokpoga

Flex + Express

Estimated Annual Trips	60,100
Operating Cost per Trip	\$12.98
Avg. Annual Operating Cost	\$517,823
Local Government Share	11%

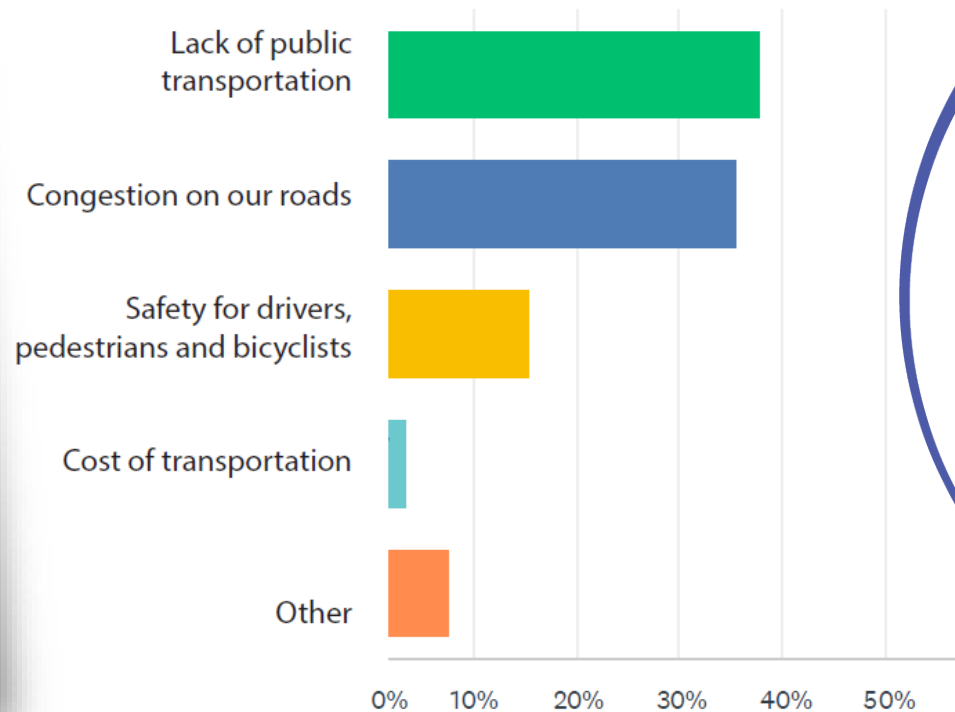
Hardee County

Foundational Plans

- 2017 TDP Findings
- HRTPO LRTP 2045 Plan
- Transportation Disadvantaged Service Plan
- Heartland 2020 Refresh
- On-Demand Feasibility Study
- City and County Comprehensive Plans



Biggest Challenge to Travel

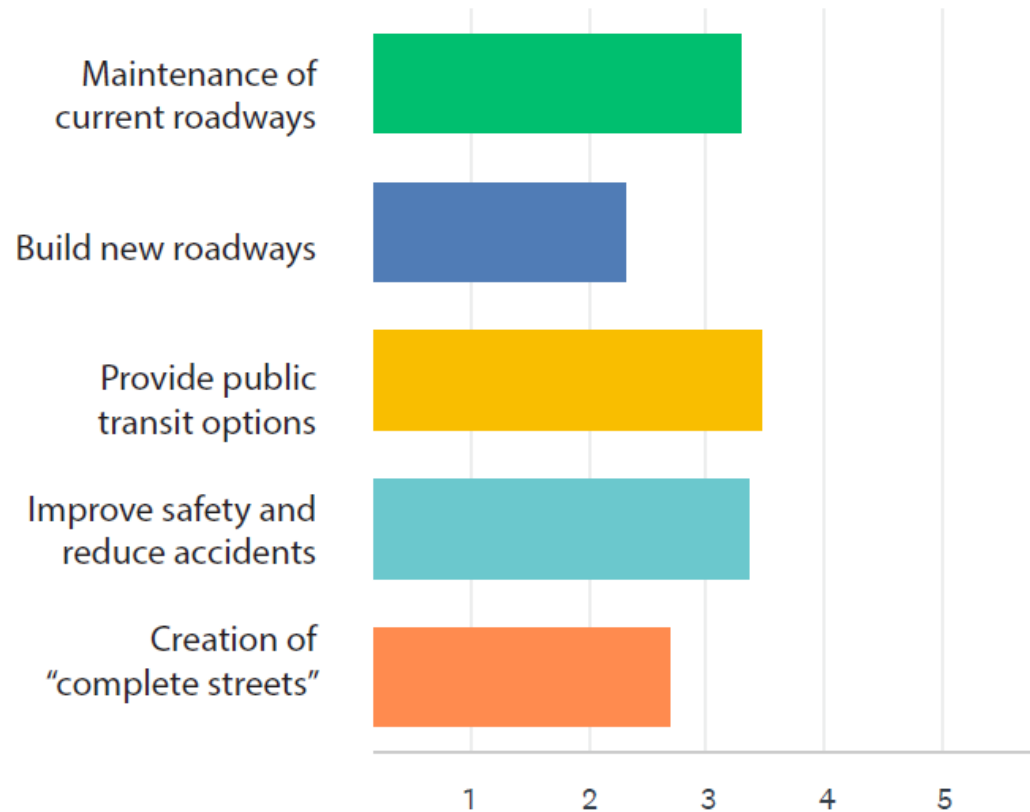




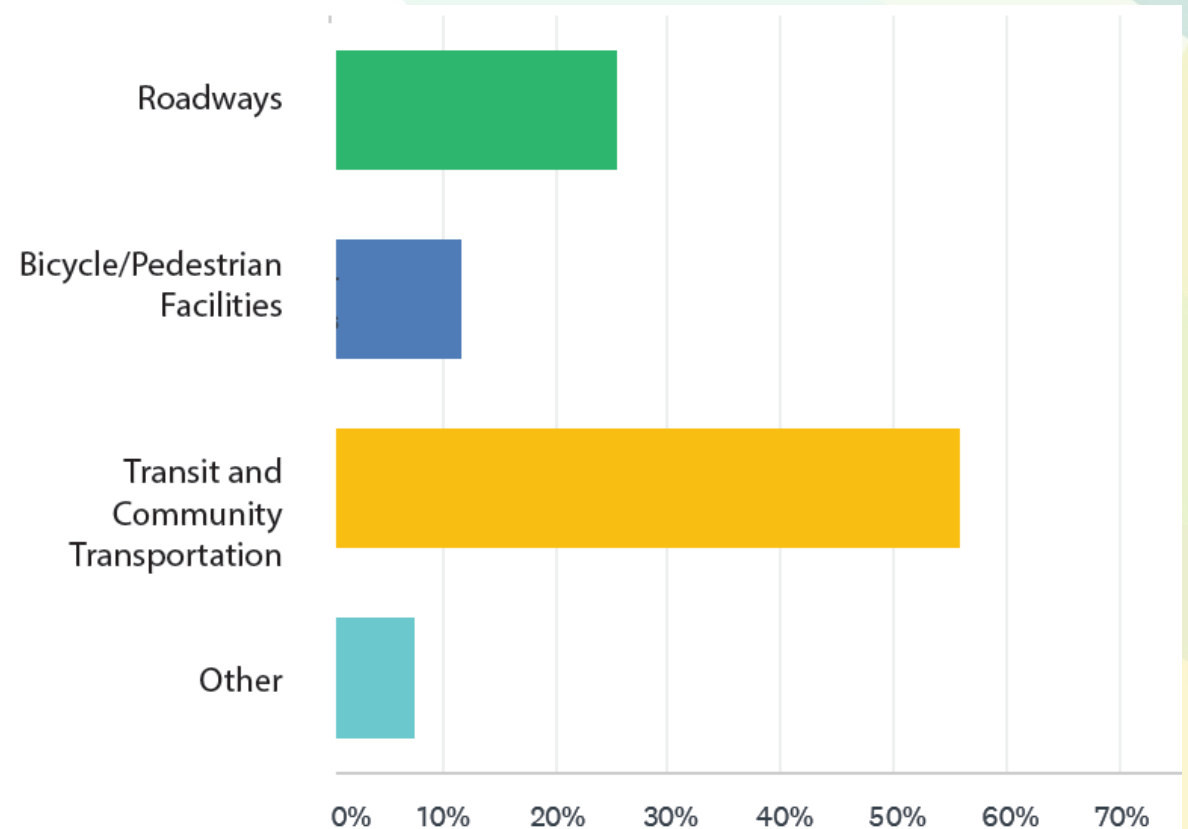
Foundational Plans

- 2017 TDP Findings
- HRTPO LRTP 2045 Plan
- Transportation Disadvantaged Service Plan
- Heartland 2020 Refresh
- On-Demand Feasibility Study
- City and County Comprehensive Plans

How to Prioritize Funding



What Needs the Most Improvement





Foundational Plans

- 2017 TDP Findings
- HRTPO LRTP 2045 Plan
- Transportation Disadvantaged Service Plan
- Heartland 2020 Refresh
- On-Demand Feasibility Study
- City and County Comprehensive Plans

Identified Unmet Service Needs		
Service/Financial Gaps	Proposed Plan	Timeline
Employment trips	Coordinate with Commuter Services to expand the awareness and use of vanpool programs.	On-going
Education, and Skills Training related trips	Continue partnerships with CareerSource Boards, Vocational Rehabilitation Programs, Community Colleges, and Private Sector to identify community needs and coordinate services.	On-going
General Public, Personal Business and Recreation related trips	Continue to apply for FTA Section 5311 and 5310 operating funds. Section 5311 and Section 5310 Rural funds are not available for use in the Urbanized area of Highlands County.	On-going; Section 5310 Small Urban grant funding has been recommended by FDOT D1 to the service area and is anticipated to be available Spring 2023..
Seniors and Persons with Disabilities	Continue to apply for FTA 5310 Operating Funds. Coordinate with agencies that serve these populations to explore additional Coordination Contracts, agency grant opportunities, and purchasing agreements.	Grant funds are applied for annually.
Extend Service Hours (evenings and weekends)	Work with system contract carriers to expand service hours to coincide with the needs of customer transported under these programs.	Service expansion includes service over weekends and evenings coordinated with service needs.
Funding Shortfalls	Investigate other funding opportunities. Revise procedures and policies where possible to cut costs. Investigate opportunities for private funding contributions. Encourage participation in the "Voluntary Dollar" program. Investigate voucher opportunities and other mobility options.	The CFRPC will continue to apply for capital and operational funding.

9,438

2023 Critical
Need Population

745

2023 Unduplicated
Passengers Served



Foundational Plans

- 2017 TDP Findings
- HRTPO LRTP 2045 Plan
- Transportation Disadvantaged Service Plan
- Heartland 2060 Refresh
- On-Demand Feasibility Study
- City and County Comprehensive Plans

More than
1 out of 3
Highlands County residents is
OVER THE AGE OF 65,
the **5th highest share**
among Florida's 67 counties



Population Growth

	2019	2045	2060	Population Growth (2019-2060)
Hardee	27,385	30,450	31,817	16%
DeSoto	36,065	43,350	46,861	23%
Highlands	103,434	127,550	138,220	34%
Okeechobee	41,808	48,950	52,602	26%
Glades	13,121	16,200	17,726	35%
Hendry	40,120	51,200	57,052	42%
Heartland (total)	261,933	317,700	344,278	31%

By 2060, that will increase to nearly

2 out of 5

(Source: University of Florida Bureau of Economic and Business Research, Central Florida Regional Planning Council)

What is one key action we should be thinking about for the future of the Heartland?





Foundational Plans

- 2017 TDP Findings
- HRTPO LRTP 2045 Plan
- Transportation Disadvantaged Service Plan
- Heartland 2020 Refresh
- On-Demand Feasibility Study
- City and County Comprehensive Plans

Designing high-quality services is a careful trade-off between supply, demand and service quality within a specific zone.



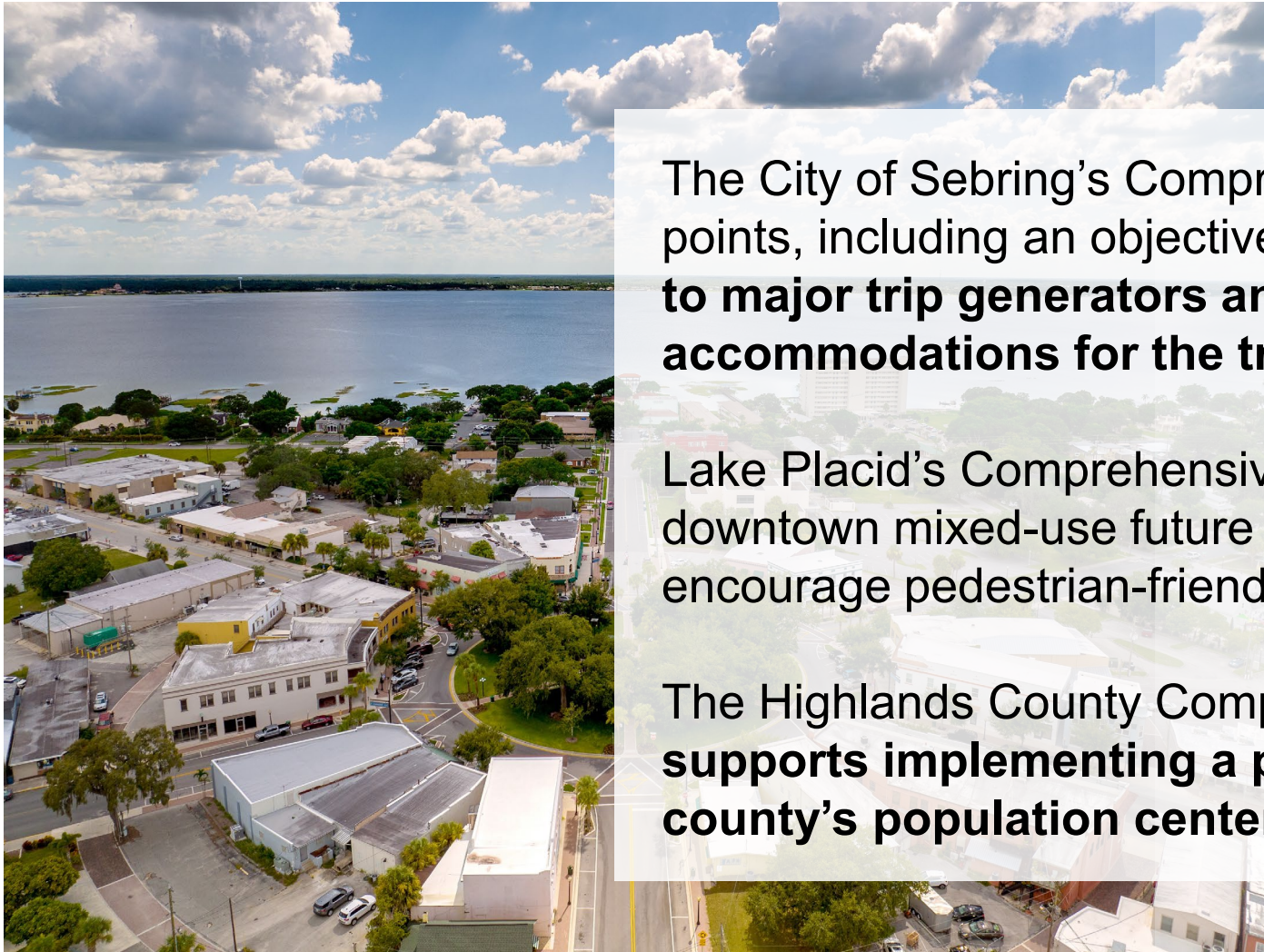
Simulation Results: Countywide Zone

Demand Scenario	Paratransit Only (Prebooking)		Microtransit + Paratransit (On-Demand)		
	Current Service (Actual)	Current Service (Simulated)	Low	Medium	High
Passengers (boardings per weekday)	210	210	310	385	460
Vehicles Required at Peak (min. number of vehicles to accommodate demand)	12-13	10-11	11-12	13-14	15
Average Utilization (passengers/vehicle/hr)	1.8	2.3	2.3	2.4	2.6
Average Wait Time (min, on-demand trips)	N/A	N/A	12	12	13
Average Trip Duration (minutes)	20	20	16	16	15
Percent Shared Rides	N/A	55%	46%	50%	56%
Annual Passengers	57,000	57,000	85,000	105,000	126,000
Annual Revenue Hours	32,000	25,000	37,000	44,000	48,000



Foundational Plans

- 2017 TDP Findings
- HRTPO LRTP 2045 Plan
- Transportation Disadvantaged Service Plan
- Heartland 2020 Refresh
- On-Demand Feasibility Study
- City and County Comprehensive Plans



The City of Sebring's Comprehensive Plan mentions transit at several points, including an objective describing **the need to provide transit to major trip generators and attractors, supportive land uses, and accommodations for the transportation disadvantaged.**

Lake Placid's Comprehensive Plan notes that the classification of its downtown mixed-use future land use designation is meant to encourage pedestrian-friendly **and transit-oriented design.**

The Highlands County Comprehensive Plan transportation element **supports implementing a public transit system serving the county's population centers** to reduce vehicle miles traveled.



Reports and Surveys

- 1st Highlands County Transit Plan
- CTC Rider Surveys, 2023 & 2024
- Community Health Needs Assessment Final Report, Highlands County

Outreach Event	Participants
Phase 1 Activities	
Stakeholder Interviews	27
Transportation Needs Survey	771
Public Workshops (3)	23
Highlands County Fair	Various
Community Presentations	75+
Phase 2 Activities	
Community Transit Forum	20
Service Options Survey	156
Public Workshop	15
Blueberry Festival	Various
Information Distribution Techniques	
HRTPO Website	Various
Email Campaigns	247+
HRTPO Facebook Page	2,900+
PSAs and Radio Spots	Various
Newspaper Advertisements	Various

Public Transportation Needs Survey

Q: What transportation options would people like to see?



Q: Is there a need for fixed-route public transportation service in Highlands County?





Reports and Surveys

- 1st Highlands County Transit Plan
- CTC Rider Surveys, 2023 & 2024
- Community Health Needs Assessment Final Report, Highlands County

“We currently use it for medical appointments only, as we were told that's all that's available. We are also required to book two weeks in advance.”

“I know, for the most part, I will have to depend on your transport. I will arrange my medical appointments accordingly.”

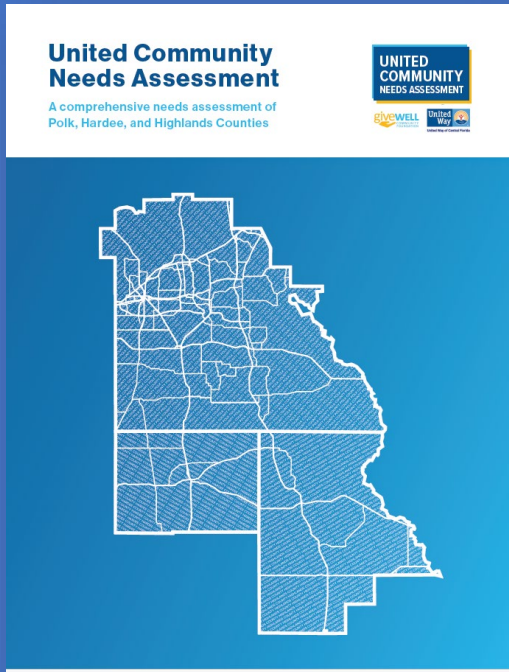
“I used these services two times. After each appointment, I had to wait a long time to be picked up to come home, which turned into an all-day trip.”

“I'm in a wheelchair & couldn't do without the service. Thank you very much everyone is so nice.
Highlands County desperately needs public transportation”



Reports and Surveys

- 1st Highlands County Transit Plan
- CTC Rider Surveys, 2023 & 2024
- Community Health Needs Assessment Final Report, Highlands County



The report also highlighted that limited access to affordable and reliable transportation is a significant barrier for residents, impacting employment, food access, education, and healthcare.

914 Highland County Respondents Shared:

85% agreed that public transportation is needed in their community.

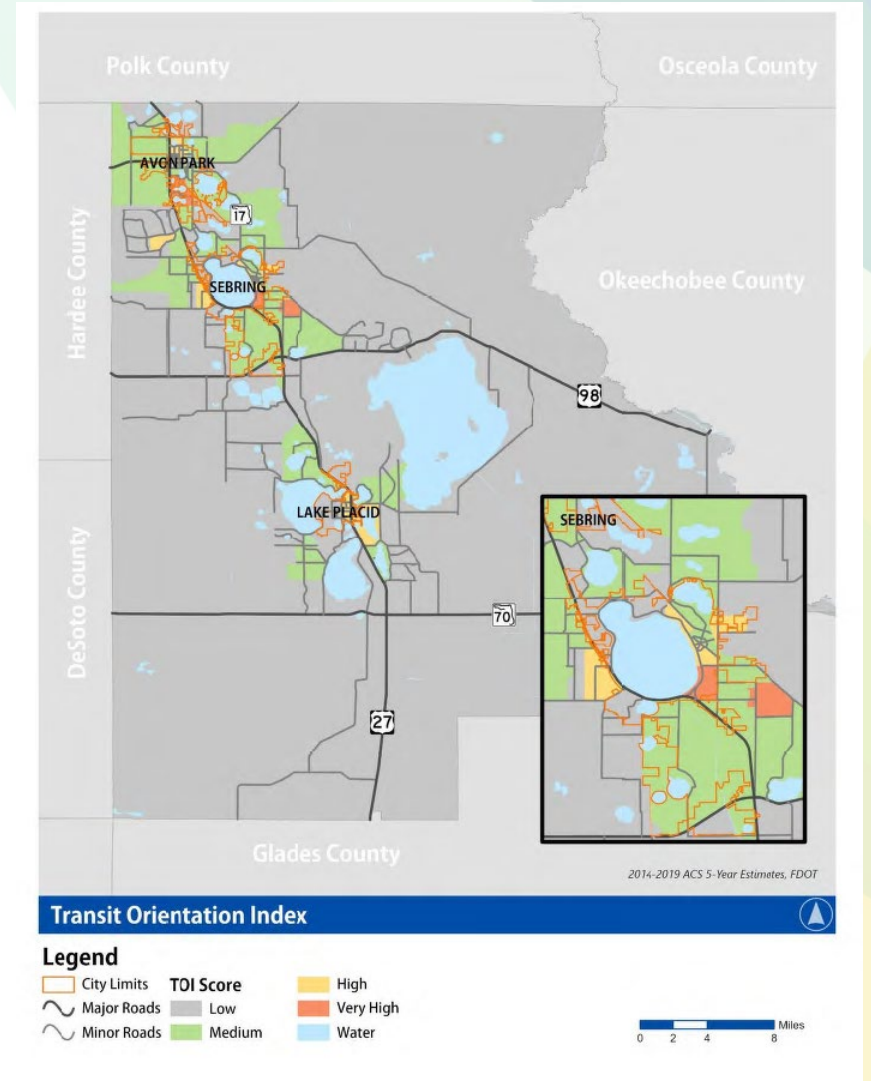
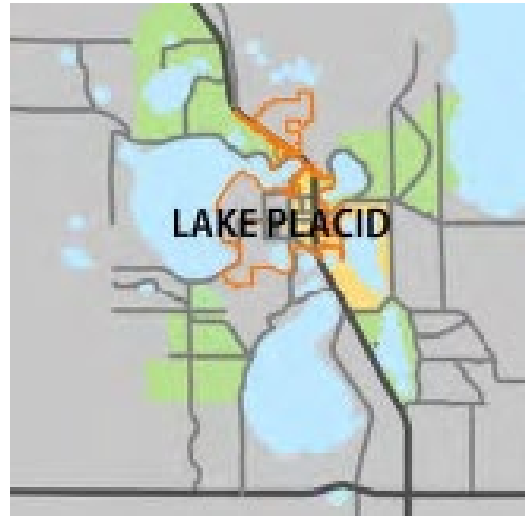
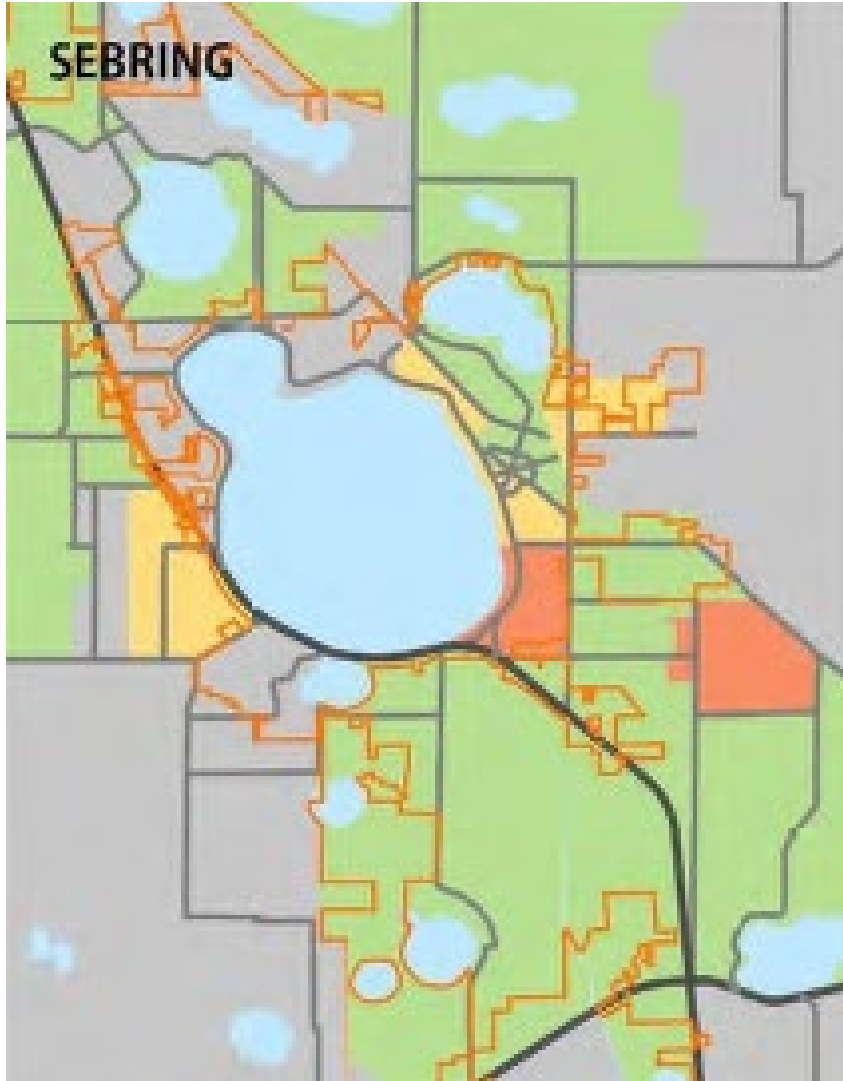
66% agreed that people in the County would be willing to fund more public transportation options.

73% agreed that Special Transportation Services are available for residents with special needs (e.g., elderly, people with disabilities).

66% of residents stated they do not feel safe walking or biking



Transit Orientation Index

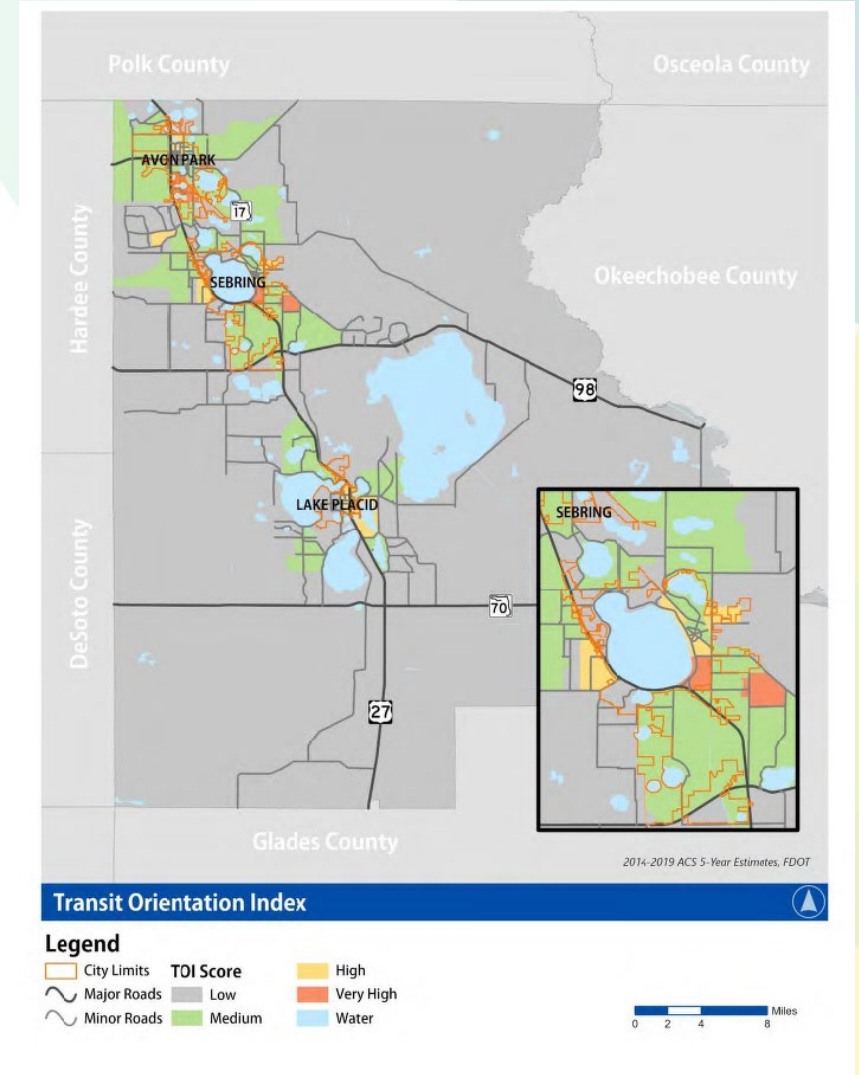
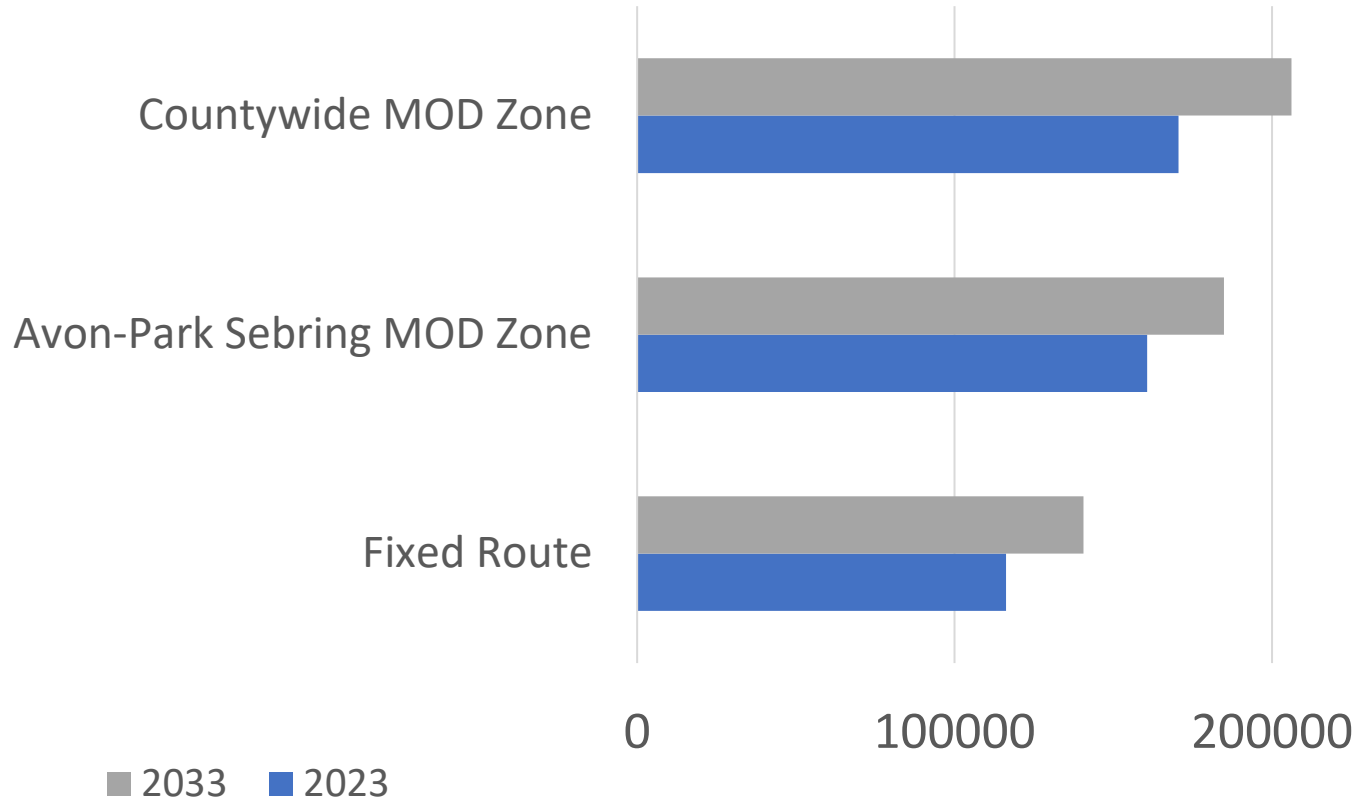




Options And Assumptions for this Study

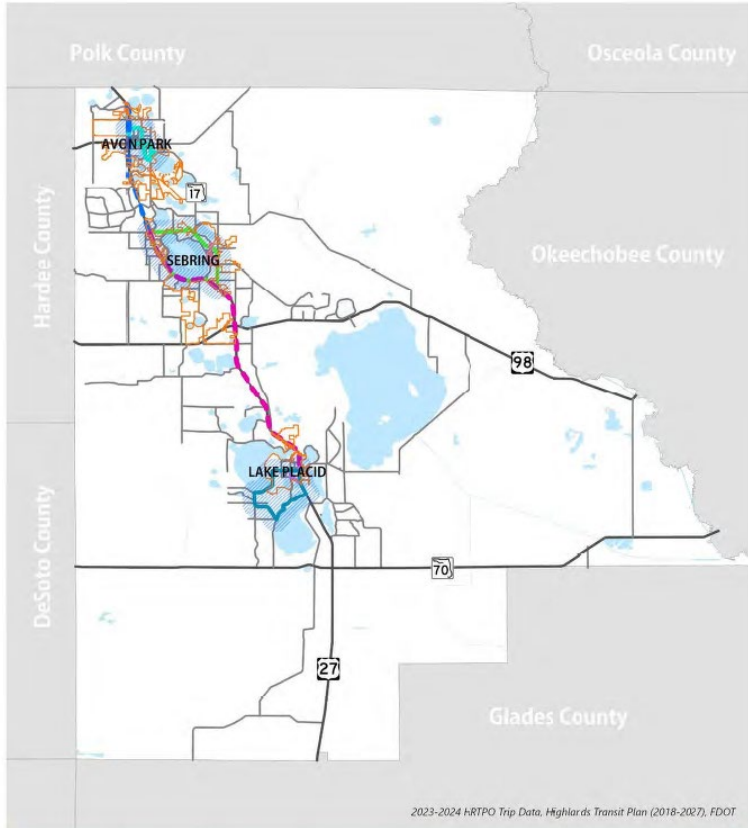
Service Type	Current CTC Services	Mobility-on-Demand (Urban Zone)	Mobility-on-Demand (Countywide)	Fixed Route
Registration/Eligibility	Yes	None	None	None
Scheduling	Call 2-days to 2 weeks in advance	Call or App	Call or App	None
Wait Time	15 minutes before to 15 minutes after scheduled time	15 minutes	Up to 35 minutes	Up to 60 minutes
Door-to-Door	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Cost to Ride	\$2 (Currently waived)	\$2	\$2	\$2
Fixed Bus Stops	None	None	None	Yes

Forecast Ridership Analysis





Fixed Route



Option 1: Fixed Route Transit

- Legend**
- Avon Park Flex
 - Downtown Sebring Circulator
 - Lake Jackson Circulator
 - South Lake Placid Flex
 - Downtown Lake Placid Circulator
 - Sebring-Avon Park Express
 - Sebring-Lake Placid Express
 - Flex Zones
 - City Limits
 - Major Roads
 - Minor Roads
 - Water

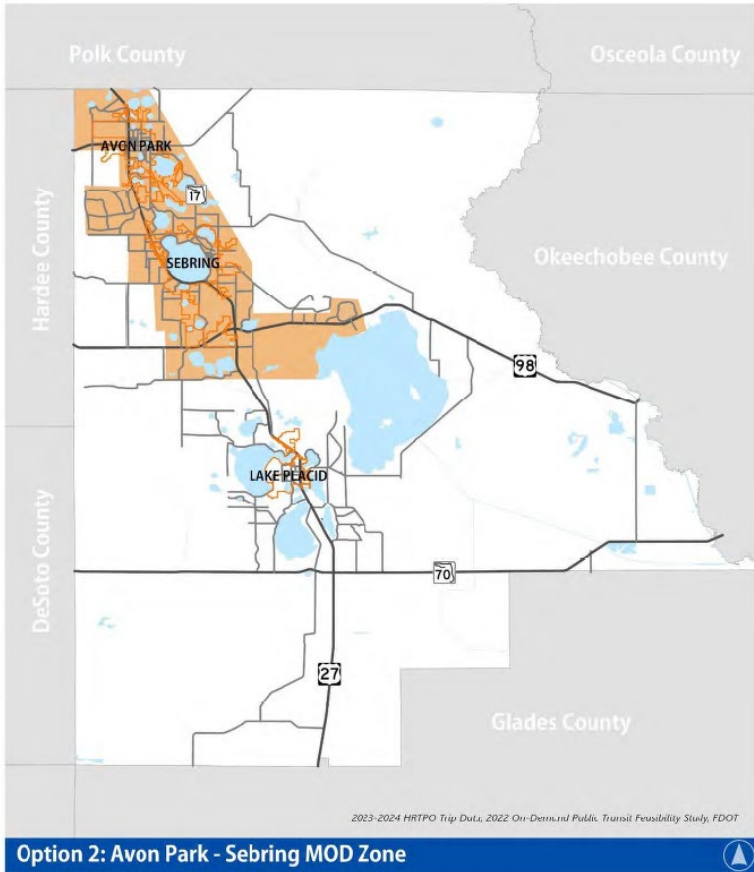


Measure	Option 1
Population in Service Area	73,300
Estimated Annual Trips	78,285
Anticipated Revenue Hours	34,000
Average Trips per Revenue Hour	2.3
Annual Operating Cost per Trip	\$35.00

Cost	10-Year Total	Annual Average
Total Operating Cost	\$16,199,677	\$1,619,968
Local Revenue Required	\$5,598,958	\$559,896
Local Government Share	20%	



Mobility-on-Demand Urban Zone



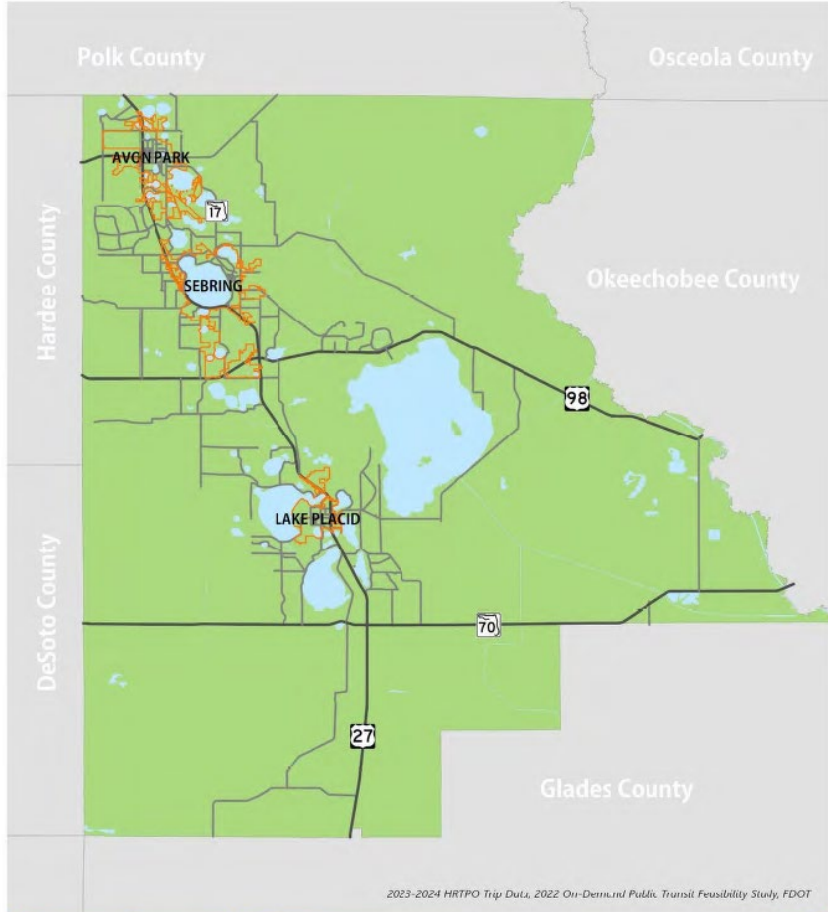
Legend
 Avon Park-Sebring Microtransit Zone
 City Limits
 Major Roads
 Minor Roads
 Water

Measure	Option 2
Population in Service Area	70,000
Estimated Annual Trips	66,267
Anticipated Revenue Hours	16,995
Average Trips per Revenue Hour	3.9
Annual Operating Cost per Trip	\$27.35

Cost	10-Year Total	Annual Average
Total Operating Cost	\$7,130,924	\$713,092
Local Revenue Required	\$1,576,607	\$157,661
Local Government Share	9%	



Mobility-on-Demand Countywide



Option 3: Countywide MOD Zone

- Legend**
- Highlands Microtransit Zone
 - City Limits
 - ~ Major Roads
 - ~ Minor Roads
 - Water



Measure	Option 3
Population in Service Area	105,618
Estimated Annual Trips	62,298
Anticipated Revenue Hours	21,850
Average Trips per Revenue Hour	2.9
Annual Operating Cost per Trip	\$49.30

Cost	10-Year Total	Annual Average
Total Operating Cost	\$17,872,639	\$1,787,264
Local Revenue Required	\$1,892,438	\$189,244
Local Government Share	6%	



Implementation and Next Steps

Board Recommendation and
Adoption of TDP

Operations Plan and Designated
Recipient Status

Equipment and
Staffing/Contract for Operations

Launch Service (2027)

Highlands Transit Plan

Requested Action

Adoption of the 2025 – 2034 Highlands Transit Plan with the preferred service option of a countywide Mobility-on-demand service as recommended by the TAC and CAC.

Appendix D: Financial Plan

Source	FY 2025	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030	FY 2031	FY 2032	FY 2033	FY 2034	10-Year Total
OPERATING AND CAPITAL COSTS											
Operating Costs											
Service Operations	\$0	\$0	\$1,720,219	\$1,762,863	\$1,806,564	\$1,851,349	\$1,897,244	\$1,944,277	\$1,992,475	\$2,041,869	\$15,016,859
Planning Support	\$0	\$0	\$84,016	\$86,098	\$88,233	\$226,050	\$92,661	\$94,959	\$97,313	\$99,725	\$869,054
Total Operating Costs	\$0	\$0	\$1,804,234	\$1,848,961	\$1,894,797	\$2,077,399	\$1,989,905	\$2,039,235	\$2,089,788	\$2,141,594	\$15,885,913
Capital Costs											
Vehicles	\$0	\$0	\$588,109	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$569,751	\$0	\$0	\$1,157,860
Operator Contract to Capital	\$0	\$0	\$1,146,812	\$1,175,242	\$1,204,376	\$1,234,233	\$1,264,829	\$1,296,184	\$1,328,317	\$1,361,246	\$10,011,239
Other Capital	\$0	\$147,027	\$69,955	\$22,058	\$22,605	\$23,165	\$23,740	\$24,328	\$24,931	\$25,549	\$383,359
Total Capital Costs	\$0	\$147,027	\$1,804,876	\$1,197,300	\$1,226,981	\$1,257,398	\$1,288,569	\$1,890,264	\$1,353,248	\$1,386,795	\$11,552,459
Total Costs	\$0	\$147,027	\$3,609,110	\$3,046,261	\$3,121,778	\$3,334,797	\$3,278,474	\$3,929,499	\$3,443,036	\$3,528,389	\$27,438,372
OPERATING REVENUES											
Federal											
Section 5307 for Operating	\$0	\$0	\$902,117	\$924,481	\$947,398	\$1,038,699	\$994,953	\$1,019,618	\$1,044,894	\$1,070,797	\$7,942,957
Section 5311 for Operating	\$0	\$0	\$451,059	\$462,240	\$473,699	\$519,350	\$497,476	\$509,809	\$522,447	\$535,398	\$3,971,478
State											
FDOT State Block Grants	\$0	\$0	\$152,278	\$156,053	\$245,000	\$251,074	\$257,298	\$263,676	\$270,213	\$276,911	\$1,872,502
Local											
Required Local Funds	\$0	\$0	\$222,697	\$228,217	\$148,796	\$186,393	\$156,265	\$160,139	\$164,109	\$168,177	\$1,434,793
Other											
Farebox Revenues	\$0	\$0	\$76,084	\$77,970	\$79,903	\$81,884	\$83,914	\$85,994	\$88,126	\$90,310	\$664,183
Total Operating Revenue	\$0	\$0	\$1,804,234	\$1,848,961	\$1,894,797	\$2,077,399	\$1,989,905	\$2,039,235	\$2,089,788	\$2,141,594	\$15,885,913
Total Operating Cost	\$0	\$0	\$1,804,234	\$1,848,961	\$1,894,797	\$2,077,399	\$1,989,905	\$2,039,235	\$2,089,788	\$2,141,594	\$15,885,913
Net Operating (Contingency/Need)	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0

Source	FY 2025	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030	FY 2031	FY 2032	FY 2033	FY 2034	10-Year Total
CAPITAL REVENUES											
Federal 5307 for Capital	\$0	\$117,622	\$1,443,901	\$957,840	\$981,585	\$1,005,918	\$1,030,855	\$1,512,211	\$1,082,598	\$1,109,436	\$9,241,967
State Toll Credits (Soft Match)	\$0	\$29,405	\$360,975	\$239,460	\$245,396	\$251,480	\$257,714	\$378,053	\$270,650	\$277,359	\$2,310,492
Local	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total Capital Revenue	\$0	\$147,027	\$1,804,876	\$1,197,300	\$1,226,981	\$1,257,398	\$1,288,569	\$1,890,264	\$1,353,248	\$1,386,795	\$11,552,459
Total Capital Cost	\$0	\$147,027	\$1,804,876	\$1,197,300	\$1,226,981	\$1,257,398	\$1,288,569	\$1,890,264	\$1,353,248	\$1,386,795	\$11,552,459
Net Capital (Contingency/Need)	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
TOTAL COSTS VS. REVENUES											
Total Revenue	\$0	\$147,027	\$3,609,110	\$3,046,261	\$3,121,778	\$3,334,797	\$3,278,474	\$3,929,499	\$3,443,036	\$3,528,389	\$27,438,372
Total Cost	\$0	\$147,027	\$3,609,110	\$3,046,261	\$3,121,778	\$3,334,797	\$3,278,474	\$3,929,499	\$3,443,036	\$3,528,389	\$27,438,372
Net Total (Contingency/Need)	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Percent Local Government Share of Total Revenue	0%	0%	6%	7%	5%	6%	5%	4%	5%	5%	5%